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Expediency Versus Harmony: Reconsidering the Values of Collectivist Cultures in Intercultural Communication

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EXPEDIENCY VERSUS HARMONY: RECONSIDERING THE VALUES OF
COLLECTIVIST CULTURES IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

(TITLE)

BY

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UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF

UNDERGRADUATE DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, ALONG WITH
THE HONORS COLLEGE,
EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2013
YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS UNDERGRADUATE THESIS BE ACCEPTED
AS FULFILLING THE THESIS REQUIREMENT FOR
UNDERGRADUATE DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

4/24/2013

DATE

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4/24/2013

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4/24/2013

DATE

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Introduction

The U.S. is becoming increasingly integrated into markets outside of the country. Although the U.S. and other countries are progressively conducting business communication in English, the global language, there is great potential for studies in intercultural communication and contrastive rhetoric as they continue to identify the defining values and communication practices in collectivistic and individualistic cultures that have business associations with the U.S. The U.S. relies on textbooks and case studies to tell technical and communication students what cultures, particularly collectivist cultures, value and prefer for communication and the organizational environment. Students may know the cultural variations, but they still apply their own values to intercultural communication. As a result, we create more chances for miscommunication and possible offense towards other cultures. Intercultural business communication is critical because it is an “integral part of communication;” therefore, the way a culture does business reflects their values and affects the communication procedures. The U.S. objective of shaping goals and policies within a corporation and showing economic progress relies heavily on organizational communication, and the U.S. channels primary “organizational communication” through the use of written practices. We tend to believe that to maintain a productive business, U.S. organizations need technical writing and interpersonal skills that emphasize employees’ responsibility to produce for the organization.

Two key words that are important to this thesis are value and practice. To understand the complex relationship between cultural values and oral and written communication, I researched key components to intercultural communication and contrastive rhetoric. Many articles state that cultures tend to disagree on correct communication procedures. A lack of understanding for other cultures’ values and communication norms can lead to miscommunication and unproductive

collaboration. My interest in this topic of cultural and communication introduces my underlying question, what are the benefits to implementing Eastern cultures' values and practices in an intercultural setting?

I will use other theorists' case studies and my tables as the primary support to explain how the U.S. can implement values and practices of Eastern cultures (i.e., Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan). I want to compare the value of expediency (U.S./individualist culture) to the value of harmony (Eastern countries/collectivist cultures), and I will explain how expediency arises in technical writing and harmony cultivates in circumlocutory writing. Throughout the course of this paper, I will identify how the U.S. can benefit from mitigating its own values and practices and implement characteristics of established values and practices in China, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. Before I can discuss the core of the thesis, I must explore the background of cultural studies and its dimensions.

Four ways of breaking down culture

Culture is a complex and ever-changing concept, and two pioneer anthropologists, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, identified "some 160 different definitions of culture from English-language authors" (Atkinson 279). Culture can be defined in many ways, but scholars generally agree that culture is, "an established set of values and a way of thinking and behaving that is passed from generation to generation" (Bosley 53). Different cultural values can impact communication and the way a culture thinks. A basic definition can suffice, but it is important to understand how cultural perspectives differ depending on static and dynamic level. The growing research of culture can pertain to media, pop-culture, intercultural communication, contrastive rhetoric, linguistics, or academia. Globalization and technology have allowed the U.S. and other countries to connect, combine, and revitalize the definition of culture time and time again.

Atkinson argues that the study of culture and its meaning can be divided into four sets of binary oppositions: “(1) received culture versus postmodern culture; (2) culture as product versus culture as process; (3) culture in the head versus culture in the world; and (4) big culture versus small culture” (Atkinson 279). The received culture, culture as product, and big culture give researchers a broader scope of culture, and this larger scope correlates with the scope of this thesis. I believe that the basic characteristics of a culture, like the ones based off of Geert Hofstede’s research on collectivism and individualism, shouldn’t be disregarded. Some researchers believe that dynamic (small) cultural studies challenge these larger cultural dimensions when considering individual personalities. However, we don’t realize that the certain characteristics of individualism and collectivism, which I will define later on in this section, are engrained in culture and still effects different aspects of our lives. Atkinson’s four sets of culture explain the scopes of cultural studies and Hofstede’s dimensions define the particular characteristics. The characteristics of different cultures are beneficial to the study of **contrastive rhetoric** (how a person’s first language and culture impacts his/her writing in a second language) and intercultural communication, and I will discuss contrastive rhetoric later on in the background section.

Received and postmodern culture

The idea of **received culture** is that “a world of human difference is to be conceptualized as a diversity of separate societies, each with its own culture” (Atkinson 280). Received culture focuses on the “big-picture”; thus, a received view conflates a country’s culture based on political groupings like nation states. While a received view favors a broad view of culture, a postmodern perspective considers small-scale cultural groups. Postmodern views of culture focus on the disruption, inequality, and radical change that occurs because of world capitalism,

globalization, neo-imperialism, and “the diffusion of ‘western’ popular culture through media” (Atkinson 281). In the wake of significant events in the late 20th and early 21st century, **postmodern culture** attempts to capture the “global flow” of ideas, people, technology, media, and economy and highlight social and cultural adaptations. For example, Herrick’s article focuses on how the society’s notion of gender and the workplace has cultivated a misconception of how female authorities must represent themselves at a job, especially in male dominated job fields. The received view represents the traditional study of culture, not entirely based in media or contemporary culture. Also, received cultural perspectives tend to influence contrastive rhetoric studies. I find that received cultural views benefit this thesis because of its broader contextualization of culture and relationship to contrastive rhetoric.

Culture as product and process

By referring to **culture as a product**, Atkinson explains that the everyday life of a culture is born from the history of different systems (political, economic, and social). History influences a culture’s construction of belief systems, which teach us how to behave in public and private. A culture’s political, social, and economic views develop and change from experience and history. Therefore, culture is a product of the past.

Atkinson refers to culture as process as a modern concept. Atkinson cites that culture as product is insufficient because history (political, economic, and social) is “ongoing, ever-changing, and non-systematic in many ways; they can hardly be considered fair representations of the multifarious activities that actually went into producing them” (Atkinson 282). According to Atkinson, history is being overgeneralized, and culture as product shows the collective shift in culture, not the individual.

The **culture as process** focuses less on the collective and more on the individual activity within a society. The product and process of culture are the results of a stimulus-response. Culture as product represents the collective belief and behaviors based upon history. Culture as process represents the individual elements that went into creating the sociocultural beliefs and behaviors seen throughout history. Theorists of culture as process analyze and differentiate the ever-changing influences in culture, and culture as product wants to create a collective stance without looking at the individual elements that create the product. Although cultural studies that focus on the individual are appealing and contemporary, the idea of only looking at the individual activity seems insufficient when dealing with intercultural communication and collaboration. History and its collective effects on a culture remain a popular standpoint for cultural studies and contrastive rhetoric. In this thesis, the culture of product can be seen by how a culture values expediency and its relevance in history and institutions relate to written and oral communication in different cultures (contrastive rhetoric).

Culture in the head and world

Cultural studies also look at the idea of culture in the head or the world. Basically, researchers question where culture is located, cognitively or in the social world. **Culture in the head** means that culture is “shared cognitive knowledge rather than anything external” (Atkinson 284). People developed cultural values because they *thought* on how to act and interpret their experiences. However, culture in the world assumes that humans’ behavior, practices, and beliefs are constructed through the use of public institutions and significant symbols in society. Although Atkinson introduces these terms as opposing ideas, he doesn’t contrast them but believes that culture in the head and culture in the world work together. Atkinson states:

I would argue against setting the head and the world in any kind of fundamentally oppositional relationship here: it seems far more sensible to say that culture exists co-constitutively in the world and in the head, and that heads and worlds may therefore not really be such separate and isolated locations after all. (Atkinson 284)

To understand how culture exists in the outside world, people need to *make sense* of it in their head. **Culture in the world** is similar to received culture and culture as product because it shows how institutions and history shapes the mass population. Atkinson's statement that culture in the head and world exists "co-constitutively" makes sense in relation to how a culture's values (culture in the world) influence communication and comprehension (culture in the head).

Dynamic and static cultures

When Atkinson discusses "big versus small culture," he is referring to the terms "dynamic" and "static" that were part of Adrian Holliday's 1994 work. Dynamic culture studies approach the field at a smaller scale, e.g. classrooms, towns, and focus groups—a "small" culture study. On the other hand, a static cultural study refers to "big" ethnic cultures (Connor 292). Holliday's work diagrams the sizes of these cultures and argues that "small" cultures, such as classrooms, and "big" cultures, such as national culture, have overlapping relations (Atkinson 285). Static and dynamic cultures represent the size of a culture instead of an implied theory, which means that static culture tends to compare collectivist vs. individualist characteristics of the culture.

I believe the collective view of a culture remains an important standpoint for cultural studies related to intercultural/contrastive rhetoric and professional communication. Since the basis of my thesis is suggestive, I believe that a collective approach on culture and its values will further support my argument and represent each area of study that comes from the case studies

and other articles. Received culture, culture as product, culture in the head/world, and static culture are viewpoints that coincide with Bosley's definition of culture because they are flexible in terms of understanding how cultural values and practices impact the mass society. Thus, this paper establishes that my research and the tables represent a **global/cultural perspective**, not based upon certain individuals in the culture. The resources will support this paper's argument based on "static" cultural values, statistics, and behaviors. Some case studies cited in this thesis use "dynamic" cultures as control groups, but this paper focuses on how an understanding of static culture can influence the findings in smaller case studies, e.g., classrooms, companies, and smaller collaborative groups.

Hofstede's features of culture

Now that I have explained the importance of looking at the broad-scope studies of culture, I will define the features of culture by looking at collectivist and individualist cultural characteristics that directly relate to cultural behaviors and practices. From published research, contemporary cultural studies continue to use two terms, individualism and collectivism, which were first introduced by Geert Hofstede—Dutch researcher of organizational culture. Hofstede's research and published works (1980, 1983, 1991, 1998) have been greatly significant to the study of static culture—he created a framework for five concepts that categorize received cultural differences:

- **Power distance**- measuring the degree to which members of a culture accept institutions and organizations that have power.
- **Masculinity/femininity**- being more assertive and "achievement-oriented" vs. caring more about relationships and the quality of life.
- **Long term/short-term orientation**- looking towards the future and fostering pragmatic values vs. promoting values of the past and present and preserving one's individuality and social responsibilities.
- **Uncertainty avoidance**- determining a culture's tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty.
- **Individualism/collectivism**- defining the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. (Bowe and Martin 80–1)

From Hofstede's research, collectivist cultures (e.g., Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Mexico) value the development of relationships over expedient behavior. On the other hand, individualistic cultures put tasks before establishing a relationship (Bowe and Martin 82). Thus, most important for this study is Hofstede's fourth concept of collectivist versus individualist societies. Below in Table 1, Hofstede shows his framework for collectivist/individualist societies.

Table 1: Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Collectivist Societies	Individualist Societies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value standards differ for in-group and out-group • Other people seen as members of in-group • Relationship prevails over task • Moral model of employer-employee relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same value standards apply to all • Other people seen as potential resources • Task prevails over relationship • Calculative model of employer-employee relationship

(from Bowe and Martin 2007:82)

What does Hofstede mean when he states that **collectivist cultures** emphasize relationship over task and U.S. emphasize task before relationship? For example, a director of a U.S. company (individualist culture) sends a team of American employees to **collaborate** on a joint venture with its sister company located in Japan (collectivist culture). As a result, the Japanese team members are more likely to want to start off by building a positive business relationship with the U.S. team members by discussing personal facts that might revolve around family, hobbies, etc. This emphasis on business relationship helps create a sense of harmony, which is an important value in Eastern countries. As an individualistic culture, the U.S. team members would most likely focus on tasks related to the project than focus on interpersonal relationships. The scenario also relates to how the Japanese and U.S. value expediency. In Japan, corporations don't promote business expediency as their top priority. This isn't to say that they aren't goal-oriented

or productive—the Japanese believe it is more important to understand the relationship-based process of a business meeting.

Collectivist cultures emphasize **out-group** and **in-group collaboration**. Individualist cultures view out-group members as resources, and tend to apply their **values** to all situations. When the table lists that collectivists' cultures see other people as in-group members, the "other" is the individuals born within the same culture but not a part of the same in-group. This means that "individuals in collectivistic cultures are born into pre-existing groups" (Niedergassel 567). People in the same in-group may be more likely to share knowledge and discuss work-related issues. Individualist cultures tend to see other people as potential resources and that means they may not be willing to share their immediate work. Niedergassel's case study interviews Chinese and German scientists who were collaborating on a project. Based on the results, the Chinese scientists appeared to be more open to working with out-and-in group members, instead of isolating the out-group. When the Chinese scientists knew they were going to collaborate with out-group members, "they disclosed personal information, such as their hobbies, more often than their German collaboration partners" (Niedergassel 584). The Chinese scientist felt it was important establish trust and personal knowledge with the German scientists before relying on sharing knowledge about their research.

Table 2: Intra-intercultural business values

	Cultural Dimension	Business Expediency	Corporate Interaction	HC/LC
China	Collectivist	No	Harmony/Personable	High Context
Japan	Collectivist	No	Harmony/Personable	High Context
South Korea	Collectivist	No	Harmony/Personable	High Context
Taiwan	Collectivist	No	Personable/Competitive	High Context
U.S.	Individualistic	Yes	Direct/Objective	Low Context
U.K.	Individualistic	Yes	Direct	Low Context

The moral model of employee-employer relationship is another aspect of collectivist cultures, and this characteristic means that collectivism within a business emphasizes respect of elders, the hierarchy, and employee consensus. Also, collectivist cultures support a top-down organizational structure. (See table 2). Although the U.S. respects hierarchy, it also emphasizes individual initiative and multilayered/vertical management, rather than relying on the entire group or top-down consensus—productive and strategic in its own way. However, since employees in collectivist cultures are of different status, age, and gender, the group promotes harmony and formal address—expedient behavior would be a sign that one lacks consideration for Japan’s cultural norms.

Contrastive/Intercultural rhetoric

When we compare collectivist and individualist cultures values, we also engage in those cultures preferences of communication, particularly written communication. As I mentioned earlier, contrastive rhetoric is the study of “the differences in writing and comprehension related to the effects of culture and language” (Sharp 485). The study of contrastive rhetoric (CR), also known as intercultural rhetoric, and contrastive culture helped identify the differences between cultures that are portrayed in the larger tables 1 and 2. (See appendix). Contrastive rhetoric plays

an important part in culture because it impacts intercultural communication. A culture defines what it values in communication, and the culture's communication values directly teach people how to speak and write. People learn to speak and write a certain way because of influences from the outside world (**Culture in the world**), so they can use those experiences to comprehend (**Culture in the head**) the oral and written practices of their culture. Different cultures value certain organizational and rhetorical patterns. Cultural values act as the hand to the pencil, with the pencil representing communication practices and patterns. Also, collectivist cultures tend to prefer written and oral communication while individualistic cultures rely on the written word. For example, Thatcher's case study examines the U.S. (individualist culture) and South American (collectivist culture) employees miscommunication based on preferences of oral vs. written. Thatcher explains, "The other South Americans never re-read the written definition, not even once. Instead, they immediately discussed orally the definition and then dramatized it using examples and concrete applications" (Thatcher 377). In an interview, a U.S. representative believed that the meeting was a failure because of the South American's value in oral repetition as a learning technique, but the South American group used their oral communication to interpret the definition until they felt confident with their understanding of the new term.

High-context and low-context cultures: Characteristics of contrastive rhetoric

High-context (HC) and **low-context** (LC) are the most frequently discussed characteristics seen in contrastive rhetoric. Edward T. Hall, who was a major figure in cross-cultural research, coined the terms and proposed that cultures influence communication in his book *Beyond Culture* (1976). Hall believed that members of a culture interpreted and identified messages based on that culture's preference (Niedergassel 568). In a **HC culture** (e.g., Japan, China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Mexico), communication rests on "physical context" and

people, and the culture rarely conveys the transmittal code as part of the communication. High-context cultures are more receptive to **indirect verbal expressions** and **non-verbal skills**, like body language, which means direct exchange of words isn't always consistent or expected.

Bosrock explains that indirect verbal expressions a non-native person might see Japanese people use are "I hear you" or "maybe," and they try to avoid the words "no" or "yes" (Bosrock 191). In most collectivist cultures, body language is an important communication tool such as nodding, personal space, posture, less eye contact, and smiling. (See appendix). In China, people usually convey an apology by smiling, bowing, or sometimes remaining silence instead of verbal apologies. Collectivist cultures are noted for having high-context communication, and it is seen in their practice of circumlocutory writing, which I will discuss in the body section. However, in a **LC culture** (e.g., U.S., Germany, UK, Australia, and France) members of the culture prefer **direct and explicit** information exchanges, which are invested in words, not non-verbal skills or indirect expression (Niedergassel 569). From table 2, it seems significant to point out that there is a correlation between HC and LC cultures and Hofstede's collectivist and individualistic dimensions. By comparing the similarities between HC/LC and individualistic and collectivistic seen from table 2, it is imperative to note that other cultural dimensions seem to also correlate. (See appendix).

One of the major ways HC/LC come into conflicts is the disagreement between oral vs. written. Thatcher shows how high-context cultures value of verbal expressions and low-context cultures value of written communication can be seen in a business setting. He discusses the history, an example of **culture as product**, of the U.S. and South America that instills a valued practice of oral (South America) and written (U.S.) communication. Thatcher states:

The U.S. has historically valued writing as perhaps the most critical mechanism of regulating behavior, which is a heritage of the U.S. common law system. Not surprisingly, the U.S. personnel at DTA brought these assumptions to their professional communication. On the other hand, in South America, the collective-hierarchical culture and its connections to orality have historically been the critical mechanisms of regulating behavior, reflecting the civil law tradition in South America. Consequently, many of the South American personnel at DTA brought these assumptions to their professional communication. (Thatcher 376)

During training, South Americans used **orality** to put the definition into a familiar context (HC), so they could try to comprehend (**culture in the head**) the term. The U.S. team thought the South Americans were digressing in with their verbal learning strategy. The style in spoken language also reflects written, circumlocutory writing. Digressions, which will be further expanded on in the circumlocutory writing section, are present in collectivist cultures' oral practices. **Orality** is valued by all cultures, but some cultures prefer oral communication to help them comprehend messages that can't be expressed in writing. The two teams showed their different communication preferences, which caused miscommunication and ineffective collaborative knowledge sharing.

In table 1, Hofstede identifies that individualist cultures tend to apply their values to all situations. While questioning whether or not the written and oral communication differences are superficial or fundamental, Thatcher explains, "First, all of the South American personnel were literate in the traditional sense—they could read, write, and speak, some in two or three languages. Thus, they were probably more complexly literate than their U.S. counterparts. Thus, we have to be careful about characterizing oral cultures as not literate" (Thatcher 391). By not

assuming but understanding another cultures preferred communication practices, effective collaboration, knowledge sharing, and comprehension can become a mutual occurrence in intercultural communication. Also, collectivist and individualist cultures conflict over written communication. The U.S. technical writing demonstrates the U.S. value for direct and linear texts, and Eastern countries circumlocutory writing tends to digress and focus on societal niceties. I will discuss these characteristics in more detail in the following paragraph and the body section.

Writer and Reader Responsible

If cultural preferences can influence communication practices and context, it can also impact the perspective of the writers. Writer and reader responsible perspectives are direct results of HC and LC communication values. **Reader-writer responsibility** is categorized according to, “the degree to which the reader is required to make inferences and to deduce meaning from a text, as opposed to the degree of the writer’s duty to explicitly provide explanations of propositions” (Vergaro 1215). LC/individualistic cultures are **writer responsible**, and HC/collectivistic cultures (e.g., Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Mexico) are reader responsible. The perspective of the writer will also influence exposition, whether it is **inductive** (bottom-up, basic propositions taken from specific examples that might not lead to a specific conclusion) or **deductive** (top-down, reasoning of one or more premises that leads to a clear conclusion). Circumlocutory (collectivist) and technical (individualist) writing will be explained in the body section.

Table 3: Contrastive rhetoric-discourse and organization

Collectivist	Focus (Perspective)	Discourse Structure	Exposition
China	Reader responsible	Circumlocutory	Inductive/Deductive
South Korea	Reader responsible	Circumlocutory	Inductive
Taiwan	Reader responsible	Circumlocutory	Inductive
Japan	Reader responsible	Circumlocutory	Inductive
Individualist			
U.S.	Writer responsible	Linear	Deductive
U.K.	Writer responsible	Linear	Deductive

Cultural Values and Practices

As I move into the main argument of this thesis, I want to show how other cultural values and practices of Eastern countries can be beneficial. Also, I hope I can emphasize and suggest that the U.S. consider the benefits of adopting Eastern countries' values. In the body section, I will explain the relationship between a cultural value and practice. The U.S. (individualistic) values expediency and Eastern cultures (collectivistic) value harmony. In table 1, Hofstede cites that individualistic cultures tend to see people as resources and emphasize task before developing business relationships. When individualist cultures value the task, they also introduce the value of expediency. On the other hand, collectivist cultures have the relationship prevail over tasks that presents the value of harmony. In this section, expediency and harmony are the examples of the cultural values, and technical writing and circumlocutory writing/orality will be used as the examples of the cultural practices that represent the values.

The Value of Expediency

Expediency in business is how U.S. organizations place value on tasks according to their overall importance to the business objectives. Our society considers economic progress to be one of the most important business objectives. An example of **business expediency** could be how a country initiates business meetings and projects, so U.S.-based organizations prefer executing the task before focusing on building a relationship with business partners.. Why do Western cultures, primarily the U.S., value expediency? In the U.S., expediency is believed to contribute to goals, deadlines, and business deals. (See table 2.) Also, our society believes expediency is instrumental to personal happiness and economic progress.

Expediency in practice: technical writing

How does the value of expediency become instrumental as a practice? In short, the U.S. uses technical writing (e.g., memos, business letters, emails, proposals, reports, articles, and newsletters) to quickly achieve business objectives. In technical writing, expediency manifests in two important qualities, directness and objectiveness. With a selection of communication channels, people and businesses are trained to expect quick results to maintain financial stability and other needs¹. The U.S. instilled expediency into technical writing—a rhetorical tool to execute “the means to an end.” Markel states:

U.S. audiences expect writers and speakers to get to the point quickly and to communicate information clearly. So when you write a claim letter, for example, clearly state what you want the individual you are addressing to do to correct a situation.

Related to **directness** is **task orientation**. Do not begin a letter with a comment about the weather or family. Instead, communicate immediately about business. (Markel 653)

¹ I would like to note that “people are trained to expect quick results” is not universal but a popularized notion in the U.S. and other individualistic cultures.

Thus, technical writing becomes naturally expedient and goal-oriented. By not committing to social niceties with collectivist cultures, the U.S. objective and direct tone seem rude and standoffish.

In the U.S., technical writing has certain characteristics that are permanent in practice. (See table 3.) By implementing direct, linear, and writer responsible writing into a text, corporations can communicate the “bottom line,” elevate productivity, synchronize in-house communication, and accomplish time-limited tasks and projects. Direct and linear writing can synchronize in-house communication by directly approaching business matters and clarifying the context without digressions. In a competitive society, U.S. business culture sees quick and accurate communication practices as advantageous.

Expediency issues

While expediency can be beneficial, it has its consequences. With the value of expediency, the U.S. defines individual success as economic stability and growth. Corporate environment loses its personal touch, and “in the United States, success and happiness, both personal and communal, are measured in monetary terms. In a capitalistic culture, it is ‘economic expediency’ that drives behavior” (Katz 2007). In most cases, a capitalistic culture is also an individualistic culture because individualism forms the foundation of democracy and capitalism. Organization models largely shape peoples’ perceptions and actions. There are five organization models: the traditional model, the human relations model, the human resources model, the systems/contingency model, and the transformation model. The traditional model is still widely used today in U.S. organizations because of its traditional strategy—“tight hierarchy, controlled and formal communication, and written policies and procedures” (Hamilton and Parker 51). Traditional managers don’t promote personal relations with employees. By focusing solely on

production and individual tasks, traditional managers and their employees learn to detach and impersonalize workplace relationships, unlike some Eastern countries.

In a capitalist culture, economic success begins to take precedence over human convenience and connection, and Karl Marx conceptualized his worries regarding the human experience in such a culture. “Marxism” arose as a critique of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution in the mid-to-late 19th century. Although Marx’s theories are quite dated, his viewpoint of how capitalism, production, and economic progress affect the worker is important when considering individualistic cultures values and practices. Marx states, “The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. The *devaluation* of the world of men is in direct proportion to the *increasing value* of the world of things. Labor produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity* – and this at the same rate at which it produces commodities in general” (Marx 22). Individualistic cultures’ influences their societies to adapt to the system and forget the importance of relationships and the original motivation. Production and materialistic appeal impacts relationships in the workplace. Since happiness is measured in monetary terms, people in the U.S. continue to value the task rather than human interaction.

Also, expediency causes ethical issues in technical writing. Katz’s looks at the ethical issues found in a 1942 Nazi memo that requested financial support for technical changes to vans, which were used in the early stages of the Nazi Eugenics Program. This is an extreme example of how deliberative rhetoric in technical writing can apply to the endangerment of human beings. Katz continues, “Here, as in most technical writing and, I will argue, in most deliberative rhetoric, the focus is on expediency, on technical criteria as a means to an end” (Katz 197). Technical writing is objective, but in this case, the deliberative rhetoric in the writing is used to

“denote, objectify, and conceal process and people” (Katz 198). From a less extreme perspective, expediency begins as a value, but technology and perception of individual success turns expediency into an issue for human experience.

Harmony and building workplace relationships

U.S. corporations have started implementing organizational models that move away from the traditional model, such as the human resources model. However, human resources also see others as “untapped resources” and “employee satisfaction is a by-product of improved performance” (Hamilton and Parker 57). China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan don’t predominately value business expediency like the U.S. (See table 2). Eastern countries don’t disvalue business objectives and tasks, but they truly rely on harmony and personal relationship to create a comfortable, trustworthy, and productive business environment. The quality of coworkers’ relationships determines the organization’s environment, and the climate of a business’s environment controls success. Although collectivist cultures prefer traditional/top-down organizational structure, they emphasize relationships and communication etiquette over being task-oriented. Even though I highlighted that two organizational models largely used in the U.S. still focuses on expedient behavior and humans as resources and by-products of performance, the human relations model tries to emphasize the importance of harmony:

- People wish to be liked and respected.
- If their needs are met, employees will produce for the organization.
- Sharing information with employees will increase their satisfaction, which will improve morale and reduce resistance to authority, thus improving productivity. (Hamilton and Parker 57)

Herrick’s case study is a great example of how differing work values can cause trouble for work relationships and communication².

² Although Herrick is addressing the dynamic cultural issue at work—gender. The workers resist Rose, but productivity rises once a male manager replaces Rose and also uses a traditional manager style.

At Phoenix Plastics, Rose Morgan starts her first day as the director of Shipping and Distribution. Herrick describes her as “a picture of moderation in every way, her hair is not dark, not light, not long, not short, not straight, not curly—just brown. Her pale, thirty-something face is also unremarkable, except for her mouth. It tells all. It pulls into a thin, tight, unyielding line. It discourages conversation” (Herrick 284). Rose feels the need to play the role of traditional manager and assert her power in a traditionally male territory. Needless to say, the workers start to resent Rose and brought their complaints to Kathy, who is the Phoenix’s director of quality leadership. The workers trust Kathy because she shows an interest in their personal lives, and she ends up becoming a confidante and friend. They don’t feel comfortable to directly give Rose feedback, so employees show their dissatisfaction with her impersonal behavior by slowing production. Personal barriers are distracting, and lack of human experience disagrees with many people—they start to feel unmotivated. Motivation is the key to high-quality work. The differences within cultures impacts factors of communication. By implementing different values, like harmony, organizations might be able to mitigate miscommunication. The choices organizations make depend on the situation and audience they are dealing with.

A courteous question about a coworker’s family is important to develop a strong in-group where people find it easier to trust, share, and collaborate with the unwanted tension or uncaring attitude. Forming a functional team for projects is a difficult task, but working in group where no one shares any personal interest is even more difficult. Work relationships are important to Eastern culture. As table 2 indicates, China, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan’s language is indirect, which means these cultures are wary of losing face and spurring confrontation. If coworkers are willing to provide information and support others’ interests, people in teams will be more willing to brainstorm, listen, cooperate, and encourage different perspectives.

Harmony in practice: circumlocutory writing

Harmony and its “intense value placed on family, on friendships, and on relationships with friends and family often translates into business communication that is highly expressive, eloquent, and personal but diffuse in statement of purpose” (Tebeaux 57). China, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan’s written business communication style is referred to as circumlocutory writing. Circumlocutory writing can be defined as a practice or tool from which, “the topic is looked at from a variety of different tangents, but the subject is never looked at directly” (Bowe and Martin 122). I believe it is important to mention Robert Kaplan’s work in relation to contrastive rhetoric. Kaplan was a prominent figure in the field of contrastive rhetoric, publishing work that continues to influence linguistics and contrastive rhetoric studies. Kaplan hypothesized that English essays written by ESL students would vary in discourse structures, compared to the English ideal of linear texts. The test is conducted in a dynamic culture (classroom), but the results represent the static culture. The following list shows Kaplan’s findings for rhetorical organization of paragraphs:

- **Linear**-general to particular topic structure, separated by paragraphs with the use of proper transitions.
- **Semitic**-parallel constructions, with the first idea completed in the second part.
- **Eastern**-circularity, with the topic looked at from different tangents.
- **Romance**-freedom to digress and to introduce “extraneous” material.
- **Russian**-Similar to 3, but with different lengths, parenthetical amplifications of subordinate elements, and topics don’t have to be directly relevant (Clyne 161).

Although Kaplan’s original research is still referenced today, his findings are less reliable because of recent advances in research approaches and methods. Many scholars use Kaplan’s research as the “then and now” argument that represents that changes of CR in lieu of new research—genre expansion and social contexts of writing. Examples of English and Chinese

letter formatting can clearly show the contrasting rhetorical strategies.³ I will use analytical notes to highlight the features of each letter.

[Name], Director
 The Industrial Explosives Society, Japan
 [Address]
 [City], Japan
 Dear Dr. [Director's name]:

The development of gunpowder was certainly one of the greatest achievements of the medieval world. European historians have recognized in the first salvoes of the fourteenth century bombards the death-knell of the castle, and hence of Western military aristocratic feudalism. The developments of modern powder and high explosive technology pushes the society ahead further, but at the mean time, it helped several strong countries to invade the weak countries and hence caused enormous sad result between the peoples.⁴

Evidences show that there was exchange of knowledge of gunpowder and blasting bombs between Japan and China not later than the thirteenth century.⁵ The relationship between scientists in the field of explosives of these two countries is improved and becoming better and better since the beginning of this decade. Professor [A], Professor [B] and many other Japanese scholars visited China: and at the same time many Chinese colleagues visited Japan. I enjoyed very much the kind invitation of Professor [A] to give a guest lecture on the Academic Conference of The Industrial Explosives Society, Japan in the May of 1987. Very kind arrangement by Professor [B] made it possible for me to visit the University of Tokyo, the University of Kyoto, and many other institutions. I am very much indebted to the generosity of my hosts for their warm reception.

In these years of close relationship with Japanese colleagues, I am deeply impressed on two points. The first point is that they always put the safety problem on the first place. According to the statistics, the frequency rate of injury (FRI) of industries is keeping going down from almost 40 in the early fifties to as low as 2.22 in 1987. In 1985, the FRI of the U.S.A. is 9.90 in compared with 2.52 of Japan. The second point is that the four main islands, Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu, have been linked by bridges and tunnels completely in 1988 and reliable transportation routes interconnecting these islands have been provided. The explosive scientists and engineers played a big role in the underwater blasting and construction work.⁶

On the occasion of the fifty years anniversary of the Industrial Explosives Society, Japan, I would like to send my sincere congratulations for your past achievements and my best wishes for your future success.⁷ I am also looking forward to a more intimate

³ The following two letters are actually the same letter written in English by a Chinese scientist, but the second version was the revised and preferred version voted on by surveyors.

⁴ Introduces topic, but the first paragraph is vague in regards to the purpose of the letter.

⁵ This sentence deviates from the primary point of this paragraph—Japan and China's relationship has improved.

⁶ The ending sentence doesn't make an impact. It is misplaced.

⁷ Inductive approach to the letter. Bottom-up organization.

cooperation between scientists and engineers in the field of explosive science and technology for our two great neighboring countries.

Revised version

On the fiftieth anniversary of the Industrial Explosives Society, Japan, I send my sincere congratulations for your past achievements and my best wishes for your future success.⁸ I am also looking forward to even more intimate cooperation in explosive science and technology between scientists and engineers of our two great neighboring countries.

In the field of explosives, the relationship between Japanese and Chinese scientists has improved steadily since the beginning of this decade.⁹ Professor [A], Professor [B], and many other Japanese scholars visited China; many of my Chinese colleagues have visited Japan. I enjoyed very much the kind invitation of Professor [A] to give a guest lecture at the Academic Conference of The Industrial Explosives Society, Japan, in May 1987. Very kind arrangements by Professor [B] made it possible for me to visit the University of Tokyo, the University of Kyoto, and many other institutions. I am very much indebted to the generosity of my hosts for their warm reception.

In these years of close relationship with Japanese colleagues, I am deeply impressed on two points. First, they always give high priority to the problem of safety. The frequency rate of injury (FRI) of industries has continued to decrease, from almost 40 in the early 1950s to as low as 2.22 in 1987. In 1985, the FRI of the United States of America was 9.90, compared with Japan's 2.52. Second, explosive scientists and engineers played a big role in the underwater blasting and construction work in linking the four main islands by bridges and tunnels. Completed in 1988, this work has provided reliable transportation routes connecting these islands.

Again, congratulations on these achievements to the Industrial Explosives Society, Japan, with best wishes for continuing future success.¹⁰
From (Jiang and Zhou 2006: 17)

The first version of the letter gives us a sense of how collectivist countries characterize **inductive** and **reader responsible** writing¹¹. Sharp explains, "Johns has also noted the underuse of cohesive ties by Chinese students. Miao and Zhu (1992) suggested that difficulty may be that Chinese texts are meaning based rather than syntax based, and this explains the problems some students have with English text" (Sharp 484). Chinese students focus less on sentence structure

⁸ Clear and concise introduction. It signifies that the purpose of this letter is because of the 50th anniversary and the writers own involvement in explosive science and technology. Bottom-line organization.

⁹ States overarching point of the letter.

¹⁰ Restates the purpose of the letter.

¹¹ In most cases, the texts that are used to study contrasting rhetorical strategies are written in English by ESL students.

and more on the meaning of the text—they are content oriented and willing to explore different perspectives.

Through the development of my tables (See appendix), I discovered that **circumlocutory discourse** has a **digressive** organization structure—diverges from the main topic. All cultures abide by certain business standards. Collectivist cultures' crucial value is harmony. How does harmony influence circumlocutory writing? Well, circumlocutory writers tend to digress in their texts, and **digression** is a part of being a **reader responsible** writer. Circumlocutory writers focus on content and exploration of multiple perspectives, and the writers believe that readers should demonstrate their intellectuality by analyzing and understanding the text without simplifiers and an overuse of transitions. Individualist and expediency valuing cultures, such as the U.S., shouldn't assume that reader responsible texts are less effective in business communication. American technical writing classes teach students that **direct** and **writer responsible** texts are effective for bottom-line organization and encouraging the reader to act in accordance to the document. Writing for another culture is a challenge, but basic guidelines can help writers avoid confusing and offending the other cultures. Therefore, a Japanese business document will follow a different organizational pattern than Western cultures:

A Japanese letter is the reverse of one in the West, in the sense that you proceed first from the general to the specific. You need to begin with the social niceties, with small talk about the weather, the holidays, or some seasonal reference. Include at least a paragraph of such material before getting to the heart of the correspondence. (Markel 83)

Japan's culture prefers a less direct approach to written communication that proceeds from the general to the specific, which is customary for **high-context cultures**. . The same preference for harmony in writing can be seen in Mexico's business culture. Mexico is a **collectivist culture**

and its “intense **value** placed on family, on friendships, and on **relationships** with friends and family often translates into business communication that is highly expressive, eloquent, and personal but **diffuse** in statement of purpose” (Tebeaux 57). Collectivist cultures value the exchange of personal information in business documents and in person because it establishes a formal relationship between the two cultures.

The U.S. document’s usual tone is objective, direct, and precise. **Low-context** cultures favor detail and structure over brevity, but being overly assertive and informative can be an insult because **high-context** writers expect the readers to make the effort to comprehend the text. This is an act of authority and a challenge of a readers’ intellect. Often, the assumption is that Western cultures’ writing is stated squarely without tact, but that is not always the case. While consulting Russian and Canadian’s periodic engineering reports, Artemeva identifies that the organization of information in the Canadian reports caused misinterpretations for the Russian-speaking translators. When the Canadians discuss any problems, they start their reports with positive feedback. As a result, the Russian translators don’t understand the Canadians intent and send the translated report to the director, who “most probably, read the first lines that reflected a positive and supportive attitude and never read the message to the end to interpret it correctly” (Artemeva 289). Artemeva classifies that Canada’s idea of building goodwill before discussing the problems is a commonly used format that the U.S. uses when revealing “bad news” in documents. A writer begins with goodwill to bond with the reader, just as the Japanese letters begin with social inquiries.

Harmony Issues

While harmony can produce positive results, this value in practice can have its issues. Collectivists' value of cementing personal relationships in business, especially business communication, can effect time, goals, and tasks. In collectivists' cultures written documents, the main purpose of the document buries itself into the middle of the document, which makes it more difficult to understand what actions to take. Compared to U.S. written documents, circumlocutory writing "progresses in several directions, discuss several topics, and seem incoherent by U.S. standards of logical, unified development" (Tebeaux 57). This importance of highly eloquent and personal expression in written and oral communication can diffuse the purpose of a document or face-to-face communication. The emphasis of harmony in business culture might seem distracting and slow-paced for certain individuals that see business and personal life as separate.

Conclusion

Although the individualist cultures tends to apply their values to all situations, U.S. organizations and their technical professionals need to reconsider collectivist cultures' value of harmony and practice of circumlocutory writing and orality. If the U.S. emphasizes relationships and practices, our business culture might see an improvement of intercultural and intracultural communication. Whether it is an individualistic cultures emphasis on individual goals or a collectivist cultures high regards of group achievements, cultures that plan to work together need to understand each other. As seen in the argument, individualistic and collectivistic traits are still strongly engrained into our static culture, and these traits impact intercultural collaborative attitudes and the balance between task and harmony. I think it is critical for the U.S. to focus more on group-orientation to help build stronger workplace relationships. By implementing

harmony and mitigating the value of expediency, U.S. businesses can have motivated and productive groups of workers. Plus, I think a stronger sense of harmony will clearly present itself in intercultural communication, especially in writing.

Language barriers and geographic distance might be a cause for concern when communicating with other cultures, so that is when written communication comes in handy. Translated documents can be one of the most important ways to communicate with collectivist cultures (e.g., China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan), but researchers have cited that collectivist cultures believe U.S. technical documents can be rude and possibly insulting. If the U.S. considered organizing documents from basic to specific with an introduction of social niceties, translators and receivers of the document will appreciate the lengths the U.S. are going to understand and respect the cultural variations.

Once the U.S. organizations collaborate face-to-face with their business partners, the U.S. workers will hopefully understand the importance of in-group consensus, nonverbal cues, and orality in the Eastern business societies. If both cultures can find mediation between values and practices, I think miscommunication and possible tension can be alleviated. Plus, showing signs of shared values and practices can create trust and a more enthusiastic approach to sharing knowledge. While I focused solely on harmony and expediency as competing values, the U.S. still needs to consider other collectivist values as well in intercultural business communication.

Appendix

Table 2: Intra-intercultural business values

	Organizational Structure[i]	Cultural Dimension	Business Expediency[iii]	Preferred Communication	Language	Corporate Interaction	High and Low Context
China	Vertical (top down) Masculine[iiii] Power Distance	Collectivist[iv]	No	Written	Indirect[v] Body language[vi]	Emphasis on harmony	High
Japan	Top down Masculine	Collectivist	No[vii]	Written	Body language[viii] (indirect)	Harmony Personable	High
South Korea	Horizontal & Open (Recent)	Collectivist	No	Written and Verbal	Body language (indirect)	Personable/Harmony	High
Taiwan	Horizontal (Patriarchal)	Collectivist	No	Written and Verbal	Indirect	Personable/Competitive	High
Australia	Egalitarian Society[ix] (social justice, equality)	Individualist	Yes	Written	Direct (blunt)	Competitive/Emphasis on business.	Low
France	Centralized/Vertical/Multilayered Management	Individualistic	Yes	Verbal	Direct (hierarchy) Indirect (subculture)	Formal and informal correspondence--relates to the subculture and hierarchy	Low
Germany	Strict Vertical Hierarchy	Individualistic	Yes	Written	Direct interaction	Methodical	Low
UK	Multilayered Management/Vertical	Individualistic	No	Written	Direct	Differentiate between work and personal life	Low
Mexico	Power Distance[xi] Masculine	Collectivist[xiii]	No[xiii]	Face-to-face[xiv] Passive[xv]	Uncertainty Avoidance[xvi]	Relationships[xvii]	High
U.S.	Multilayered/Vertical, Management (Traditional, HR)	Individualistic	Yes	Written	Direct	Emphasis on Business, Differentiate between work and personal life	Low

Table 3: Contrastive rhetoric - discourse and organization

	Organization/Discourse Structure	Focus (Perspective)	Exposition
China	circumlocutory[xix]	Reader responsible	Inductive/deductive[xx]
South Korea	circumlocutory[xxi]	Reader responsible	inductive
Taiwan	circumlocutory	Reader Responsible	inductive
Japan	circumlocutory[xxii]	Reader responsible[xxiii]	inductive[xxiv]
Mexico	circumlocutory	Reader responsible	inductive
Germany[xxv]	romantic	Reader responsible	general deduction[xxvi]
Russia	Similar to romantic	Reader responsible	digression
Italy	romantic	Reader responsible[xxvii]	inductive
U.S.[xxviii]	linear	Writer responsible	deductive[xxix]
Australia	linear	Writer responsible	deductive
France	linear[xxx]	Writer responsible	deductive
UK	linear	Writer responsible	deductive

[i] References from figure 1 can be found in Asian Business: Customs and Manners and European Business: Customs and Manners by Mary Murray Bosrock. Her research stems from personal experience and interviews with people from the countries.

[ii] By business expediency, I am referring to a country's initiation of business meetings and projects vs. the development of business relationships.

^[iii] A situation in which the dominant values of a society are success, money, and things (Manrai 27).

^[iv] Discourage independent expression. The group comes to a decision through consensus.

^[vi] “Brick (1991: 120) comments that, in Chinese, the apology is often conveyed through body language, e.g. smile, bowing, or even silence, instead of ‘verbally,’ and that the Chinese are surprised by the amount of apologizing that takes place among

^[vii] Business meetings are formal, and business decisions are slow and by consensus. After decision is made, the implementation is quick (Bosrock 204)

^[viii] In general, the Japanese try to avoid the word no-or-yes, but a Japanese may use “I hear you” or “maybe” (Bosrock 191) Body language is an important communication tool in Japan such as nodding, smiling, less eye contact, personal space, and posture.

^[ix] Filipinos prefer indirect language—avoidance of direct yes-or-no questions (Bosrock 247).

^[x] A belief in human equality especially with respect to social, political, and economic affairs

^[xi] A culture’s willingness to accept differences in social levels. Hofstede’s definition—the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept that power is distributed unequally (Manrai 26)

^[xii] “Hofstede notes that the United States is the most individual-oriented country in the world, whereas Mexico is a collectivist country. Current studies of Mexican culture consistently stress the importance of the family” (Tebeaux 52). A comparison of U.S. and Mexico’s business letters

^[xiii] Results are less important than the relationship-based process of doing business (Tebeaux 54)

^[xiv] “Designing Written Business Communication along the Shifting Cultural Continuum”—Elizabeth Tebeaux (58)

^[xv] Language of business—frequent use of reflexive verbs and literary language (Tebeaux 63)

^[xvi] The extent to which people feel threatened by ambiguous situations, and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid in such situations (Manrai 26)

^[xvii] Intercultural studies suggest that Mexicans focus more on the relationship with perspective partners before the business objectives (Tebeaux 51).

^[xviii] “The business strategies, goals, objectives, and practices become an integral part of the communication process and help create a new environment out of the synergy of culture, communication, and business” (Varner 44)

^[xix] Ling Yang’s article, “The Rhetorical Organization of Chinese and American students’ Expository Essays: a Contrastive Rhetoric Study,” argues that Chinese students prefer a direct approach to text and paragraph organization. Yang conducted a study that involved both Chinese and U.S. college students—four groups (two classes of 72 English native speakers, 80 first-year Chinese majors, 53 first-year English majors, and 50 third-year English majors. The first group was brought in from two colleges in Chicago, and the other three groups were found at a university in Central China. A Chinese students’ writing, on occasion, has topic sentences that seem indirect or vague because they are written as a sentence fragment.

^[xx] According to studies by John Hinds, writers, no matter the culture, use certain text structures to achieve coherence, but these textual patterns vary among cultures and languages. “Hinds has described how Japanese, Chinese, Thai, and Korean Writers favor an inductive presentation” (Severino 203).

^[xxi] Bosley, Deborah. “Cross-Cultural Collaboration: Whose Culture is it, Anyway.” (60)

^[xxii] The findings came from a reference of Hinds’ study in Vergaro’s text, “Dear Sirs, what would you do if you were in our position?”. Discourse strategies in Italian and English money chasing letters.” Reader-writer responsibility is categorized according to. “the degree to which the reader is required to make inferences and to deduce meaning from a text, as opposed to the degree of the writer’s duty to explicitly provide explanations of propositions” (Vergaro 1215).

[xxv] Ulla Connor, focusing on coherence, reported that her ESL subjects' texts had less adequate justification of claims and were less likely to link concluding inductive statements to the preceding subtopics of the problem. ●i reported that her native Japanese-speaking subjects used more mixed arguments (arguing both for and against) and argument alterations (between arguing for and arguing against) and more often ended their arguments in directions that differed from the beginning positions. She also reported that her Japanese subjects were inclined to be more tentative and less hyperbolic than their NES peers, using more hedges and fewer superlatives" (Severino, Guerra, and Butler 212) The information is from an article within the collection—from Tony Silva's, *ESL and Native-English-Speaker Writing* .

[xxv] German, Spanish and Russian languages require conjugation of verbs that correlate with singular or plural subjects (Mary Fong)

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[xxvi] In the U.S., the aim of expository writing comes from the topic or question that is introduced at the beginning of the text. German texts contain a more general that doesn't need to be considered to carefully. Linear texts, such as in the U.S., don't value repetition and digression (circumlocutory), but linearity is a not a core value in German discourse. Thus, German texts exhibit recapitulation as a tool for logical development (Clyne 161-2).

[xxvii] Italian writers rely on reader's co-operation to be interpreted (Vergaro 1223).

[xxviii] "From the perspective of content-oriented cultures, the English linear structure might be considered simplistic, due to its high usage of advance organisers and its emphasis on the careful presentation of thought structures and strategies of expression" (Bowe and Martin 129).

[xxix] The deductive approach in Western culture, specially the U.S., focuses on a linear organization—the text moves from the general to the particular (Severino 203)

[xxx] The French show signs of linearity, but the structure of the text uses more orientation aids (advance organizers).

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