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DOES NATIONAL CULTURE INFLUENCE BUSINESS RELATED ISSUES? THE CASE OF CHINA AND POLAND.

Abstract

The aim of this article is to present whether and how national culture influences management practices and work-related issues. The results of questionnaires conducted in three companies involved in cooperation between Poland and China are demonstrated in order to indicate the influence of culture on operations in respective countries. The overview of cultural models of behaviour developed by Geert Hofstede, Fons Trompenaars, and Edward T. Hall with their implications on the way of conducting business in two diverse countries are described and thoroughly analysed. Moreover, business practices of Chinese and Polish managers are presented, along with the practical tips for investors.
Introduction

The aim of research in the area of cultural differences is to explain the variations that exist between nations and their influence on business related issues. Even though the empirical research in this field begun in the middle of the twentieth century, various psychologists and sociologists still attempt to find the answers to the most important questions and issues concerning cultural distinctiveness and the way it affects management practices. The ongoing research is important, owing to the fact that increasing number of companies invests abroad and requires knowledge how to work in international environment. Companies and managers, who are conscious of cultural differences, are more prone to achieve success by making their employees globally sensitive. Dilemmas are universal around the world, but it is culture that determines the ways of problem solving, it leads us through our lives and directs our behaviour in hard and problematic situations. Every society has its own values and attitudes towards status, time, or education, which consequently affect diverse operations of the company, such as hiring practices, motivation, and compensation programmes. Obviously, there is no ideal model of behaviour and management. People and companies need to be aware of existing differences between various cultures in the context of personal relations and in our attitudes towards various aspects of life in order to effectively function and achieve success.

Due to the cultural distinctiveness of Eastern and Central Europe from Asia as well as the existence of substantial discrepancies in business culture, it is worth analysing Poland and China. The process of internationalisation and globalisation contributed much to the choice of these countries as the cooperation between them has been increasing in the last years and it is necessary to be aware of different habits and managerial practices in respective countries. According to the report on the state of foreign trade for 2011 (Ministry of Economy, 2011) in 2009 Polish exports to China increased by 21.3%, to over EUR 1 billion, whereas in 2010 it increased by another 17%, thus reaching the level of EUR 1.2 billion. Imports from the Chinese market increased by 26.4% in 2010.

Results of the questionnaire

Practical information about the influence of national culture on business-related issues was gathered from the Polish companies operating in China and a Chinese company operating in Poland. The purpose of the questionnaire was to discover whether cultural differences affect the business conduct between two culturally distinct countries and whether theories regarding
cross-cultural management are valid in work-related situations. For the purpose of this questionnaire culture has been defined as values, norms, tradition, shared and learned human behaviour that shape the way humans solve problems of adapting to the environment or living together and consists of such elements as religion, ethical, economic and political systems, language.

Three Polish companies and three Chinese companies were asked to fill in the questionnaire, out of which two Polish and one Chinese company provided the feedback. Managers representing those companies were supposed to answer five open questions regarding cultural differences between their companies’ operations in Poland and China, problems (if any) in the workplace resulting from cultural differences between Polish and Chinese culture, characteristics of Chinese / Polish employees that positively or negatively influence the development of Polish-Chinese cooperation in the workplace and the differences between business etiquette in Poland and China.

The first Polish company (company A) is present on the Polish market as a seller of fuels, electric power, coal and metallurgical products, while its operations on international market include exports of machinery, coal and other raw materials, as well as mining and construction services. Its cooperation with Chinese enterprises is based mainly on the supply of mining equipment. The second Polish firm (company B) is a supplier of rescue and firefighting vehicles, equipment for such vehicles and services related to repairing and rebuilding vehicles for fire-fighting brigades. Finally, company C is a Chinese company operating in Poland, which main business line is international project contracting (engineering and construction of housing projects, public utilities, and highway surface works).

On the basis of questionnaires it may be stated that all three companies perceive cultural differences in their operations in Poland and China. Polish companies draw attention to China’s geographic location, history, distinct language and traditions, which substantially influence ways of conducting business. What is more, perception of time is different in China and there is almost no sense of stability and order in their lives. Polish managers may feel offended if concluding business or some organisational issues take too long. Polish companies should be prepared for long negotiation process and various dinners and banquets before finalising any business. As manager in company A indicated, the Chinese often change decisions unexpectedly, even after negotiations. Poles may treat it as a sign of untrustworthiness, whereas for Chinese it is just further development of relationship between
both partners. Manager of company B also emphasised the importance of hierarchy in Chinese enterprises and exaggerated courtesy of Chinese businessmen (signs of high power distance and importance of status in Chinese society). As Polish companies claim, there are no substantial problems in the workplace resulting from cultural differences. The only complaint is that Chinese employees are used to having lunch at 12.00 a.m. and two-hours break afterwards. Furthermore, time difference between Poland and China often causes problems in smooth conduct of business. The manager of company A believes that there are no unique characteristics of Chinese and Polish employees, which may negatively influence their cooperation. The manager of company B, however, indicates inability to stick to schedules as a drawback of Polish enterprises and excessive meticulousness and sudden changes of decisions as drawbacks of Chinese enterprises. Positive features on the side of Polish managers and employees include creativity and individualism. The main areas of business etiquette, mentioned by Polish companies, where differences exist include eating habits and dress code. Chinese businessmen tend to go for dinner together after business meetings or to banquets, if negotiations were successful. Their clothes are often casual when compared to Polish dress code, what was also confirmed by the Chinese representative. Suits are worn only on very formal occasions. Although Polish managers observed that gift giving is very subtle subject, small presents such as pens, notebooks, and calendars are given at the end of negotiations.

From the perspective of the Chinese company operating in Poland, cultural differences can be observed mainly in employees’ attitudes. Chinese workers value collectivism, in contrast to Poles, who value individualism. Chinese subordinates are able to sacrifice their free time and personal freedom for the good of corporation. What representative of company C values to great extent in Chinese subordinates is that they can stay extra hours at work if the project requires to be quickly finished. He also indicated other differences, such as centralisation of power in Chinese companies, where decisions come from top managers, whereas in Europe subordinates are encouraged to take part in decision-making process. Chinese emphasise group affiliation and loyalty what encourages employees to identify stronger with the company. In his view, these characteristics give Chinese employees advantage over Polish subordinates in terms of effectiveness, whereas Polish workers have more personal freedom and more opportunities for self-development. From the point of view of company C, the main problems that Chinese may face in Poland involve legal issues and, distinct from those in China, administrative procedures. Additionally, communication problems may occur, as it is
often the case that requests are sent to Polish companies, which do not reply. Manager of company C additionally indicates some negative characteristics of Poles, which may hinder cooperation between the two nations. We can find among them tendency to separate corporate matters from private matters - people in Poland separate facts from person, e.g. in the workplace, people who share the desk for many years, may never have lunch or drink after work. Chinese people never separate work from friendship. What is more, Chinese employers find it difficult to contact Polish employees after working hours. Lastly, Polish subordinates are perceived to never do more than what is expected from them. Whereas Chinese perceive their work as a part of their private lives, business relationships as personal relationships, and are able to sacrifice more for the good of the company than Polish employees. Chinese manager does not perceive any substantial differences in gift giving between Poland and China. He also emphasised the importance of knowing eating habits of Chinese people, due to the fact that all dinners and lunches are considered as a part of work. Drinking alcoholic beverages to the bottom as a sign of respect was given as an example. All in all, meetings and social interactions, in the eyes of Chinese businessmen, produce better understanding and easiness to conduct business.

Corruption was a separate topic raised by the representative of Chinese company. It is common knowledge that China’s level of corruption is one of the highest in the world. Nevertheless, Chinese manager stated that there is no difference in the problem of corruption in Poland and China. As he explained, businesspersons in China often have to give some money to avoid bureaucracy and shorter the time of some procedures. However, in the mentality of Chinese people, it is not corruption, but smoothening the process of business or legal proceedings.

In conclusion, results of the questionnaires conducted in Polish and Chinese companies emphasised the importance of personal relations in business in PRC – the Chinese expect personal relationship building when Poles think it is unnecessary. Apart from that, managers should always remember the difference between relationship focus in China and moderate deal focus in Poland. The fact that China is a collectivist country, while Poland more individualistic should also not be disregarded. Furthermore, Polish businesspersons often underestimate symbolic meaning of food, eating habits, and social etiquette. Nevertheless, there are issues which have been mutual for Poland and China, due to economic transition.
from closed, central system to open, market, what posed challenges not only in Central and Eastern Europe, but also in Asian societies.

Now it is important to analyse how the results of the questionnaires conducted in Polish and Chinese companies are in accordance with the theories of cultural differences and their influence on work-related issues.

**Cultural models of behaviour in business**

Various psychologists and sociologists attempted to examine characteristics of cultures around the world. Their aim was the comparison of cultures and establishment of certain clusters of countries reflecting similar characteristics and attitudes. Owing to the fact that Hall’s, Hofstede’s, and Trompenaars’ works appeared to be the most influential and most often quoted when indicating the impact of national cultures on management practices, this article will describe Poland’s and China’s position according to their classifications and its reflection in the views of interviewed managers.

**Hall’s low-context versus high-context approach**

Edward and Mildred Hall developed low-context – high-context approach, which may serve as one of the techniques indicating characteristic differences between cultures. In the case of low-context culture, exchange of information and messages being sent are said to be explicit and based on spoken words, without much emphasis on nonverbal communication. During negotiations, for example, people from low-context cultures tend to move quickly to the essence of the subject, they value competency and high productivity. In these types of cultures legal contracts are used to conclude negotiations (Simintiras and Thomas, 1998). High-context cultures, on the other hand, put an emphasis on nonverbal communication. Messages sent are indirect and promote mutual trust, friendly relationships, and respect for each other. People in these cultures are very attentive not to offend anyone and to be polite. To a great extent, the context of uttered words is important along with accompanying body language. It is mirrored, for instance, in the way people are seated during the meeting – the most important person usually can be found far away from the room’s entrance as a sign of respect for him/her. Apart from this, negotiations tend to have different form in comparison with low-context cultures. They are usually very slow, prolonged in time, and based on trust between parties (Cavusgil, Knight and Riesenberger, 2008).

According to Hall’s model Poland is a low-context country. Poles rely on straightforward, explicit messages in the communication process and do not need to decode the meaning of the
message from the context. What matters in the Polish culture is verbal, direct message, not its background, context or relationships. Low-context has its consequences in business environment, as in countries characterised by this feature performance is appreciated in greater extent than reputation or connections, legal contracts are written and binding, and negotiation process is quick and efficient. Negotiations or a deal may be rejected or accepted even after one day. During negotiations, foreigners should be formal and focus on technical issues, presenting facts and important information. They should set realistic goals and remember that when dealing with the Polish state company or industry important for the state, negotiation process may be longer than with the private company (Chee and West, 2004).

China, in contrast, is a high-context culture what means that successful communication substantially depends on non-verbal behaviour and external context of the situation. Before any agreement can be reached both parties need to achieve mutual trust. It leads to a slow and ritualistic negotiation process in which relationships are highly valued. Apart from that, in high-context cultures greater emphasis is put on trustworthiness and relationships than on legal contracts. As Lin and Miller (2003) state, “when people are heavily involved in each other’s lives, less information needs to be explicitly codified.” For the same reason, any resort to legal measures for resolving disagreement is likely to be perceived by the Chinese as signalling failure of a relationship”. During presentations, Chinese dislike listening to jokes, anecdotes and criticism of competitors and other companies. They appreciate detailed information about the product and the company. Chinese people are considered tough negotiators. During negotiations, Chinese businessmen like bargaining and expect that their business partners will make concessions to reach an agreement. For this reason, it is good to raise the initial offer in order to be able to lower it in the process of negotiations. Often negotiations may stop at one moment, or Chinese may not be direct in what they want to achieve during negotiations – this is a moment for private meeting with a Chinese businessperson to solve the issue informally, on personal level. It relates to the concept that China is a highly diffuse culture, where private spheres may interrelate with business sphere. Written contracts are of lesser importance than oral agreements in China. However, foreigners should insist on writing down all the conditions, as Chinese companies often want to renegotiate the terms after making an agreement. Thus, Chinese, in contrast to Poles, emphasise the process, not the content of negotiations. What is important for them, are the means used to achieve the agreement, not the finalisation itself. What is more, Polish businessmen focus on specific issues, whereas Chinese take general view on negotiations.
Hofstede’s dimensions

Another research aimed at determination of dimensions of culture, which differ among distinct nationalities was conducted by Geert Hofstede, a Dutch anthropologist who, as a manager in the personnel research department in IBM corporation analysed 116,000 workers in sixty-four countries. Primarily, four dimensions were identified (power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance), and the fifth dimension (long-term orientation) was developed after conducting the studies from a Chinese perspective.

Table 1. Poland and China according to Hofstede’s dimensions.

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**Power Distance Index**

Power distance is the first dimension described by G. Hofstede and it relates to the inequalities that exist in each society around the world. As G. Hofstede and G.J. Hofstede (2005) explain, power distance is “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally”. The employees of IBM from around the world had to answer questions related to the issues of employees’ preferences and perception of superior’s actual decision-making style (autocratic, paternalistic, etc.) and their fear of expressing disagreement with the manager. On the basis of given answers, power distance index (PDI) was calculated for each country. Countries with low PDI are characterised by the willingness of employees and managers to cooperate, consult subordinates before decision-making and ability to admit the necessity of employees’ support. Subordinates in such cultures negatively approach close supervision, prefer consultative style of managers, and workers are not afraid of disagreeing with the superiors. In contrast, managers in countries with high PDI reflect autocratic and
paternalistic style when making decisions. Their subordinates appreciate this style and close supervision, but they fear to disagree with their employers. Poland exhibits moderate power distance with the score in Power Distance Index of 68. This means that people accept to some extent a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place. Centralization is popular and subordinates expect to be told what to do. Managers often tend to use autocratic style of management and oppose everything that could diminish their power and authority (Collett, 1998). However, it needs to be noted that when compared to other CEE countries the score of Poland appears to be relatively low.

China represents a high power distance culture (with the score of 80), which tolerates inequality, uneven distribution of power, and great emphasis on status. High power distance has certain consequences in organisations. Due to power, chaos and insubordinate behaviour may be avoided. Those who have authority make final decisions, which cannot be questioned by anyone. It often results in a situation when employees wait for orders and instructions and are not willing to take initiative. In comparison to other cultures, it is also difficult to get promoted due to this large hierarchy gap. High power distance also implies greater centralisation, large differences between salaries, and large number of supervisory personnel (Ling, Ang and Lim, 2007). This dimension is often correlated with Trompenaars’ description of ascription culture, which ascribes status to a person on the basis of seniority, instead of achievements, what is certainly a case in China.

**Individualism**

The second dimension described by Hofstede, and later confirmed by Trompenaars, is individualism. It is related to the notion that people perceive themselves as individuals, whereas in communitarianism (also referred to collectivism) people consider themselves as a part of a bigger group and put the collective or corporate interest first, ahead of individualistic priorities. Poland appears to be at the intermediate position on individualism-collectivism scale with the score of 60, though it is much more collectivistic when compared to Western countries (e.g. United States has the highest score of 91, United Kingdom 89, and France 71). Poles often avoid taking individual responsibility. Relationship-focus approach was dominant in Poland in the past as in many cases to achieve success managers needed to build extensive social networks. Nowadays young people begin to adopt moderate deal-focus approach, which emphasises focus on task completion rather than on people. The score of China in Hofstede’s studies in terms of individualism is very low (20). According to Qing (2008), Chinese “(...) tend to define themselves as constituents of more collectives such as family, organizations or in-groups. They are inclined to sacrifice their personal interest for the goals
of these collectives and are most motivated by norms, duties, and obligations imposed by the collectives”. In the process of decision-making, Chinese people, due to their collectivistic features, take into account group harmony, not personal autonomy or interests. Confucius teachings, as well as Communist ideas, stress the importance of family values and well-being of the whole society.

**Uncertainty Avoidance**

Most of the countries from Central and Eastern Europe display high scores in the third dimension described by Hofstede, i.e. uncertainty avoidance. It deals with the way people tolerate and cope with uncertainties about the future. There are societies, which feel comfortable with unstructured, surprising situations, and those, which reject innovations and abnormalities from what is known and try to minimise the possibility of occurrence of such situations by implementing certain laws, rules, and safety measures. It indicates that societies with high uncertainty avoidance have problems with accepting uncertain and ambiguous situations (Greece displays the highest level of uncertainty avoidance – 112, while Singapore the lowest – 8). In Poland it is displayed by the strong reference for experts, by the attitude towards authority, and recognition to a status position, not to the superior as individual. Furthermore, Poles need explicit directives and guidelines to avoid ambiguous situations. They display high level of stress at work and support the notion that a good manager should always have accurate answers to the questions of subordinates. All this characteristics lead to relatively high score of Poland (93) on uncertainty avoidance (Kolman, Noorderhaven, Hofstede and Dienes, 2003). Citizens are more anxious and afraid of their future, they display higher job stress, and they are more likely to reject changes. What is more, they are risk-averse and fear to fail. They prefer to be given clear instructions and do not accept any deviations from rules. Finally, conflict in the company is unwelcome as well as competition between employees. China with the score of 40 prefers managers who take more risks and have fewer written rules (Hofstede, 1980). This dimension is related to the notion that Chinese people were poorly managed in the Communist era. The aspirations of workers were not considered at that time, people were demotivated, avoided responsibility, and relied on someone else to do the job. The consequences of it are visible nowadays. People still consider what is politically correct rather than organisationally efficient. It has also its roots in the fact that China is a high-context culture and workers rarely question authority and are easily led by their superiors.
Masculinity / Femininity
The fourth dimension, masculinity versus femininity, refers to the distribution of roles in the society between sexes. There are societies, which tend to be assertive and competitive, where achievement and power are assigned to men, thus described as masculine, and there are societies more caring, where being less self-centred is assigned to women, thus described as feminine (Browaeys and Price, 2008). The division of roles attributed to different sexes is transferred through the process of socialisation in families, educational institutions, media, etc. Thus, biology plays minor part in the sex role differentiation. The model that dominates assumes assertiveness of men and nurturing type of women. This pattern can be also observed in companies and career possibilities for men and women. In many countries, it is accepted that political and business organisations prefer men as employees, whereas hospitals, for instance, promote women. In work environment, men and women have distinct goals. What counts for men are advancement, earnings, and responsibility, whereas what counts for women is supervision, social aspects of the job, working conditions and working hours. Countries which scored low in MAS are more interested in maintaining good relations with managers and working in friendly atmosphere than highly masculine countries, which are interested in earnings, development, and promotions. Managers in low MAS countries are not so concerned about leadership and independence as their colleagues in high MAS countries (Morden, 1995). Furthermore, feminine cultures have weaker achievement motivation, work is not central in their lives, and they are characterised as having lower job stress. They also disapprove of company’s interference into their private lives. The highest level of masculinity is observed in Japan (95), whereas the lowest in Sweden. Poland and China are both moderately masculine countries with the scores of 64 and 66 respectively. This fact contradicts somehow the idea of collectivism and responsibility avoidance that remained from socialist times. Even though this dimension is quite high in China and in Poland, western cultures achieve even higher scores. It means that Chinese and Poles are modest, still less assertive than Westerners, and value good relationships and harmony more than employees in the West (Buttery and Wong, 1999).

Long-term orientation
Long-term orientation was developed as the last of Hofstede’s dimensions and it was further developed in the studies of Fons Trompenaars. People around the world demonstrate significant differences in attitudes towards past, present, and future. Our views on time have considerable consequences. Especially important is the fact whether our attitude towards time is sequential or synchronic. The former one means that we perceive time as a sequence of
transitory events, while the latter means that past, presence and future are interrelated in such a way that visions concerning future and memories from the past create present times. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2002, pp.146-147) state that the way culture perceives and manages the time is the key to understand what significance members of this culture give to life and human existence. Three types of cultures can be distinguished:

- cultures oriented on the present, which ignore the past and are relatively deprived of time, and tradition; they emphasise what is being done now and what gives pleasure. Plans are rarely implemented as everything is assessed from the current point of view;
- cultures oriented on the past, which are mainly interested in maintenance and restoration of traditions in the present time; history and tradition play an important role. They are the source of motivation to achieve once more what was achieved in the past. Older people and predecessors are highly respected;
- cultures oriented on the future, wishing for better tomorrow and for realisation of their visions and plans. They discuss a lot the perspectives, potentials, and aspirations of people. They enthusiastically plan the future and choose the strategies and use the present times for future profits.

Poland has a relatively short-term orientation, due to the fact that people are interested in short-term profits, emphasise the importance of the past and want to maintain traditions. The history and past successes may be used as a source of motivation for future achievements. Although changing, still no sense of urgency can be met in some companies (another remain of the Communist system). Although young Polish businesspersons are more aware of punctuality and importance of sticking to schedules and deadlines, still meetings may start 15-20 minutes late, may be prolonged and even interrupted. According to Peter Collett’s studies (1998), being late in Poland equals 13 minutes. He also investigated the issue of time management in the company. It occurred that 38 per cent of individuals arrive late in Poland and the relationship that the person has to a manager (whether s/he is his colleague, subordinate, boss, or secretary) does not influence the likelihood of arriving late.

China, on the other hand, represents a long-term oriented culture, which is associated with such characteristics as thrift, perseverance, and overcoming obstacles with time. Chinese businessmen build strong relationships first, and only then start doing business. As Jaw, Ling, Wang and Chang (2007) state “Confucianism encourages people pursuit long-term benefits (perseverance) while suffer short-term loss (thrift)”. Punctuality is very important for Chinese people. In order not to insult a business partner, businessmen should always arrive on time or earlier. Chinese employees are diligent and hard working in order to achieve their objectives.
in a distant future. Long-term orientation positively correlates with Trompenaars’ dimension of time horizon, which clearly demonstrates that China is a future-oriented country, though respecting at the same time past times and traditions.

**Trompenaars’ cultural dimensions**

It is also worth to mention some of Trompenaars’ dimensions. A description of differences between cultures prepared by this Dutch researcher has also received significance in the recent years. Trompenaars questioned more than 15,000 managers in almost 30 countries during a 10-year period. The result of his studies has been the identification of relationship orientations, which explain differences in people’s behaviour, and their views on time and environment (Luthans and Doh, 2008).

**Particularism versus Universalism**

The first orientation described by Trompenaars based on the interpersonal relations, relates to the manner of assessing other people behaviour. It is presented on the scale of particularism versus universalism. In countries where high universalism prevails, the emphasis is on formality, conformity to the contracts, and on following the rules. Person raised in such a culture, does not adopt his/her actions to specific event, but behaves according to general principles. Universalistic cultures tend to perceive all people equal, thus subject to the same rules. Cultures characterised by high particularism, on the other hand, stress the importance of relationships rather than formal practices. Each case is considered in relation to specific situation. Poland achieved the medium score (74) what means that Poles do not always focus on rules, but often note the importance of human relations and changing circumstances. Even though they consider law and legal contracts as necessary parts in business, they also understand the importance of considering some cases as specific situations, which allow for different behaviour. China, on the other hand, is highly particularistic country (score of 47), which means that what they value the most are relations between people, not formal contracts and agreements. Guanxi is one of the most important elements of Chinese culture. As Chee and West (2004) explain, “guanxi, or relationships, consists of connections defined by reciprocity, trust and mutual obligation; in other words, friendship with implications of a continual exchange of favours”. The notion of guanxi is deeply rooted in the teachings of Confucius, and it interrelates with the concept of face and harmony. Foreigners tend to believe that the concept of ‘guanxi’ is losing its importance, however Chinese still trust more in their relationships than in the legal system. That is why, before any business becomes successful, it is necessary to build network of contacts. Finally, it is worth remembering that
networking in China is long-term and built on personal basis (business relationships are personal relationships).

**Neutral versus emotional**

What drives human behaviour are emotions and common sense. Whether former or latter element dominates, suggests whether we are emotional or reserved and self-controlled. There are two types of culture characterised by these features: emotional and neutral. In respect to this factor, Poland is highly neutral country. It suggests that people do not disclose their emotions openly and reserved behaviour is admired. It influences decision-making, as personal feelings are separated from this process. Physical contact and expressive miming are considered in neutral cultures as unwelcome. During business meetings, Poles are usually straightforward and transmit information without unnecessary courtesy. Furthermore, during the first meeting Polish businesspersons may be reserved, while during the next meetings they may demonstrate more open behaviour. When it comes to nonverbal communication, interpersonal distance is usually 25-40 cm. Touching is also rareness in Polish culture, apart from hand shaking. Finally, eye contact is not so intensive as in South European cultures, but still more important than in East and South-East Asia.

In this respect, China was also classified as a neutral country. In order to understand Chinese culture, one has to be aware of the concept of ‘face’ (mianzi), receive face. A person can lose his/her face by showing signs of no self-control, childish behaviour, by rejecting the invitation for meeting or dinner, or refusing a gift. S/he can also cause that others will lose their faces by insulting them, criticising or showing no respect in front of a group of people. Face may be also gained through developing good connections, wealth, and power. Even countries and institutions are believed to have face. Handshaking is a common greeting – strong handshaking, touching and direct eye contact should be avoided, as it may be offensive. Exaggerated hand movements and gestures should be also avoided by foreigners as Chinese never use hands while speaking and may be distracted by it. They never point to something when speaking – if they do, they always use open palm, not an index finger (Gesteland, 2000).

**Specific versus diffuse**

Closely related to the issue of emotionality and manifestation of feelings is the level to which people allow others to the various spheres of their lives, whether on single level of personality, or to various spheres and simultaneously on different levels of personality. On this basis, culture can be divided into specific and diffuse (Kippenberger, 2000).
First of all, differences between specific and diffuse cultures can be easily observed in the workplace. In specific culture, the director of the company is focused on the work-related issues with his employees without any interference into the private sphere of their lives. His authority is respected in the place of work, while having no greater significance in normal life, outside the company. Thus, each area of life is considered separately, without any interconnectedness to other spheres and situations. However, there are countries where all layers of life and levels of personality pervade. Coming back to the example of the workplace, it means that the director of the company is authority wherever and whenever s/he is met. S/he requires respect in every aspect of life. Apart from that, in specific culture employer defines the aims of employee’s work. Whether or not they will be achieved affects his appraisal and the level of salary. Successful achievement of goals is also equivalent to the creation of good relations with the employer. In diffuse cultures, on the other hand, this kind of system does not work. In this case, relations between employee and employer can improve or deteriorate the outcomes. Already set aims may change before the assessment of employee’s work, or employee may not be successful in this specific situation, but s/he can do something more valuable for employer. Payment for the results is not popular in diffuse cultures as it leads to the break of relations between people. Moreover, there is lower fluctuation and mobility of workers due to loyalty and great number of interpersonal relations. In such cultures, head-hunters are rare and companies do not have a tendency to attract employees from other firms with higher salary. Acquisitions are also scarce in such countries as it often leads to the breaking of ties (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2002).

Poland appears in the middle of the specific-diffuse scale. Poles are able to combine features of specific and diffuse cultures and usually follow the rules, but in many cases also value context and person. In the workplace features of specific culture prevail as there is no interference into the private spheres of employees’ lives and there is uneasiness to speak about every subject. China, in contrast, is an example of a highly diffuse country, as all layers of life are interrelated. It is reflected, for instance, in situation when the director at work is also authority outside the workplace. People in such cultures are very indirect and build relations without any specific aim.

**Achievement versus ascription**

An achievement culture is the one in which people are awarded status on the basis of their actions and performance. It means that those who achieved a lot have very high status in the society, e.g. a researcher who discovered a cure for a cancer. Ascription cultures, in contrast, are those in which status is ascribed according to such factors as age, gender, skin colour. The
elements influencing the status in ascription cultures do not often have any logical connection with the effectiveness of work. However, there are also those factors that increase the effectiveness, for example, age, experience, education, and qualifications.

On the basis of Trompenaars’ study (2002) it is stated that both Poland and China are examples of ascription cultures, obtaining score respectively 21 for Poland and 28 for China. It means that in both countries status is still ascribed to people in great extent on the basis of age, education, or gender, not according to achievements. What matters is who a person is, not his/her performance and actions. People in Poland are also quite formal and use titles in order to indicate their status and relation to others. Due to this, it is important to agree on formality of forms of address. During the meetings, it is necessary to have business cards and give them to every person present. All the titles and most important qualifications should be mentioned on business card. In China business cards are given and received with both hands. Nothing should be written on a business card in the presence of a person that gave it. Apart from the company name and the name of a person on the business card, the most important is his/her position in the company to assess what is the rank of the person in the hierarchy. The most important person in a group or company should lead the meetings. It is related to high respect for superiors, duty to family, loyalty to friends, sincerity, and courtesy. When addressing people formal titles and surnames should be used.

Relation to nature
There are two main orientations towards nature developed by societies: inner-directed, which supports the idea that people should control nature, and outer-directed, which states that humans are part of nature and should conform to its rights and laws. People can be divided into those who feel that their efforts are influenced by external forces, such as fate or chance, and those who believe in their own actions and control over every aspect of their lives. Hence, internals are convinced about their ability to control their own actions and surrounding environment and are characterised by dominant relationship with environment, strong emphasis on self and organisation, and uneasiness in the situation of inability to control the environment. Externals, at the same time feel inability to introduce any changes to their environment and harmonious attitude with environment, are in favour of compromises, and concentrate on others rather than on yourself (McKenna, 2000).

Poland appears in the middle of the scale of inner- and outer-directness, due to the fact that Polish people combine the belief that life is influenced by one’s own actions as well as by external forces such as fate. China, on the other hand, is an outer-directed country, as the notion that external forces influence our lives prevails. For businesspeople from outer-
directed cultures adapting to external circumstances may be more beneficial and economically effective than focusing on their own preferences. It is also worth mentioning that outer-directness does not exclude possibility of competition. Furthermore, it can take the form of imitation of competitor’s practices in order to outperform him. Western countries often criticise Asians for stealing their ideas and concepts, but for Asians it is not stealing or copying, but making use of something available in external environment and improving it (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2001).

**Conclusions**

Managers and investors who plan to be involved in business cooperation between companies from two different countries should always bear in mind that such collaboration entails greater difficulties than business conduct on national level. Cooperation of Polish and Chinese companies may even involve more problems in the workplace, due to major differences in culture. Factors such as language, religion, education, and political systems form the basis of existing differences. Thus, expanding operations to other cultures involve adaptation to their value systems and norms. Structure of organisation, relations between employees and their superiors, negotiation process, and business ethics are only few among many elements, which are sensitive to cultural differences.

One type of strategy and work goal that is successful and efficient in all countries around the world does not exist. As it was presented, work values and means to achieve goals are dependent on the cultural values that dominate in the society. Two countries, namely Poland and China, served as the basis for analysis of cultural differences and their influence on business practices. Existing models of behaviour in business created by such scholars as Hofstede, Hall, and Trompenaars were examined in relation to Poland and China. It was demonstrated that while in Asian countries such characteristics as status, hierarchy, and relationships play the most important role, in Poland such features as individualism and uncertainty avoidance prevail.

In order to state whether models of the mentioned scholars are true in the real business conduct, three companies involved in cooperation between China and Poland were asked to answer essential questions about the influence of cultural differences on business-related issues. The results of questionnaires conducted in Polish and Chinese companies appeared to be in accordance with the theories developed by Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hall, although not all dimensions mentioned in the models were raised by the managers of Chinese and
Polish companies. Strong collectivism of Chinese employees and high individualism of Polish workers appeared to be most frequently mentioned discrepancy between the two nations, as well as the fact that China is highly diffuse culture, able to connect private life with corporate life. Theories about high power distance, status ascription as well as relationship focus of Chinese employees occurred to be valid in real business conduct. Polish managers confirmed that Poland, in contrast to China, is characterised by being a low-context country, what has substantial influence on the communication and negotiation processes between these two cultures. Furthermore, China was confirmed to be highly particularistic country, where formal practices are of lesser importance than interpersonal relations. Although Polish and Chinese culture occurred to differ substantially in the attitudes towards business practices, there are issues which have been mutual for Poland and China, due to economic transition from closed to open market, what posed challenges not only in Central and Eastern Europe, but also in Asian societies. Although the process of industrialisation, advancement in communication and transportation technologies, as well as the rise of global enterprises lead all the countries towards greater homogenisation of values, certain characteristics of cultures remain distinct and individuals need to be aware of them and respect these cultural differences, as they may often decide on the successfulness of the company abroad.

Practical examples presented in this thesis show that described models apply in real life situations, however, managers must be aware of the fact that the sample used in this paper is not statistically significant, thus it is important not to over generalise presented results. At the same time, ignoring cultural differences may result in the future in the inability to motivate employees, to build competitive advantage, and correctly interpret potential opportunities. Proper understanding of these differences may lead to greater success of managers and companies in international environment, due to faster learning process and better operations in organisation.
Bibliography


