

A Review of the Business Culture Differences between Canada and China

Peng Sun

Abstract

Problem-solving is one of the essential purposes of many companies. The business culture of enterprises is an important basic rule for enterprises to solve many problems in their development. The business culture of an enterprise reflects the fundamental value of employees. This article is composed of three parts, including the introduction of what business culture is, the development of the business culture of Chinese and Canadian enterprises, and the comparative analysis of the business culture of the two enterprises. Confucianism profoundly influences the business culture of Chinese enterprises. Confucianism plays an essential role in China's business culture. The characteristics of the organizational culture of Canadian enterprise groups have their particularities. It is necessary to understand the development of the business culture of enterprises in the two countries. It is also essential for readers to understand the differences in corporate culture. In addition, the author critically analyzed China and Canada's business culture and summarized their respective shortcomings. At the practical level, this paper can provide more stable business culture construction considerations for enterprises. Nowadays, many successful enterprises offer better customer services with their unique business culture. The author believes that the competitiveness of a genuinely successful enterprise is often reflected in its services. Competitive services will bring more economic returns to enterprises. Therefore, for enterprises, a thriving business culture is crucial.



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1. Introduction

Globalization has brought countless opportunities for enterprises to build international relations (Sun, 2022). As a result, business people are increasingly likely to encounter cultural differences in the workplace. Without a correct understanding of the differences in business culture, business people may hinder the success of enterprises. Business culture refers to a set of behaviour and procedural norms observed within a company, including company policies, procedures, ethics, values, employee behaviours and attitudes, goals and codes of conduct (Schein, 1990). Canada and China are different in nationality, language and politics. As a result of these differences, Canada and China have very different business cultures. Based on the fact that the business culture of Canada and China has different business methods, the author conducts a bilateral study on the business practices and business culture of Canada and China so that business people and other readers can better understand the essential cultures around the world, and can conduct business more efficiently, with more respect and more successfully in any country.

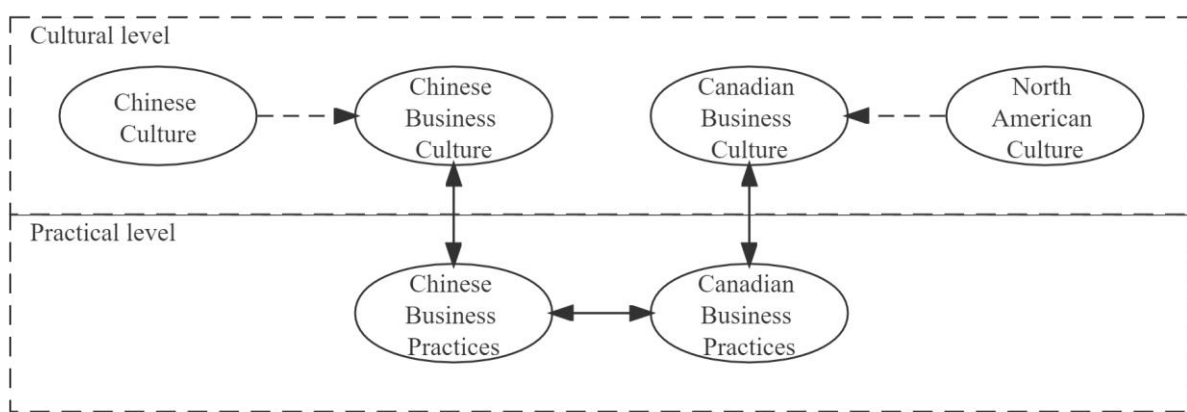


Figure 1-1 Research Framework

(Source: Author)

2. Literature Review of Business Practices

This chapter summarizes and introduces the business culture of contemporary Canada and China from eight aspects: basic principles, first contact, time management, greetings and addressing business gifts, dress code, business card use, and conference management.

2.1 Business Practices in China

From the perspective of the basic principles of business culture, Chinese business culture is primarily influenced by Confucianism. First, the Confucian concept of relationship means that the relationship network is crucial and based on unity, loyalty, modesty and politeness (Wang et al., 2020). Second, China's hierarchy is vertical from both commercial and private perspectives and should be treated cautiously (Tang, 2020). Third, Chinese people are very concerned about face to protect their reputation, influence and dignity (Wu, 2021). However, it must also be emphasized that these traditional values have been gradually diluted in some way since China's reform and opening up, while modern Western personal values and business methods are increasingly valued (Li, 2020). Therefore, the global convergence of business culture norms and international business values is increasingly evident in China. Chinese people are usually risk averse, and the decision-making process has strict procedures. Chinese management decisions are generally made after repeated thinking, and the influence of subordinates' opinions is usually low. Decision-makers will consider problems, alternatives and solutions from a long-term social perspective (Liu, 2019). Therefore, this is usually a

relatively slow process. Chinese partners are often uncomfortable with quick decisions. In business practice, hierarchical differences must be respected. Any attempt to avoid hierarchical differences will almost always hinder business decisions. Chinese people usually seek long-term relationships. Business culture practice focuses on establishing relationships, not contract negotiations. In China, ignoring the construction and maintenance of personal relationships may lead to failure to achieve business goals (Hu, 2010). Establishing a personal relationship varies from a few days to several months or even longer. It includes formal meetings, home visits, invitations to sports activities, long dinners, etc. As for initial contact, Chinese business culture also has its characteristics. In China, distrust and suspicion are often the characteristics of communication with strangers (Zhang, 2013). The most effective way to develop mutual relations is to join an intermediary in this process (Chen, 2015). The business intermediary must be a business partner trusted by potential partners. Intermediaries often play a positive role in constructing the relationship between the two partners, obtaining helpful information about potential partners, and avoiding mistakes in local customs. Regarding time management, Chinese people regard punctuality as trustworthy behaviour, so they should be punctual when attending meetings (Zhu, 2011). If they are or are expected to be late, the party concerned shall contact the other party in time to inform them of the delay and must apologize for being late. However, unlike German culture, Chinese culture does not require business negotiations to be conducted mechanically. For example, meetings started on time but did not end strictly on time. Regarding greetings and addressing, China's Business Culture also has its characteristics. In cross-cultural communication, it is essential for Chinese people to feel cultural similarities (Liu, 2020). For example, using Chinese proverbs will leave a deep impression when meeting for the first time. Compared with the West, the strength of the Chinese handshake is light, but it lasts longer. The strength of cooperation intention is expressed through the time of handshake rather than strength. When conducting close business greetings, the eyes should look down to show humility, and the body should also avoid being close to the other party. Nodding and smiling are also very common greetings. In terms of addressing, the general practice is to use the combination of family name and position to address the other party, which is a relatively safe way of addressing. If the position information is unclear, use "Mr." or "Ms." instead. Regarding business gifts, giving and receiving gifts symbolize the beginning of a relationship (Qu et al., 2020). Gifts should not be too expensive in general but should be well packaged. The gift recipient usually refuses it two or three times before accepting it and rarely opens or checks it in person. In addition, gifts must be given and/or received with both hands. In terms of business dress, it is required to emphasize formal and prudent style clothes (such as suits). However, the dress should be able to diffract a kind of information with successful elements rather than some ostentation (Lin et al., 2020). This information is usually reflected in clothes, watches, shoes, etc. When meeting new business objects for the first time, they should exchange business cards and follow strict business etiquette (Li, 2016). Although the application of instant communication software such as WeChat has gone deep into China's business practice, physical business cards are still the necessary information carrier in business transactions. Therefore, business cards are exchanged when meeting new people, and strict etiquette is followed. Business cards should generally contain Chinese and English information. Show the business card with both hands and ensure that the side printed in Chinese faces the recipient. For example, take the business card of a Chinese colleague with both hands (never with your left hand), read it carefully, and then put it away carefully. In addition, the receiver should not write on the other party's business card in person. In terms of meeting management, traditional Chinese business meetings usually take a long time and require repeated consultations to establish a sustainable relationship. Chinese business culture generally does not regard meetings as a means to resolve conflicts (Zhang, 2009). Instead, essential issues are generally reached by a consensus

in a small circle composed of key figures and then widely open and discussed. Therefore, there is a practical way of "small meetings decide big things, and general meetings do small things." In cross-cultural meetings, if you encounter embarrassing situations, you usually break the deadlock by chatting. Most of the time, Chinese people are used to expressing their opinions tactfully (Beurel, 2017). Even if the Chinese have different opinions, they will not tell each other frankly. The common euphemisms in business communication are "OK, but will it be..." and "OK, will it be more...". In the context of Chinese culture, to deliver bad news while maintaining good relations, an intermediary is usually chosen to deliver information on behalf of others to mitigate the negative impact. The Chinese culture emphasizes the prudence of expression, which leads to the saying, "think twice before you act." Silence sometimes does not mean opposition but is an integral part of careful thinking and should not be disturbed. In addition, in the business environment, interrupting the other party's speech is very reckless, usually only in the communication between the superior and the subordinate. Chinese (commercial) culture does not emphasize the representation of body language (Shi, 2014). Appearance and seating also reflect the differences in status and power among individuals. Bargaining is an integral part of Chinese culture, and directly accepting the other party's proposal may be considered a weakness. In the negotiation process, psychological pressure tactics should be avoided because they will be regarded as manipulators under Chinese culture and will be disliked by the other party. Under the Chinese business culture, people with higher power speak more frequently. The lower level should actively provide information to the higher level, and then the higher level should speak. Most importantly, achieving business goals is more determined by the degree of the harmonious relationship between the two sides. In business communication, the organizer usually provides some refreshments and business meals. In China's business culture, business meals are an essential part of business relations, and individuals can eat in order of importance (Yi, 2019). In business banquets, the guests will not eat all the food, which will be considered insufficient entertainment by the host under Chinese culture. China's business culture does not pay attention to the A-A system. Generally, the inviter will pay for this, and the invitee does not need to pay but should show some willingness to pay to show positive etiquette and cooperation. In addition, the timing and occasion of meal fee payment are very particular, and payment in front of guests should be avoided.

2.2 Canadian Business Practices

From the perspective of the basic principles of Business Culture, Canada's Business Culture combines some characteristics of the United States, Britain and France (Buhr et al., 2001). Canada is the second largest country in the world (after Russia). In other words, the specific characteristics vary from region to region. Most Canadians agree with their provincial attributes very much. However, respect for opinion, equality, diversity and justice are typical values in Canada's business environment. Canadian enterprises have traditionally been hierarchical but tend to a flat hierarchical view (Guadalupe et al., 2010). Therefore, before business communication and negotiation, it is necessary to study the company structure. The enterprise's managers (functional and business units) are responsible for making the final decision. However, they rarely make decisions without consulting their subordinates. In Canada, it is usually not necessary to develop personal relationships to strengthen business relationships (Lasprogata et al., 2004). Generally, personal life behaviour is separated from professional behaviour. As for initial contact, Canadian Business Culture also has its characteristics. If the meeting is the first time, it is better to make an appointment in advance and have a person who is familiar with the meeting (Al-Alawi et al., 2016). The best time to schedule a meeting is from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Tuesday to Thursday, especially in the morning. An appointment request can be made by phone or email, and an Outlook reminder can be sent. In addition, it is necessary to fully explain the reasons for the meeting when making an

appointment. Regarding time management, punctuality is essential in Canada (Johns et al., 1998). It is recommended to arrive 5 to 10 minutes before the meeting. You should expect the meeting to start and last in line with the schedule. In terms of greetings and addressing, the greeting starts with a handshake, followed by personal and company introductions. When you meet a French Canadian opposite-sex colleague, no matter how familiar you are with the other person, you will get a kiss on both cheeks (Stickney, 2022). When addressing the other party, usually add "Mr." or "Mrs." or "Ms." after the family name, and add their title ("Doctor," etc.). Thank you at the end of the meeting. Regarding business gifts, giving and receiving gifts are not common in Canada (Aung et al., 2017). However, small business gifts can be given when an agreement is reached, or the office visit is over. Mainly traditional gifts from the country of origin; Good chocolates, flowers or wine are also acceptable gifts (open them face to face when you receive them, and then give thanks again). In terms of business dress, formal dress is required, and a monochrome suit or dress is preferred (Creelman, 2018). However, clothing can be more casual in some industries, such as technology. For business cards, it is better to use double-sided bilingual business cards. Since the official languages of Canada are English and French, one side of the business card is in English, and the other is in French (Dissanayake, 2021). At the beginning of the meeting, hand it over to the other party when shaking hands. Other business cards should be carefully read and stored adequately after receiving them. Regarding meeting management, business meetings in Canada are often more formal than those in the United States. However, having a friendly chat at the beginning of a meeting is common. The speech should be brief and precise, and it is important to use facts and figures in business meetings (Mitchell, 1999). Be sure to prepare information and not exaggerate the company's capabilities. If a proposal is considered genuine interest, the results will respond quickly. Generally, only a "handshake agreement" or written agreement can be used for agreements (Hooker, 2003). Of course, formal contracts are preferred. Business communication is implicit to some extent. Differences are allowed in the culture of additive business communication, but they should be expressed respectfully and tactfully (Hooker, 2012). For example, french-speaking people are usually more likely to interrupt people's conversations than English-speaking people. In Canada's Business Culture, it is recommended that individuals keep a necessary distance from peers. When the other party's response is not clear, be careful to use humorous comments. Eye contact between individuals is a vital sign of respect and sincerity. In business communication, it is recommended to smile, be confident and go straight to the theme of the meeting. Conversations during business lunch or dinner are relatively casual, and can continue to communicate on business issues. The table manners are continental (for example, holding the fork with the left hand) (Martin et al., 2008). People must wait to be taken to their seats until the host starts eating. The etiquette in Quebec is more formal than in other parts of Canada.

3. Literature Review of Business Culture

Understanding international cultural differences in business is the key to success in cross-cultural communication (Sun, 2022). Business professionals who are familiar with and have mastered the business culture can show respect to their peers and help each other establish a lasting and trusted relationship.

3.1 Features of Chinese Business Culture

As mentioned earlier, the existence of Confucianism in China is essential. As the core of traditional culture, Confucianism has profoundly impacted the entire Chinese civilization (Wu, 2015). It determined the development of Chinese literature and art; At the same time, Confucianism's influence has also significantly impacted Chinese enterprises. The author summarizes the characteristics of China's business culture under Confucianism as follows:

- a. Harmony is the most important
- b. Inclusive
- c. Emphasize humanism
- d. Learn traditional culture
- e. Emancipate the mind
- f. Make progress together

Chinese business culture has many characteristics. The western business culture influences some characteristics. However, "harmony is the most precious" is a traditional Chinese thought (Long, 2021). "Harmony is precious" means that mutual assistance and friendly coexistence among countries, nations and people should be our ultimate pursuit. Influenced by Chinese traditional culture, overseas Chinese business people regard harmony as the root of interpersonal relationships. At the same time, friendly relations among employees will improve business efficiency. Therefore, as a kind of Chinese traditional culture, Confucianism has profoundly impacted enterprise management.

3.2 Problems of Chinese Business Culture

Traditional Confucius influences the current business culture of China thought, western influence and the successful application of Japanese practice. Japanese practices include Daming (a Westerner initially rejected by the West but is now highly valued) and Japanese traditional values. With the vigorous development of China's commerce, there are also some problems in business culture. Jin (2010) lists some of these problems, including:

- a. Formalization
Quite a few Chinese enterprises pay too much attention to enterprise formalization and neglect the connotation of enterprise culture. On the contrary, the core of enterprise culture is how to make the enterprise value.
- b. Business Culture is equal to the enterprise spirit
Some entrepreneurs believe that business culture is equivalent to the spirit of enterprise. These views separate business culture from enterprise management. Business culture does not exist independently in enterprise operations.
- c. Ignore innovation and personalization
Many private enterprises copy some old companies' ideas and (or) practices in a tort manner. Without the spirit of innovation, an enterprise is challenging to develop.
- d. Misuse of traditional culture
Confucianism is the essence of Chinese traditional culture. Entrepreneurs should seek traditional Chinese philosophy, including Confucianism, rather than directly grafting their views on the modern business management system based on the western scientific paradigm. A possible and appropriate approach is integrating these traditional Chinese philosophies to adapt to the new changes in current enterprise management.

3.3 Features of Canadian Business Culture

As mentioned earlier, Canada's business culture is comprehensively influenced by the cultural factors of the United States, Britain and France. The author summarizes the characteristics of Canadian Business Culture as follows: First, humanism is the primary feature of Canadian business culture (Dissanayake, 2021). Canadian business practitioners can accept diversity from all over the world and focus on diverse ideas. Canadian enterprises accept the new ideas of their employees on business affairs. The company will also take some incentive measures to encourage employees' personalized expression. Implement incentive measures (systems) such as job rotation for talents or critical personnel to enrich job responsibilities, Overseas training and signing service agreement. Secondly, individualism is the core of business culture (Johns et al., 1998). Although Canadian culture originates from Britain, it is geographically closer to

the United States and is more influenced by American culture. Canadian enterprises emphasize individualism, which is everyone's goal spirit and has the spirit of personal struggle, adventure and continuous innovation. Individualism is an essential feature of Canada's Business Culture. Enterprises in North America (except Mexico) have one thing in common. They are full of freedom. Employees can have their own opinions and rights. However, the core spirit of freedom is individualism, and the significance of individualism lies in that people should respect individual abilities. In the context of Canadian business management, individualism has become the leading spirit, but this does not affect the smoothness of business communication, although business and life are relatively independent in the eyes of individuals. Third, business attitude is also an important quality, which echoes the business ethics mentioned above. Compared with enterprises, individuals have weak control over information and resources, so North American business law practice tends to prioritize customer interpretation (Conklin et al., 2019). This kind of commercial law practice undoubtedly transmits pressure to the commercial subject. Generally speaking, Canadian enterprises will provide the best service for every customer. Therefore, the business philosophy is customer-centred, and the enterprise philosophy is to meet customer requirements and improve customer satisfaction. The fundamental motivation of this management attitude is to maintain the maximization of corporate profits by reducing legal costs. Fourth, Canadian companies adhere to the spirit of innovation (Guadalupe et al., 2010). Today, although enterprises worldwide advocate innovation, the spirit of enterprise innovation was first put forward in North America because this view of business culture is the product of individualism. However, with the development of business globalization, many countries and enterprises have accepted this spirit. Fifth, Canadian Business Culture focuses on practicality (Johns et al., 1998). They believe that more practical exploration is more scientific and will bring more profits to the company. From these characteristics, the spirit of business cooperation, the importance of employee characteristics, and management effectiveness are Canada's business culture's core features (Mitchell, 1999).

3.4 Problems of Canadian business culture

Compared with Chinese Business culture under the influence of traditional Chinese Culture, Canadian Business Culture also has some problems, as follows.

- a. Individualism will bring self-centred opinions to each employee.
- b. Under the strict commercial law system, the profitability of capital will reduce the level of corporate social responsibility.
- c. The spirit of innovation may turn into the spirit of adventure.

Every Canadian enterprise has its own business culture at different times, and there are complex problems. Even in the same enterprise, different functional departments may have various problems. As a result, the problems in business practice are dynamic and diversified and will not disappear due to cultural differences.

3.5 Differences and Similarities of Business Culture between Canada and China

In comparison, Canada's business culture has some similarities and differences with China's business culture. "Emphasizing humanism" is the central concept of the business culture of the two countries, but there are also differences. Chinese business culture emphasizes formalization; Canada's Business Culture pays more attention to customers and employees. In addition, business culture has different purposes. In China, establishing a good Business culture is a tool to attract customers. A good business culture will get more and more sales. The purpose of Business Culture in Canada is to improve efficiency. The utility of Canada's business culture is not utilitarian. The "innovation spirit" of the two countries is also different. Canadian innovation is more practical. Canada focuses on creating new things, while China focuses on transforming some things on the original basis. The innovation spirit advocated by the two

countries is not the same. Chinese companies focus on the "appearance" of products, such as colour, design and pattern; On the contrary, Canadian companies create new technologies for new products and pay more attention to the "cost" of products. These new products can (or even advocate) be similar to the previous ones, but they are different. Finally, Canada's Business Culture emphasizes the legal system. This concept emphasizes logical positivism in Canadian enterprises and respects rules and order. Enterprises focus on making detailed rules. The relationship between employers and employees is a rule, not a personal friendship. Although China has a collectivist culture, China's Business Culture pays more attention to the rule of man, and the personal influence of enterprise leaders is more extensive than the institutional binding force. Attribution is still the influence of Chinese traditional culture. Due to some historical and cultural factors, the rule of man is a characteristic of Chinese culture. At the same time, the author also notes that China's business culture has and will continue to weaken and change this cultural outlook. Therefore, due to the different social cultures of the two countries, there are substantial differences in business culture. Therefore, Chinese enterprises should learn from Canada's successful experience in developing business culture; Canadian enterprises should also conduct research and practical exploration of Chinese traditional culture.

Conclusion

The most significant difference between Canadian and Chinese business systems is culture. Canadian business is based on numbers and objectivity. In Canada, the business environment is based on the logic of profitable transactions. Trust is built through a robust set of legal, judicial and accounting institutions composed of objective professionals loyal to customers. In contrast, there is no highly standardized and objective dispute settlement method in China's commercial system; Trust in the business system is usually established through personal relationships and the concept of reciprocity. Although China's business system can be traced back thousands of years, while Canada's business system has a history of only two centuries, China's integration into the global economy means that enterprises need to constantly change their ideas and behaviours to better integrate into a more extensive system. The author believes cultural differences should no longer be an obstacle to cooperation between Canada and China. Affected by the Wanzhou Meng incident in 2018 and COVID-19 in 2020, China-Canada trade exchanges fell to the lowest in history. At the same time, it should also be noted that since China entered into the WTO, China's business environment and practices have undergone tremendous changes, such as a stable business environment, business practices that converge with the international community, and gradually professional and objective business services. China's increasingly important role in the global economic and development forum proves this evolution. The author believes that with the deepening of the reform and opening up process, China's business culture and environment will continue to develop from a high to a broad perspective.

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