

Chinese and Western Thinking

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Even though we all aware that people from different countries have their own way of thinking, sometimes we can barely avoid some culture shock and misunderstanding. What to know about the differences between Chinese and western thinking? We're going to talk about the major differences from these aspects: perspective, priority, tendency, focus, attitude and means of expression. The following discussion may help you have a better understanding.

Be aware that the comparison of thinking between China and western countries is only talking in generalities, thinking patterns vary from person to person, we are not saying that each Chinese or western people think the same way as what we're going to talk about.

Aspects	Chinese (Eastern)	Western
Perspective	Holistic	Analytic
Priority	Group	Individual
Tendency	Paradoxical thinking	Rule-based thinking
Focus	Relationships	Categories
Attitude	Keep real feelings	Show real feelings
Means of Expression	Indirect	Direct

1.Perspective: Holistic vs Analytic

Chinese people usually look at the whole picture, while western people tend to focus on objects and their properties. As a result, in certain circumstance, Chinese way of thinking is holistic with a “broader vision”, and western thinking is analytic with a “narrow vision”.

2.Priority: Group vs Individual

Chinese people value more group achievements, while western people think it more important to have self-improvement and achieve success. Due to the cultural difference of individualism and collectivism, western and Chinese people think and act in different ways. Group is the top priority for Chinese people, and sometimes they will make sacrifice for the good of the whole group, because of the idea of unity and harmony. But for most western people, personal choice and freedom value more, self-promotion and self-worth are encouraged.

3.Tendency: Paradoxical thinking vs Rule-based thinking

Easterners, including Chinese people, tend to be more open to paradoxical thinking, they believe that it's normal to meet contradictions, so rules will change accordingly. However, westerners are the opposite, they are strict with logic and rule-based thinking, they will always keep the essential law when it comes to specific problems.

4.Focus: Relationships vs Categories

Chinese people focus more on the relationships and details, while western people emphasis more on categories. What's more, westerners identify different objects, and try to discover laws and principle by categorizing those objects. The western way of thinking is quite helpful for achieving scientific and technological advancements. On the contrary, Chinese people, and also other eastern people, concern more about the relationships between different things, with more flexibility according to the specific context. Based on Chinese way of thinking, there is no strict rule for how the world runs, as paradoxes and contradictions always exist.

5.Attitude: Keep real feelings vs Show real feelings

Chinese people tend to be more subtle than western people. Sometimes, Chinese people will keep the real feelings to themselves and accept opinions from the majorities, in order to not hurt any other person's feeling. It's possible that Chinese people feel angry on the inside without reflecting their feelings on the outside. For example, you can't tell whether some Chinese people get mad, because they may smile politely, but maybe they've already got angry internally. Westerners hold the opposite attitude. For most western people, you can easily know they're angry or happy from their faces, because they show real feeling externally, instead of hiding it. When it comes to conflict, they argue for their own ideas, but they will laugh off afterwards, rather than taking it personally.

6.Means of Expression: Indirect vs Direct

Chinese people prefer an indirect way to express their feelings, while western people love to communicate directly with other people. For westerners, it's a respectful and honest way to say "No" or "I don't know", without misleading other people.

On the contrary, Chinese people consider an indirect way is more polite, so that they don't like to say "No" directly. When it comes to negative topics, instead of direct statements, Chinese people would like to hear "between the lines".

In conclusion, there is no "right" or "wrong" when we talk about the major differences between Chinese and western thinking. To tell the truth, the best solution to deal with culture differences is to show respect and learn from each other.

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