

**The Relationship of the Cultural Dimensions of Power distance,
Individualism-collectivism, and Face concerns, and of Immigrant
Status on the Conflict Communication Styles of Chinese Managers
of ENZ subordinates in the New Zealand Workplace**

Yi Mei Wang

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This thesis is supervised by

Dr. Linda Beamer

Dr. Donna Henson

Abstract

This qualitative study examines the relationship of power distance perceptions and conflict communication styles of Chinese managers of ENZ subordinates in a New Zealand workplace, an overlooked research field. One of Hofstede's cultural variables power distance has not been used in the studies of intercultural conflict communication. This research uses PD along with culture variables of I-C and face to study the choices of the Chinese managers of ENZ subordinates conflict communication behaviours in the New Zealand workplace.

The study uses qualitative interviewing as the primary data collection method. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with nine Chinese managers of European NZ subordinates in Auckland, New Zealand during December 2008 and January 2009. The initial contacts were obtained through the researcher's networks in the community, by asking acquaintances for possible contacts that led to research participants. Snowball sampling was used to find additional possible participants.

The findings disclose that the nine Chinese managers of ENZ subordinates have adapted their conflict communication styles to be more direct and dominating, as the effect of their ENZ subordinates' culture. This is a significant finding that differs from what have been predicted Chinese conflict communication styles in the published studies. The study shows that PD is useful to explain the conflict communication behaviours of the Chinese managers in this study.

The study is the first step of a series research studies about New Zealand conflict communication in workplace. The next step is to study the ENZ employees' perceptions of PD, their identity as New Zealanders of the European generations, and of conflict communication with Chinese managers as their subordinates.



Declaration

Name of candidate: Yi Mei Wang

This Thesis entitled “*The relationship of power distance perceptions and conflict communication styles of Chinese managers of ENZ subordinates in a New Zealand workplace*” is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of International Communication.

CANDIDATE’S DECLARATION

I confirm that:

- This Thesis represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 903

Candidate Signature:Date: 17 June 2009

Student number: 1107561

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Abbreviations

ENZ	European New Zealander
I-C	Individualism-Collectivism
PD	Power Distance

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

New Zealand is a country with 4 million residents from 145 countries around the world ("Our People," 2008). Among the diverse ethnicities, Chinese make up the fifth largest population of New Zealand. According to the New Zealand 2006 census (Statistics New Zealand, 2006), from 2001 to 2006, the population of Chinese in New Zealand has increased 40.5 percent, which is from 105,057 to 147,570 people. As a new Chinese immigrant in New Zealand, I have worked in a Chinese-owned company with European New Zealander (ENZ) employees, as well as in a local ENZ-owned business as the only Chinese employee at the time. These work experiences gave me opportunities to work with ENZ colleagues, and enabled me to experience different cross-cultural communication issues in the workplace. One of the issues that specially interested me is the different conflict communication approaches of the managers and subordinates who are from different cultural backgrounds.

This study focuses on analysing the workplace conflict communication between individuals from the perspective of the managers. In this case, the managers are from China, and they manage European New Zealander (ENZ) subordinates. The managers are part of a minority culture in New Zealand, and the ENZ subordinates are members of the dominant majority culture. I have been interested in how culture affects communication in conflict situations. Different cultural values and beliefs give the two parties different conflict behaviours. As a Chinese immigrant myself, I chose to focus on Chinese immigrants in New Zealand workplaces. I am interested in finding out how the culture of the Chinese affect their communications in New Zealand workplace related conflicts, and whether they choose to continue their

Chinese communication style as managers, or to adapt their communication style to deal with the new culture, as the effect of their immigrant identity.

Conflict

Conflict is defined as “the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals” (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001, p. 5). Conflict is a culturally grounded concept (Applbaum, 2006; Kim, Lee, Kim, & Hunter, 2004; Ting-Toomey, 1988), and managing conflict is regarded as one of the important factors affecting interactions between multicultural groups and individuals in organisations. Intercultural conflict occurs when the ebbs and flows of a developing conflict situation between members of two or more cultural groups are being shaped by visible or invisible cultural group membership factors (Ting-Toomey, 2007b, p. 7). In other words, the cultural values and norms of individuals will affect their conflict handling and managing behaviours (Ting-Toomey, 1988).

The most widely used conflict styles include those introduced in Blake and Mouton’s (1964) dual concern model, which suggests that the two dimensions of concern for production and concern for people result in five conflict handling styles: withdrawing, smoothing, forcing, problem solving, and compromising. Rahim and Bonoma’s (1979) self- and other-concerns model also includes five conflict handling styles: integrating, obliging, compromising, avoiding, and dominating. Leung and Kim (2008) proposed ten conflict styles: avoiding, smoothing, obliging, integrating, compromising, dominating, threatening, relational coercing, deceiving, and ingratiating.

Conflict Communication Styles

Instead of studying the broader conflict management behaviours, communication researchers focus on the communication styles used by people when dealing with

conflict situations. Among a number of definitions of conflict, the one given by Ting-Toomey (1988) best describes the concept of conflict communication that is useful for this research project: conflict communication is “a communication process that involves different styles of interchanges between two interdependent negotiators who perceive incompatible needs or goals and perceive each other’s potential interference in achieving those goals” (p. 213). Based on Rahim and Bonoma’s (1979) model, Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) created an eight-style conflict communication grid. The styles are dominating, neglecting, integrating, expressing emotion, being helped by a third-party, compromising, avoiding, and obliging.

Cultural Dimension: Power distance

Power is one of the sources of intercultural conflict (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). It is defined as “the degree of perceived or actual influence person A has over person B” (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001, p. 188). Unequal power relationships in organisations are inevitable and functional, and are often formalised in boss-subordinates relationships (Hofstede, 1984, 2001).

Each culture has its own level of tolerance to inequality of power. Hofstede (1984, 2001) introduced the cultural variable *power distance* (PD), to describe attitudes towards the distribution of power. “Power distance is a measure of the interpersonal power or influence between Boss B and Subordinates S as perceived by the least powerful of the two, S” (Hofstede, 1984, pp. 70-71). It is “the degree to which members of an organization or society expect and agree that power should be shared unequally” (Carl, Gupta, & Javidan, 2004, p. 517).

According to Hofstede (1984, 2001), New Zealand culture has a low PD, which means that the perception is that individuals often have a legitimate claim to power over others in varying contexts. New Zealand culture views people as more or less equal, tends to diminish status differences, and distributes power more evenly than

high PD cultures. On the other hand, Chinese culture is known as a high PD culture that emphasises status differences among members, and more acceptance of uneven power distributions (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2002).

PD and Conflict Communication

This research is designed to examine the relationship between PD perceptions and intercultural conflict communication styles of the nine Chinese managers as well as the effects of the two other cultural dimensions, individualism-collectivism and face concerns. The study also explores the Chinese managers' PD perceptions about the conflict communication behaviours of their ENZ subordinates. Power distance is hypothesised to be related to immigrant/host status, and a related focus of the study is the effect on the managers' conflict communication behaviour as members of a minority culture managing employees who are members of the majority cultural group of the society.

Other Cultural Dimensions: Individualism-collectivism and Face

Individualism-collectivism (I-C) is a popular cultural dimension that has been widely used by scholars in intercultural studies (Merkin, 2006; Oetzel et al., 2001; Smith, Dugan, Peterson, & Leung, 1998; Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2002). Individualistic culture members tend to be more concerned with the group's needs, goals, and interests than with individualistic culture members, who emphasise the importance of the unique self (Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, & Lin, 1991). "Individualism-collectivism has been used to account for communication style differences between sets of individualistic and collectivistic cultures" (Trubisky et al., 1991, pp. 67-68).

Face is an individual's claimed sense of positive image in a context of social interaction (Ting-Toomey, 1988), which "is associated with identity respect, disrespect, dignity, honor, shame, guilt, status, and competence issues"

(Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2002, p. 145). The literature suggests that individualists have high self-face concerns, while collectivists have high other-face concerns, which predict the culture members' conflict communication styles.

Rationale and Importance

The emergence of multinational corporations in today's globalised business world calls for the need to understand how cultural diversity influences social interaction in the intercultural groups of these organisations (Chen & Cheung, 2005; Dinsbach, Feij, & DeVries, 2007; Euwema & Van Emmerik, 2007; Smith et al., 1998). Chen and Cheung (2005) suggest that conflict between "a manager and an employee represents a situation in which the disputants occupy different positions with disparity in power and status, which itself may contribute to conflicts between managers and employees in an organization" (p. 4). Therefore, it is interesting to see what culture in terms of PD, I-C, and face concerns brings to the conflict communication styles within an organisation.

New Zealand has been overlooked in the studies of intercultural conflict management. Therefore, this research adds value to this under-explored area by studying the influence power distance has on the choice people in a multicultural workplace in New Zealand make for conflict-resolution communication strategies. The study draws special attention to the New Zealand workplace context, and more specifically, to Chinese-managed businesses in New Zealand.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The main research question of this study is *What is the relationship of the cultural dimensions of power distance, individualism-collectivism, and face concerns, and of immigrant status on the conflict communication styles of Chinese managers of ENZ subordinates in the New Zealand workplace.* The study aims to find out about the conflict communication behaviours of the collectivist (Chinese) managers in

managing individualist (ENZ) subordinates. As the literature suggests, Chinese culture emphasises respect for authority and status, high power distance, and concerns for others' face. ENZ subordinates, advocate human equality, low power distance, and emphasise self-face concerns. This research project focuses on what conflict communication behaviour results, in the Chinese managers' perception, when these two different groups—Chinese immigrant managers and ENZ subordinates of the majority culture encounter a conflict situation.

This leads to Sub-question 1 a): *Does the Chinese manager use Chinese conflict communication styles with the ENZ subordinates?* Published studies suggest, cultural variables can be used to predict communication behaviours, and specifically predict Chinese managers' preferred communication styles are integrating, smoothing, obliging, and avoiding (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001, 2002). In proposing Sub-question 1a, the research asks if the Chinese managers' preferred conflict communication styles are found in the Chinese managers' conflict communication with the ENZ subordinates. The answer to Sub-question 1a results from the confirmation or disconfirmation of *Hypothesis 1: Chinese conflict communication styles are preferred by Chinese managers, even with ENZ employees.* On the other hand, the research is open to another possibility that the Chinese manager may choose to modify his or her conflict communication style when dealing with conflict with ENZ subordinates. That in turn leads to Sub-question 1 b): *Does the Chinese manager modify Chinese conflict communication styles?* Under this question, *Hypothesis 2* is generated: *Chinese managers do not adopt ENZ conflict communication styles.*

Following the logic of sub-question 1 b), Sub-question 2 emerges: *If the Chinese managers' conflict communication styles are modified, what are the reasons they give for modifying their conflict communication styles with the ENZ subordinates?*

If the conflict communication style the managers report is different from what the literature predicts for Chinese managers, the factors that contribute to the modification need to be investigated.

Immigrants to a host nation have less power than the dominant cultural groups (Orbe & Spellers, 2005; Ramírez-Sánchez, 2008). As immigrants, the Chinese managers in New Zealand have less power than the dominant (ENZ) culture members. This aspect of the conflict situation leads to the formulation of Sub-question 3: *Does their immigrant status, affect the Chinese managers' conflict communication styles?* In asking this question, the research is interested in finding out how the Chinese managers see themselves in their immigrant status, and how it relates to their conflict communication styles. Two hypotheses address the issues in this sub-question. *Hypothesis 3 is The Chinese managers perceive they have less power because of immigrant status.* If proven, the hypothesis could form the basis for answers to Sub-question 1b, which asks what factors result in modified communication behaviours. The literature predicts that immigrant status leads to a perception of marginalisation and diminished power in relation to the dominant host culture. If the hypothesis is disproven, then the literature predictions are open to challenge. *Hypothesis 4 is a corollary: In the Chinese managers' perceptions, ENZ subordinates think they have more power because of majority status in New Zealand society.*

Finally, this study wanted to enquire into the way the Chinese managers saw the conflict communication behaviours of their ENZ subordinates. A number of possible views were considered: the Chinese managers might find the ENZ conflict communication was what they were used to from Chinese subordinates, or they might find it differed in being more passive or in being more assertive. The interviews gave the Chinese managers three scenarios to respond to, as well as the

invitation to describe a conflict situation they had encountered at work, in order to capture how they reported on the ENZ subordinates' conflict communication.

Sub-question 4 addresses this aspect of the study: *In the perceptions of the Chinese managers, do their ENZ subordinates use ENZ conflict communication styles?* This question forms the basis for the investigation into attitudes of the Chinese managers toward their subordinates' conflict communication styles.

A thorough literature review is conducted which forms the grounds to creating the above research questions, and provides useful sources for the analyses of this research. In taking a qualitative approach, the study uses in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method to collect rich data from nine Chinese managers of ENZ subordinates in Auckland, New Zealand. Both quantifying and non-quantifying analyses are employed in the data analyses. In this study, Chinese culture is treated as predictable and stable. The cultural dimensions of PD, individualism-collectivism, and face concerns, as discussed in the literature, are seen as independent variables. They are compared with the Chinese managers' actual PD, I-C, and face concern, as well as their reported conflict communication styles reported. The perceptions of the Chinese managers about the cultural dimensions, especially PD value, and conflict communication styles of their ENZ subordinates, are compared with NZ culture according to the literature. Reasons are given to explain the Chinese managers' deviations from the Chinese norms as described by published studies. The analysis then focuses on the Chinese managers' perceptions of the boss-subordinate relationship, when the boss is an immigrant and the subordinates are members of the dominant host culture. Finally, the relationships between these variables are examined.

Thesis Overview

This chapter provides background of the study, introduces and explains the research questions and hypotheses. Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature that is

related to this research project on the relationship of PD and conflict communication styles. Chapter 3 explains the research paradigm, the data collection method, information about the participants, and the analysis methods and processes. Researching findings are presented in Chapter 4. Following that, Chapter 5 provides detailed analyses of the findings presented in the previous chapter. Finally, Chapter 6 gives a summary of the whole research study, recalls the main findings and interprets the meanings of them. The significance of the research study and its limitation and future directions are also included in Chapter 6.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

New Zealand has been overlooked in the studies of intercultural conflict management. This research studies the influence power distance has on the choice people in a multicultural workplace in New Zealand make for conflict-resolution communication strategies.

Key Concepts

Power

Power is one of the sources of intercultural conflict (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). It is defined as “the degree of perceived or actual influence person A has over person B” (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001, p. 188). Asymmetrical power relationships in organisations are inevitable and functional, and are often formalised in boss-subordinates relationships (Hofstede, 1984, 2001). Coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent power are the five sources and bases of power originally identified by French and Raven(1959) five decades ago, and they are still widely used by many researchers in both the management and communication fields (Carl et al., 2004; Conrad, 1983; Rahim, Antonioni, & Psenicka, 2001; Rahim & Buntzman, 1989).

The five power sources are all based on subordinates’ perceptions that the type of power their managers have, are important elements of perceived power relationships (Conrad, 1983). *Coercive power* refers to a subordinate’s belief that the manager has the ability to punish him or her if the subordinate fails to conform to the manager’s order; *reward power* is based on the perception of a subordinate that the manager can reward him or her for desired behaviour; *legitimate power* is a subordinate’s belief the manager has the power to prescribe and control his or her behaviour; *expert power* is based on the perception of a subordinate that the manager has the ability to influence on the basis of technical expertise, special skills, or

special knowledge in a given area; *referent power* refers to a subordinate's feeling of interpersonal attraction to the manager, and a desire to identify with the manager because of admiration (Carl et al., 2004; Rahim & Buntzman, 1989).

Managers are the more powerful party who have ability to influence their subordinates' behaviour, as subordinates are the less powerful party (Hofstede, 2001). Power relationships involve the degree to which each individual in a relationship is perceived by the others as having access to various sources of influence over their own behaviour (Conrad, 1983). Since a particular cultural member has his or her own understanding of power relationships between managers and subordinates (Conrad, 1983), the perception of a manager, as an individual of a particular culture, towards power relationships influences his or her choice of conflict strategies. On the other hand, minority cultural groups have little power, as they are marginalised from the dominant cultural group of a host nation (Orbe & Spellers, 2005; Ramírez-Sánchez, 2008). Chinese managers, as immigrants to New Zealand, are minority culture group members of the New Zealand society, and therefore are believed to have less power than the ENZ dominant culture members.

Conflict

Conflict is also defined as “the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals” (Folger et al., 2001, p. 5). Conflict is a culturally grounded concept (Appelbaum, 2006; Kim et al., 2004; Ting-Toomey, 1988), and managing conflict is regarded as one of the important factors affecting interactions between multicultural groups and individuals in organisations. Intercultural conflict occurs when the ebbs and flows of a developing conflict situation between members of two or more cultural groups are being shaped by visible or invisible cultural group membership factors (Ting-Toomey, 2007b, p. 7). In other words, the cultural values and norms of

individuals will affect their conflict handling and managing behaviours (Ting-Toomey, 1988).

The study of cross-cultural communication and the study of conflict management have dramatically increased in the last two decades (Cai & Fink, 2002). Communication, face and the individualism-collectivism cultural pattern impact on how people deal with conflict occurring between people of different cultures (Applbaum, 2006, p. 8). Based on the literature reviewed, many studies have been done on examining the relationship of conflict management styles and face (Applbaum, 2006; Chen & Cheung, 2005; Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey, 1988, 2007a) and individualist-collectivist cultures (Gudykunst, 1994; Kaushal & Kwantes, 2006; Smith et al., 1998; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

Conflict Communication Styles

Research into conflict management styles the dual concern model originally created by Blake and Mouton (1964). They claim that five conflict management styles exist based on the attitudes of the manager towards people and productivity: withdrawing (low concern for both people and productivity), smoothing (high concern for people and low concern for productivity), forcing (low concern for people and high concern for productivity), problem solving (high concern for both people and productivity), and compromising (moderate concern for both people and productivity).

Another dual concern model by Rahim and Bonoma (1979) is based on two dimensions: concern for self (the degree to which an individual attempts to satisfy his or her own concern) and concern for others (the degree to which an individual attempts to satisfy the concern of others). The Rahim and Bonoma (1979) model also contains five styles of handling conflict: obliging, integrating, compromising, avoiding, and dominating. An obliging style indicates low concern for self and high

concern for others. It involves behaviours such as intentionally playing down the differences and emphasising commonalities to satisfy the concern of the other party. Integrating is a style that reflects high concern for both self and others. It is associated with problem solving. A dominating style indicates high concern for self and low concern for others, which means an individual trying to win his or her objective, and ignores the other party's needs and expectations. An avoiding style shows low concern for both self and others. It involves behaviours like withdrawing and sidestepping. A compromising style reflects a moderate concern for self and others. Compromising indicates that both parties give up something to reach a mutually acceptable decision.

Leung and Kim (2008) have done a summary of different models of conflict handling styles created by different scholars. Based on their summary, Leung and Kim (2008) recently proposed a model of ten conflict management styles: avoiding, smoothing, obliging, integrating, compromising, dominating, threatening, relational coercing, deceiving, and ingratiating. They categorised them into four groups: unassertive styles, cooperative styles, aggressive styles, and wily styles. Unassertive styles include avoiding, smoothing and obliging. The styles of integrating and compromising are cooperative. Dominating, threatening and relational coercing are aggressive styles. Wily styles include deceiving and ingratiating styles. In addition to the five conflict handling styles introduced in Rahim and Bonoma's (1979) model, smoothing refers to playing down the severity of the conflict; threatening refers to expressing an intent to punish non-compliance physically or economically; relational coercing is punishing non-compliance through relationally damaging behaviours; deceiving refers to misleading the other party for convert compliance-gaining; and, ingratiating refers to showing affection for reciprocal compliance in the conflict issue (Leung & Kim, 2008).

Among a number of definitions of conflict, the one given by Ting-Toomey (1988) best describes the concept of conflict that is useful for this research project, as “a communication process that involves different styles of interchanges between two interdependent negotiators who perceive incompatible needs or goals and perceive each other’s potential interference in achieving those goals” (p. 213).

An eight-style conflict management grid is developed by Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001), and it is the first to take a communication approach and an intercultural approach (see Figure 1). Based on Rahim and Bonoma’s (1979) five conflict styles, they added three other conflict styles to “account for the potentially rich areas of cultural and ethnic differences in conflict: emotional expression, third-party help, and neglect” (p. 48). Emotional expression is characterised by using one’s emotions to lead to communication behaviours in conflict situations. Third-party help refers to using an outsider as the mediator in conflict situations. Neglect involves passive-aggressive responses to avoid the conflict but at the same time get an indirect reaction from the other party.

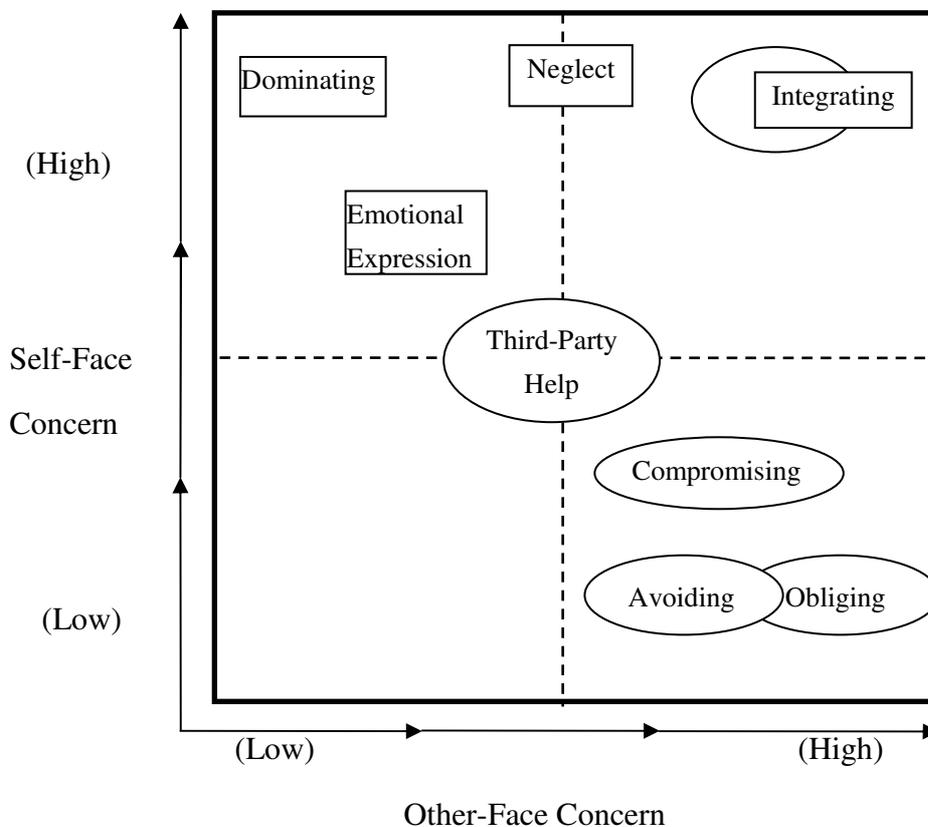


Figure 1. Eight-Style Conflict Grid of Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001, p. 48)

Cultural Dimensions

Power distance (PD)

Hofstede's (1984, 2001) PD has been an useful dimension for many scholars studying cross-cultural differences (Carl et al., 2004; Daller & Yildiz, 2006; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2002). The term *power distance* is originally from Mulder (1975). The existence of a *downward power distance* mechanism and an *upward power distance* mechanism are the two main concepts of Mulder's (1975) Power Distance Reduction theory. The downward power distance mechanism and upward power distance mechanism. In brief, the downward power distance mechanism refers to the individuals with more power will tend to increase or maintain the distance between themselves and less powerful ones; and, the upward power distance

mechanism indicates that individuals with less power will tend to decrease the distances between themselves and the more powerful (Mulder, 1975, p. 79).

Each culture has its own level of tolerance to inequality of power. Based on Mulder's (1975) work, Hofstede (1984, 2001) introduced the cultural variable PD, to describe cultural value differences towards distribution of power. "Power distance is a measure of the interpersonal power or influence between Boss B and Subordinates S as perceived by the least powerful of the two" (Hofstede, 1984, pp. 70-71). It is "the degree to which members of an organization or society expect and agree that power should be shared unequally" (Carl et al., 2004, p. 517).

According to Hofstede (2003), small power distances exist in cultures that emphasize individual credibility and expertise, democratic decision-making processes, equal rights and relations, and equitable rewards and punishments based on performance. Large power distances exist in cultures where status, age, rank, title, and seniority are the bases of rewards and punishments; credibility and experience is judged on a status-basis, and decision-making processes are autocratic.

Hofstede's PD index for 50 countries (1984, 2001) indicates that New Zealand culture has a low PD, which means that the perception is that individuals often have a legitimate claim to greater power over others. New Zealand culture views people as more or less equal, tends to diminish status, and distributes power more evenly than high PD cultures. On the other hand, Chinese culture is known as a high PD culture that emphasises status differences among members, and more acceptance of uneven power distributions (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2002).

Individualism-collectivism (I-C)

I-C is a popular cultural dimension that have been widely used by scholars when doing intercultural studies (such as Merkin, 2006; Oetzel et al., 2001; Smith et al., 1998; Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2002).

I-C influences communication in each culture through cultural norms related to the major tendency. Individualistic culture members tend to be more concerned with the group's needs, goals, and interests than with individualistic culture members, who emphasise the importance of the unique self (Trubisky et al., 1991).

“Individualism-collectivism has been used to account for communication style differences between sets of individualistic and collectivistic cultures” (Trubisky et al., 1991, pp. 67-68).

In comparing to I-C, the use of PD has been little. However, explaining communication behaviours with only I-C dimension has a limit. Merkin (2006) argues that the two cultural dimensions have different effects on intercultural communication behaviours—I-C is about how individuals identify with their group, and PD refers to differences in equality perceptions between people.

Face

Face is an individual's claimed sense of positive image in a context of social interaction (Ting-Toomey, 1988), which “is associated with identity respect, disrespect, dignity, honor, shame, guilt, status, and competence issues” (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2002, p. 145). All people from all cultures have the need for face respect and face consideration (Applbaum, 2006). However, the meanings and usages of the concept of face vary from culture to culture (Oetzel et al., 2001). The literature suggested that individualists have high self-face concerns, while collectivists have high other-face concerns, which predict the culture members' conflict communication styles (Ting-Toomey & Cocroft, 1994; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2002).

Culture Dimensions and Conflict Communication Styles

Although very little research has been done to compare use of conflict communication styles in cultures of varying power distance (e.g. Oetzel et al., 2001;

Ting-Toomey, 1988), many research studies on the relationship that each of the subjects' have with *individualism-collectivism (I-C)* and *facework* theory indicate the connection between PD and conflict communication styles.

I-C and PD

I-C and PD as two separate cultural variables also correlate with each other (Hofstede, 1984, 2001). Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) have created a conflict communication model based on the two dimensions individualism-collectivism and PD (see Figure 2). In the model the two dimensions are correlated with each other, which result in four approaches to conflict management communication: the status achievement approach (individualism and large power distance), the benevolent approach (collectivism and large power distance), the impartial approach (individualism and small power distance), and the communal approach (collectivism and small power distance).

The impartial approach is most commonly used by managers of individualistic and small power distance cultures. The managers have a personally developed style based on their work experiences, and also they treat everyone the same regardless of status, title, or rank. They tend to deal with conflict in a direct and up front manner. Employees from the same cultures are also likely to articulate their conflict concerns directly. Although a collaborative conflict style with an employee is believed to be the most effective strategy for dealing with conflicts in individualistic workplaces, a dominating conflict style is often used within the impartial approach (Rahim & Buntzman, 1989; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). The compromising conflict handling style can also be an effective mode for the conflict parties under the impartial approach, for it enables the parties at least to gain some needs by giving up some of their goals (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

The status-achievement approach is used by managers from individualistic and large power distance cultures. Freedom and inequality are the two values of this approach. Managers employing the status-achievement approach are expected to maintain and recognise one's status in addition to having an unique way of communicating with employees. The managers expect the subordinates to accommodate their wishes in conflict situations. From the status-achievement approach, the dominating style is preferred as the effective style of dealing with workplace conflict. The manager of the status-achievement approach sees collaborative conflict style as a weakness on the part of the manager. Accommodating and avoiding are considered to be the effective conflict styles for this approach. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) also distinguishes the difference between the collectivistic Latin American and collectivistic Asian benevolent approaches in the use of restrained communication. They argue that Chinese prefer a conflict management style that employs emotional restraint and self-discipline in the workplace.

According to Hofstede (2003), the benevolent approach is a common approach used around the world. The benevolent managers see themselves as interdependent and at a different status level than others (Triandis, 1995). Two values of this approach are inequality and obligation to others. Chinese managers adopt this approach. The Chinese managers are from a collectivistic and large power distance culture, and they demonstrate high concerns for interpersonal relationships. Employees taking this approach expect a manager treat them like a member of the family (Brislin, 1993, cited in Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

The communal approach is the choice of managers from collectivistic and small power distance cultures. It is believed to be the least common approach (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). This approach demonstrates a high concern for both

self and others. Managers and employees are equal, and they are openly and express working together to solve the conflict. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) argue that there may not be a manager taking the communal approach. In the other words, it is not common to have all parties in a conflict to be equal.

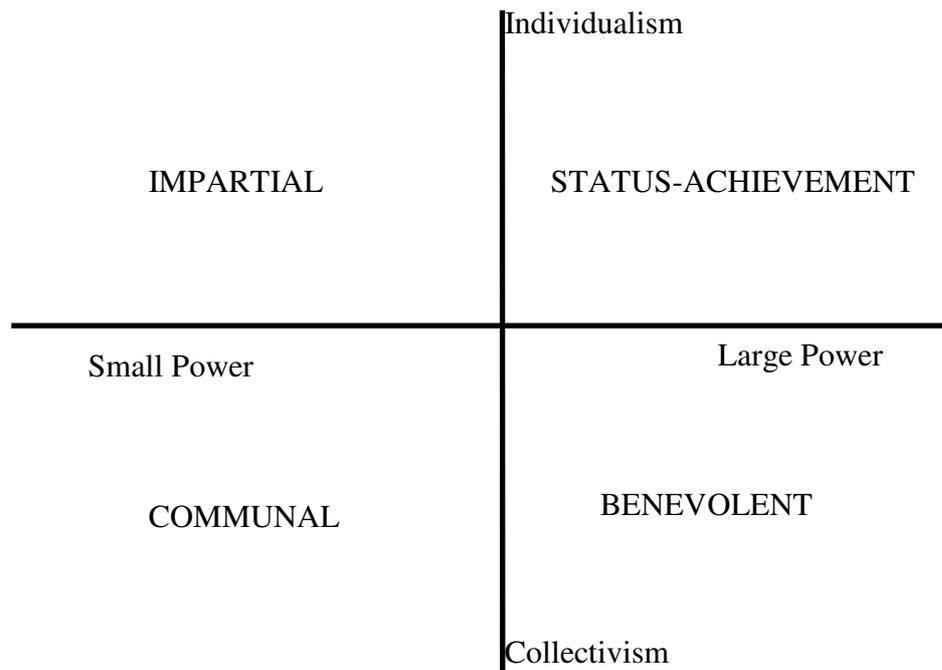


Figure 2. Organisational Conflict Management: Four Approaches of Ting-Toomey (2001, p. 141)

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2002) argue that researchers should not assume that national culture results in individuals' PD values. Rather, individual scores of PD values ought to be captured, especially when studying a small sample-size. This advice about paying attention to individual PD in small studies is helpful for the research study.

I-C and conflict communication styles

Several researchers have studied conflict management styles as related to individualist and collectivist cultures (Cai & Fink, 2002; Chen & Cheung, 2005;

Conrad, 1991; Kim et al., 2004; Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). The five conflict management styles in the dual concern model of Rahim and Bonoma (1979) are the most frequently used in these research studies (Chen & Cheung, 2005; Ting-Toomey, et al., 1991, cited in Kim et al., 2004; Smith et al., 1998; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese cultures (used by Conrad, 1991) are used as collectivist cultures to compare with American culture, represents individualist cultures. Chua and Gudykunst (1987) compared choice of conflict styles of students from collectivist cultures and choice of students from individualist cultures studying in America. The result showed that collectivistic students are less confrontational than individualistic students. Chinese culture tends to adopt the avoidance conflict style more than does American culture (Gudykunst, 1994) . In Ting-Toomey et al.'s (1991, cited in Kim et al., 2004) study, they found that members of collectivist cultures prefer integrating styles more than members of individualist cultures. They also found that individualist culture members tend to use a dominating conflict management communication style. Conversely, members of collectivist cultures tend to choose obliging, compromising, integrating, and avoiding styles. In addition, Gudykunst and Kim (1997) found that people from individualistic cultures separate the conflict issue from the person with whom they have the conflict, whereas people of collectivistic cultures do not make this difference.

Face and PD

PD influences facework in conflict management (Merkin, 2006; Oetzel et al., 2001; Smith et al., 1998). A study of facework and PD was done by Merkin (2006), in which the relationship between PD and obedience, verbal expression and injustice were examined. The study has found that culture members possessing small PD values do not mind creating face-threatening conflicts for the purpose of clarifying themselves; on the other hand, high PD culture members consider challenging

authority is not an appropriate behaviour (Kirkbride, Tang, & Westwood, 1991; Merkin, 2006). It is also found that large PD culture members avoid overt expression of emotion, such as the emotional demonstration of aggressiveness and anger (Merkin, 2006), are more concerned for politeness and use less confrontational communication styles than do small PD culture members (Steil & Hillman, 1993). In large PD cultures, inequality and injustice are taken for granted, whereas participating in direct communication against perceived injustice can give feelings of satisfaction (Merkin, 2006).

A qualitative study was done on intercultural conflict communications between Chinese managers and Western subordinates (Chen & Cheung, 2005), that discusses the use of power and face concerns of the Chinese managers. It suggests that Chinese managers held power with much self-face concern and demands for subordinates to give them face. When they were losing faces in front of the Western subordinates, Chinese managers used or even abused their power to make the subordinates lose face as a way of regaining their own face. They used power to demonstrate their status in the company instead of giving substantial reasons for their status. The findings indicate the high PD in Chinese culture correlating with the view of Chinese managers that they are superiors. These findings are helpful information when analysing the Chinese superiors' conflict communication behaviours in the research.

Face and conflict communication styles

Several researchers mentioned face and facework in their studies of Chinese conflict styles. Oetzel et al. (2001) suggests that in Chinese culture, as one of the high PD cultures, face is a primary concern in social interaction and overtakes "primary" goals. Applbaum (2006) claims that the Chinese use a series of face-related communication strategies to deal with conflict situations, in order to save or give face to others, such as indirectness, praising, shaming or the use of

intermediaries. Chinese often tend to avoid confrontation in public, and they will use indirect communication to avoid damaging the face of themselves and others (Applbaum, 2006). Chinese also prefer to use intermediaries to avoid potential face loss from direct confrontation. The intermediary is honoured because of his or her face (Applbaum, 2006, p. 9).

PD and conflict communication styles

One study directly examines PD and conflict styles. Smith et al. (1998) had several interesting findings in their study of the values of managers in 23 countries toward handling disagreement. They found that a) the larger the PD is, the more frequently out-group disagreements occur; b) the smaller the power distance, the more likely a manager is to use peers to deal with out-group disagreements; c) the smaller the power distance, the more likely a manager is to use subordinates to handle in-group disagreements than predicted.

In the literature reviewed, the several models of conflict styles, and their relationships with the cultural variables of I-C and PD values, and the concept of face, provide a good ground for the research. Based on the existing studies, it is possible to generate hypotheses and questions for the research. The literature review also enables identification of the gaps in the current research on intercultural conflict communication: 1) a limited number of studies examine the relationship of PD and the use of conflict management styles; 2) conflict communication in the New Zealand workplace is overlooked in the current studies; 3) the existing workplace conflict communication studies have a focus on analysing the relationship of Western managers (particularly American superiors) and Asian employees. This research is hoped to make a contribution to filling in the gaps identified above.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Methodology

In general, this research study fits under the interpretivist or qualitative paradigm. Deacon, Pickering, Golding and Murdock (1999) argue that the central concern of interpretive research “is not with establishing relations of cause and effect[,] but with exploring the ways that people make sense of their social worlds and how they express these understandings though [*sic*] language, sound, imagery, personal style and social rituals” (p. 6). Qualitative researchers study subjects in their natural settings, and try to interpret or make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This research is qualitative, for it is subjective in nature, and involves examining and reflecting on perceptions in order to gain an understanding of social and human activities. This research examines the PD perceptions, I-C, and face concerns of the Chinese managers and their ENZ subordinates in order to gain an understanding of the factors that influence their conflict communication behaviours.

The five assumptions of a qualitative paradigm—ontological, epistemological, rhetorical, axiological, and methodological—support the qualitative nature of this research study. Qualitative research is subjective rather than objective (Keyton, 2006). The research question is *What is the relationship between power distance perceptions and conflict communication styles of Chinese managers of ENZ subordinates in a New Zealand workplace?* It is based on the perceptions of the Chinese managers, which are subjective views. This indicates the ontological assumption of the interpretivist paradigm, which claims reality is subjective and multiple.

The epistemological assumption involves examining the relationship of the researcher and what is being researched (Collis & Hussey, 2003). The qualitative

epistemological assumption requires researchers to gain in-depth understanding of human actions, motives, and feelings, and to interact with that being researched (Collis & Hussey, 2003). The qualitative ontological assumption claims that reality is subject to the researcher's interpretation, rather than having an objective existence that the act of researching and the researcher do not affect (Collis & Hussey, 2003). The research questions and hypotheses are based on the assumption that the Chinese managers' perceptions of power are the cultural factors that influence their choices of conflict communication styles in New Zealand workplaces. By involving the researcher's thinking as part of the studied group and the interaction with other members of the community, the study reflects a qualitative epistemology and ontology.

Qualitative methodology enables researchers to collect rich and in-depth data, from which the researcher can gain a depth of understanding about the research objects or phenomena being researched. The qualitative data-collection methods—the in-depth interviews—allow for multiple layers and iterations of information, so that the researcher is able to work with rich meanings. Qualitative data analysis provides the opportunity to identify new variables for study and the opportunity to identify new relationships between variables (Collis & Hussey, 2003). This is needed by this particular research that a study that tends to explore an uncover research area, for new and unexpected themes are unavoidable.

The qualitative paradigm results in high validity. Collis and Hussey (2003) argue that ensuring high reliability is more important in positivistic studies than is in interpretivist studies, for the findings may be interpreted in different ways according to different researchers. On the other hand, studies under the interpretivist paradigm usually have high validity, because “the researcher's aim is to gain full access to the

knowledge and meaning of those involved in the phenomenon” (Collis & Hussey, 2003, p. 59).

Data Collection Method Using In-depth Interviews

Participants

Nine Chinese managers and business owners participated in the research interviews. The primary criteria for the selection of the interviewees were a) being a Chinese manager or business owner of an organisation in Auckland, b) having direct communication with ENZ subordinates on a daily basis, and c) being a Chinese immigrant to New Zealand, who considers Chinese culture as his or her home culture. The initial contacts were obtained through the researcher’s networks in the community, by asking acquaintances for possible contacts that led to research participants. Snowball sampling was used to find additional possible participants, once the first interviews were done, in order to access as many potential participants as possible for selection. This sampling method is often used in phenomenological studies where it is essential to include people with experience of the phenomenon being studied in the sample (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

The aim of these constraints was to gain consistency of the collected data, in order to ensure the validity of the research. In other words, these criteria ensure that the managers and employees of the organisations have two roles that potentially pull against one another. The hypothesis is that the Chinese manager has less power as a minority-culture group member, while at the same time the Chinese manager has more power as a manager of the organisation. A related hypothesis is, in the managers’ perceptions, the ENZ employees have more power as dominant-cultural group members and less power as employees of the organisation. The research project focuses only on the Chinese managers, and is concerned with their

perceptions of how these two identities relate to their choices of conflict communication styles.

Data was collected from nine in-depth interviews. Five of the interviews were done in December 2008, and the other four were done in January 2009. Seven interviews out of nine were conducted in the offices of the interviewed managers or owners. One interview was conducted after work, while the rest of the interviewees preferred to have the interviews done during their working hours. The interview was designed to take approximately 60 minutes. However, the actual interview lengths varied from 40 minutes to 90 minutes. The longer interviews were generally caused by interruptions from work. Also, of course, the less the initial answers responded to the interview questions, the longer the interview took to complete, for more time was involved in getting the interviewee back on track. However, the extra information provided by the interviewees voluntarily was valuable, as it added to the richness of the data and enabled the researcher to explore new themes that had not been foreseen. The electronic versions of the sound recordings and transcriptions for the interview are stored in password protected files in my computer, and the hard copies of these transcriptions are locked in a drawer, which I am the only person who has access to these files and documents.

Qualitative interviewing enhances understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the social actors through their stories, accounts, and explanations, and understanding of native communication conceptualisations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). It helps to test hypotheses, and helps to verify, validate, or comment on information obtained from other sources, which include a thorough literature review and observations. The research focuses on the perceptions of the participants. The research questions require a large amount of rich data in order to generate the

findings to answers the questions. In-depth interviewing was therefore chosen as the most appropriate method for collecting the data for this research.

The role of the interviewer is to provide general guidance during an interview by setting out a plan of inquiry, which includes the topics to be covered. Semi-structured interviews are efficient for testing developed theories (Wengraf, 2001), although interview questions are not theory questions (Wengraf, 2001). The interview questions were designed mainly for the purposes of finding out a) the PD values of each interviewee; and b) the interviewee's conflict communication styles when he or she experienced conflict with ENZ subordinates. Key questions for every interview were identical to ensure data consistency, and open-ended to allow exploration of in-depth answers (Collis & Hussey, 2003). The interviews included 6 general questions, 19 key questions, and three scenarios. [See Appendix A for the interview plan.] The interview questions were based on Kim, Lee, Kim, and Hunter's (2004), and Leung and Kim's (2008) scales measuring conflict management styles, and Hofstede's (2001) discussion of power distance.

Each interviewee was asked at the beginning of the interview for permission to make an audio recording of the interview, to provide the material for a transcript, and help with future data accuracy checks. Introduction about the research was given, including the key terms of the project. The term *European New Zealander* was described to the Chinese managers as identifying the New Zealand generations of European ancestors. The interview questions were designed in English. However, four interviewees who heard the questions in English chose to answer the questions in Chinese, their native language. The recorded interviews were subsequently transcribed, and the Chinese interviews were translated into English.

The interview recordings were transcribed in the language in which the interview was originally conducted. Some transcripts included both English and

Mandarin, as the interviewees preferred to answer some of the questions in English and some others in Chinese, whichever they felt easy to express themselves. When I transcribed the interview recordings, my focus was on the real meanings of the conversations, instead of on a strictly literal translation of exactly every single word. Some insignificant words or phrases, such as repeated words and fragmentary phrases that resulted from incomplete sentences were ignored. Some words were rephrased and amended for better presentation of the transcripts.

Verifications of translation

To ensure the accuracy of the translations, two representative Chinese interview transcripts accompanied by the translations were verified by an independent translator. Some consideration went into the selection of the translator. First, the translator had to have an adequate ability in English and Chinese. Second, the translator needed to have a good knowledge about both Chinese and New Zealand culture. Third, it was essential for the translator to have a business and management background, in order to understand terms related to management. The chosen translator was a Chinese immigrant who has been in New Zealand for 9 years. The translator has a MBA degree, and is currently in a management position in a NZ company. The translator has a good knowledge of both Chinese and NZ cultures, as well as the NZ workplace. After the research project was explained to the translator, she was asked to check on the accuracy of the translations, and make comments wherever she disagreed with my translation. No discussion took place about the translations before the translator went through the transcripts, so that the translator read the transcripts with an objective attitude. In total, 46 changes were suggested by the translator. We then discussed the differences, with the result that 45 out of the 46 differences were resolved. One disagreement, which was about the

grammatical subject of a sentence, could not be solved, due to the incomplete sentence spoken by the interviewee.

One major challenge in finding the right participants to interview was to make sure that the potential participants understood the conceptualisation of European New Zealanders that was central to this project. Definitions of European New Zealanders were given to ensure the interviewees understood the difference between the term *ENZ* and the much broader term, *Kiwi*. One interview with the person who would have been the tenth participant had to be terminated, because through the interview it became clear that his employees were all Maori, whom he personally referred as *the Kiwis* or *native English speakers*. For this reason, the participant did not fit into the sample selection criteria and was dropped from the study.

Data Analysis

Analysing qualitative data by using mixed methodologies is commonly used by many social researchers (Collis & Hussey, 2003), and is the method of data analysis this study used. This research study employed both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods, although qualitative data analysis methods were primary. They included the identification and coding of themes within the transcriptions of the interviews, the categorising of data, and the comparison of the categorised data with the hypotheses derived from the literature. The backgrounds and demographic data of interviewees were quantified for arithmetic analyses in simple percentages and averages.

These qualitative and quantitative data were used both separately and interrelatedly for analyses. For example, the quantitative data gave the age group of the sample, the years of work experience in a management role, and years they have been in New Zealand. The qualitative data require more complex analyses, including interpretations of the participant's power distance values and preferred

conflict communication styles with ENZ subordinates, based on self-reported perceptions and on self-reported actual behaviour.

Non-quantifying Analysis

As stated by Lindlof (1995), preliminary analysis happens when one transcribes interviews. Notes were taken when ideas emerged during the process of transcribing the interviews. These ideas helped in identifying themes, as well as in the data analyses. Qualitative research data usually consists of pages and pages of transcripts (Keyton, 2006), so organising the data is an important and essential step for analysis.

The reduction of qualitative data is the first, necessary step in organising the transcripts. It requires the researcher to “sort, categorize, prioritize, and interrelate data according to emerging schemes of interpretation” (Lindlof, 1995, p. 216). The first step of the analysing process was to divide the transcript into sections according to the flow of the ideas, and then to create summaries of sections of the transcriptions. Each summary was coded with a letter of the alphabet. Once this step was finished, the next step was to go through the summaries, and identify as many themes as were reflected in the summaries. These themes then were categorised within the three main focuses of the research project: PD, values in relation to the perceptions of managerial power, immigrant identity and perceptions of power, and conflict communication styles. By doing so, the reduction of data job was completed, and the data could be presented.

Lindlof (1995) argued that “when something unforeseen but important turns up, the researcher can quickly move into that area and probe more intensively (p. 215)”, and furthermore, this shows the flexible nature of qualitative data analysis (Keyton, 2006). When setting the themes, I tried to be as open-minded as possible to allow as many new and unexpected themes as appeared. Indeed, not all the data collected are useful or relevant to the research topic; therefore, some themes and categories were

eliminated after careful consideration, while some of the themes were created as the major ones for analysis.

Although the transcribed data had been structured and categorised, it was still a challenge to decide how to present them, and to interpret the meanings of the data. By directly quoting from the interviewees, I presented the original ideas of the interviewees, while maintaining the broad areas of the research question. The findings of the research were compared with the existing literature to show where the findings were consistent with the literature, and where the findings were different. Analysis of the causes of the differences was made by applying the related cultural theories, such as power distance, individualism-collectivism, high- and low-context communication, and face-concerns; and also by referring to the interviewees' own explanations.

Quantifying Analysis

The scenario choices given as responses by the participants and general data collected for background and demographics of the participants were presented in tables using quantitative analyses. "A quantitative inclination even when working with data-texts would transform qualitative data into a quantifiable form in order to examine such things as repetitive or pattern behaviours" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 216). In this research, the quantification of data is used in various ways. The answers given by each interviewee to each scenario are presented in tables. By finding out about the most and least preferred conflict communication styles, I was able to compare the results with the literature, and make analyses.

The general data collected at the beginning of each interview include age group, number of years in NZ, number of years of management experience; number of years in the current management position, number of staff and number of ENZ staff the interviewees are currently managing. These demographic data were also put into

tables, and were compared to see if any repetitive communication behaviours of the interviewees had any relationship with any of these factors. Percentages and numbers were used when presenting a particular theme or view that was related to more than one interviewee. The interviewees' position (owner-manager versus employee-manager) was another quantitative data category that was used to explain and analyse the particular communication behaviours of the interviewees.

Data Analysis Process

In the analysis process, culture is the dependent variable, which means the Chinese culture is treated as predictable and stable. Its characteristics come from the existing studies in the literature. The PD value and dimensions of I-C and face/facework are independent variables. These independent variables are used to interpret the conflict communication styles reported by the nine Chinese managers.

The Chinese managers also gave their perceptions of the PD value and conflict communication styles of their ENZ subordinates and their perceptions are compared with NZ culture according to the literature. Reasons are given to explain the Chinese managers' deviations from the Chinese norms as described by published studies. Next, the analysis focuses on the Chinese managers' perceptions of the boss-subordinate relationship, when the boss is an immigrant and the subordinates are members of the dominant host culture.

Finally, the relationships between these variables are examined. For example, by looking at a particular conflict communication style chosen by a Chinese manager, the PD value of the manager, the demographic background of the manager, and the manager's perceptions of his or her ENZ subordinates' PD values and communication styles are analysed to see if any relationships exists between each of the factors. The analysis process implies an interpretive research paradigm, which uses both non-quantifying and quantifying data analysis methods.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Data

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the in-depth interviews. The chapter begins with backgrounds and demographic data of the interviewees. The findings are presented under three themes of the research: a) the Chinese managers' perceptions about conflict communication styles of the Chinese managers and the ENZ subordinates, b) the PD values of the Chinese managers and the ENZ subordinates, and c) the managers' identities as Chinese immigrants among the host-culture ENZ subordinates. Some other non-cultural factors that the managers reported also have an influence on their and their ENZ subordinates' conflict communication styles and PD values, and these are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Cultural Influence

In the interviews, the managers made uninvited comparisons between the two cultures, in different aspects from the ones the interview questions described. Although these comparisons were not the focus of this study, they can be helpful in shaping and defining the perceptions the managers have of ENZ communication behaviours in contrast to the managers' culture and values.

When the managers talked about their ENZ subordinates' conflict communication styles either in a particular conflict episode or in general, all the managers claimed that the culture that people grow up in decides their conflict communication styles. For example, all the managers agree that Chinese culture promotes values of obedience and respect for elders and authorities, and the New Zealand culture advocates equality between individuals. Manager M (personal communication, December 28, 2008) said,

We've got big influence from the history. It's the people they show their respect to--older people. And to the work; they show their respect to the manager, the

boss. It's kind of a culture. But, in New Zealand [culture], it's very minor [unimportant]. I disagree with that.

Manager S (personal communication, January 14, 2009) also commented, "Actually, Chinese may have a custom which is that our education mode was to teach us [to] be absolute [*sic*] obedient to the elders and bosses. Obedience is like your nature".

The interviewees seemed to think that unlike ENZ employees, Chinese tend to avoid and hide problems, and compromise when necessary to ensure harmony. Manager M (personal communication, December 28, 2008) said, "Chinese are a lot 'smarter' [than the Kiwis]. They try to hide [any] problem". A similar view is shared by manager G (personal communication, December 11, 2008): "Maybe that's Chinese: they know how to avoid problems. They are not creating the problem straightaway."

The managers suggested that at work, the ENZ subordinates could be confrontational and straightforward. They also suggested that the ENZ subordinates often separated the person and the issue in a conflict. They compared that with Chinese subordinates, who, influenced by their culture, are submissive to authority, and show more respect to their managers.

Another cultural difference the managers noted was the way conflict was discussed. Managers S (personal communication, January 14, 2009) described her ENZ subordinates, when reporting a conflict to S, as usually only reporting the issue and the problem, rather than giving an opinion about the person they have conflict with. They said that Chinese subordinates would also talk about their opinions of the person whom they have conflict with, and even relate issues to past conflict issues.

Conflict Communication Styles

Chinese managers' conflict communication styles

The managers perceive that differences exist in the conflict communication styles between Chinese and New Zealanders of European descent. The choices the managers made as their preferred conflict communication behaviour in the given conflict scenario in the interview show the managers use a range of communication strategies in daily communications with ENZ workers in order to cope with the different communication styles. In accordance with previous studies (such as Chua & Gudykunst, 1987; Kim et al., 2004; Kirkbride et al., 1991; Leung & Kim, 2008; Oetzel et al., 2001; Thomas, 1976; Ting-Toomey, 1988, 2007b; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991), the Chinese managers revealed they prefer smoothing, integrating, and avoiding styles of conflict communication. Moreover, third-party mediation was reported as often used by the owner-managers.

The Chinese managers used the term *maintaining harmony* several times in the interviews. Manager L (personal communication, December 22, 2008) explained that it is the national policy of China, and an important value of the Chinese,

I want to clarify one thing, if direct conflict can be solved peacefully, I would do it that way. It is the Chinese national policy [to ensure a] peaceful life. That is also my view.” He also said, “I don’t want [conflict] to affect the daily operation of the organisation. That has something to do with my Chinese culture, and also has something to do with my personal character, that I don’t want to see conflict getting very strong and hard. I don’t want to see that happen. If that happens, I would rather that [the ENZ employee L had conflict with] resigns and takes me to the court, instead of having him staying in the organisation and [having] the conflict stay. One unhappy employee can influence the whole organisation.

Manager S (personal communication, January 14, 2009) also had a similar experience. S had to dismiss a person who was unable to maintain a good relationship with others in the company,

Although I believe H was a capable employee; he really did not know how to build good relationship[s] with his colleagues. I had to let him go. This is a kind of compromise. I seek harmony [by] being compromising...if I [had] insist[ed] [on] my own decision to keep him, he would [have] continue[d] to have conflicts with the others” (S, personal communication, January 14, 2009).

S is indicating that she was being obliging to the wishes of the other subordinates.

According to a conflict episode reported by Manager G (personal communication, December 11, 2008), G was being dominating when telling an ENZ employee to do as he was told without arguing. “I told him, ‘Don’t argue with me, just do it. And after you do it, I will explain why.’” The ENZ worker accepted G’s order and went on to complete the task that was assigned by G, but then came back for further discussion. G then gave an explanation, which G believed the ENZ worker accepted. Once again G repeated, “He wanted to argue with me, but I said, ‘No. Stop. Do it, then talk to me after that’”. G said that “you have to show your subordinate you are in this [management] position; otherwise, you can’t manage the team. That is very important, I think.

The owner-managers found themselves being aggressive when they were in serious conflict with their ENZ subordinates, especially when they felt they were being pushed to the limit in the conflict communication process. Owner-manager M warned one of the ENZ subordinates that non-compliance with the owner-manager’s decision would result in that ENZ subordinate’s dismissal. In the particular conflict, the ENZ subordinate made a decision that M believed was outside of the subordinate’s authority. After warning the subordinate, M found that the person did

not change, so they had a second meeting, in which they had an argument. M (personal communication, December 28, 2008) said,

That means you are challenged [*sic*] me; that means you don't accept working under my management...If you don't change [the behaviour], start[ing] now, you [will] have to report to me on every single thing. [If] you [are] happy [with that], you stay here. If you are not happy, go.

Owner-manager L refused to reconsider the decision he made about one of the ENZ subordinates' position change, even when he was faced with the risk of being sued by the employee. In these instances, both M and L were dominating in their conflict communication style.

Managers claim that whether they use a "soft" or "hard" conflict communication style depends on the particular situation. When talking about "soft" conflict communication styles, managers referred to communication behaviours like constantly urging their employees to adapt a particular behaviour, seeking third party opinions, negotiating with ENZ subordinates. In contrast, managers referred to communication behaviours like insisting on one's own opinions and being autocratic in decision making as "hard" conflict communication behaviours.

Eight managers claimed they are *soft* in communicating with their ENZ subordinates. When describing a conflict episode he had with one of the ENZ subordinates, Manager L (personal communication, December 22, 2008) said, "He [the ENZ subordinate] was very strong-minded, and I often played a game softly and skilfully." Manager J (personal communication, December, 19, 2008) described the way he dealt with an ENZ worker who was always late to work,

I would say, "I know they say you [the ENZ employee] have a sleep problem that is an illness. Have you take[n] any medication? Have you seen a doctor?" I will just find the solution with them, [and] see if we can

solve this problem...If he is late again, I will ask him, “Are you not sleeping well again? Why don’t you take some time off and go to see the doctor?” Sometimes, if you let go of him, he will be more attached to you. If you control him too much, [he] will go the opposite way.

“I am more of the [go] softly part,” said manager Z (personal communication, December 17, 2008) “That’s me. That’s my personality. I don’t tell people ‘You have to do this’ without details, without giving them the reason. So I always tell people, ‘You do this, because...’”

The managers seem to prefer to use smoothing and integrative styles as their first choice to communicate with the ENZ staff, when they are aware that potential conflicts are likely to happen. Manager A (personal communication, January 14, 2009) said, “When we [A and the ENZ subordinates] are having discussions, I often ask them, ‘What would you do about this in your culture?’ And [I tell them] what we do in our culture. We can discuss, and that is not a problem. That means we understand our culture differences.”

Manager L (personal communication, December 22, 2008) approached one ENZ subordinate for a discussion about his position change (to lower a level position), and at the same time L told the subordinate that he would be happy to keep him at the same pay rate, if he agreed. L (personal communication, December 22, 2008) said “I thought I was being really soft, and skilful, and even other [ENZ employees] think [*sic*] so.” The employee challenged this decision. Manager L said, “This is a weird guy.”

Eighty-eight percent of the managers said they have adapted to ENZ communication styles after working with ENZ workers for a period of time. In particular, they claim they have become more straightforward than they used to be. “I would say I get more straightforward and less soft” said Manager L (personal

communication, December 22, 2008). The change was not only caused by working with their ENZ subordinates, but also by the influence from their previous or current ENZ boss/managers. Manager W (personal communication, January 14, 2009) said,

When I just started managing the Kiwis, I felt working styles [were different from mine]. That was when I just arrived in NZ. When they [the Kiwi employees] did not do the tasks I delegated properly, I felt it was not a problem, and I helped them get the jobs done. But later, [I] changed. After a while, I learned from other Kiwi managers, who told me I shouldn't be like that. My change was as the result of the influence from the Kiwis. I feel my management style is [a] combination [of Chinese and ENZ style], but more of Kiwi style. I have done quite a few training courses, and I feel my [management] thinking is more towards Kiwis' style.

ENZ subordinates' conflict communication styles

Five managers reported that they experienced culture shock at the beginning of working with the ENZ subordinates. As stated earlier, they said they found the ENZ subordinates could be dominating and very direct in dealing with conflict with their managers. Manager W (personal communication, January 14, 2009) reported that an ENZ subordinate had refused his request directly, because the subordinate believed the request by W was against the rules of the business.

Six managers agreed the ENZ subordinates are usually direct when they have questions about any issue. They prefer to approach their managers directly for discussions, and according to the managers, they seem less concerned about the feelings of the managers than do Chinese subordinates. Manager S (personal communication, January 14, 2009) reported that the ENZ managers (who are her

subordinates) would keep trying to persuade S in order to have their ideas passed, or S's view changed.

The managers also reported that ENZ subordinates were sometimes defensive when they were in conflicts. Manager J (personal communication, December, 19, 2008) reported that his ENZ subordinates would usually have excuses when J asked for reasons why they came late to work: "I do find that Kiwi staff make up excuses quite often. But that behaviour is not found in many Chinese."

Forty-four percent of the managers stated that the ENZ subordinates are more focused on solving the problems, finding out the answers, or achieving their goals when dealing with conflicts, than they are with the ways they might meet these goals. "Usually, the ENZ staff care about the outcome more than they do about the details in the process. As long as they achieve their goals, they would not concern [*sic*] too much about what had happened [*sic*] during the process", explained manager S (personal communication, January 14, 2009).

The Powers of the Managers

Eight out of the nine Chinese managers claimed they have all the five powers as managers: coercive, reward, legitimate, expert and referent power (refer to Chapter 2 for the definitions of the powers). The research finds that expertise power, which is the ability a manager has to influence the employees on the basis of technical expertise, special skills, or special knowledge in a given area, was ranked as the most important power by seven out of the nine managers. Following expertise power, legitimate power, and the power that comes from status or position to prescribe and control employees' behaviours was ranked as the second important power that a manager should have. Coercive power, which is the ability a manager has to punish his/her subordinates, was the least favourite power to use.

When the managers were asked about what power they have, they first responded with “the power to make decisions.” The managers did not identify decision-making power as legitimate or coercive, although decision-making derives from legitimate, coercive powers, and reward powers. Manager S (personal communication, January 14, 2009) explained that the most important two powers are the power to make financial decisions and the power to make personnel decisions. Manager L (personal communication, December 22, 2008) stated that financial power, personality power (which he defined as trust and confidence the employees have about their boss), and business power together mean better communication and understanding of the culture.

Manager S (personal communication, January 14, 2009) believed she was successful in gaining respect from her subordinates. S explained that respect came from well-established personal relationships with each subordinate. To build good relationships with the ENZ staff, S invites the ENZ employees and their families to a company dinner, and praises the ENZ staff in front of their families, to show appreciation of the employees.

Two owner-managers reported that they find themselves more “careful” when communicating with their ENZ subordinates than with their Chinese subordinates. Manager A (personal communication, January 16, 2009) indicated that although he could be very straightforward toward the ENZ subordinates in a conflict, he could not use the same style to communicate with the ENZ subordinates as he usually does with the Chinese subordinates. A (personal communication, January 16, 2009) reported that he may use a softer manner and talk with the ENZ employees, rather than direct them. As explained by A (personal communication, January 16, 2009), “If a problem with ENZ employees is not dealt with properly, it may lead to legal actions. This is unlikely to happen on [*sic*] Chinese employees”.

Power Distance Values of the Chinese Managers

Employee-managers showed lower PD values in communicating with the ENZ subordinates compared with owner-managers. This apparently is not the case with the employee-managers' PD values in their relationships between themselves and their own managers or bosses above them. Employee-manager J indicated that he had told his ENZ subordinates to write thank you emails to the boss when they received incentives, which J believed was a Chinese custom for showing appreciation to the boss. Manager G (personal communication, December 11, 2008) believed he would always find good timing and make sure his boss was not busy, before he approached him for reports, although G himself would not mind if his subordinates approached *him* for discussions at *any* time.

Only one owner-manager reported what seemed to be a relatively low PD value. Manager C (personal communication, January 21, 2009) said that her position is no different from the ENZ subordinates' positions. C (personal communication, January 21, 2009) said she sees herself as equal to the staff rather than as a superior among subordinates. Manager C (personal communication, January 21, 2009) also said that in daily business operations, the ENZ subordinates make most of the decisions. Manager C (personal communication, January 21, 2009) said that the reason was that the ENZ staff had better knowledge of the business than Manager C did, as well as better cultural understanding of the local market, which was the main market of the business.

Owner-manager L (personal communication, December 22, 2008) reported that sometimes having an ENZ manager below him helped have his orders carried out better and more easily by the ENZ subordinates, than if L directly communicated with the ENZ subordinates. Manager L (personal communication, December 22, 2008) explained that there is less cultural misunderstanding between the ENZ

manager and the ENZ subordinates. “I would say I place somebody on the spot; he will be my ears and eyes. Yeah, he is one of them. So you can jump at the chance to resolve any conflicts coming off,” said L (personal communication, December 22, 2008).

ENZ Subordinates’ PD in the Chinese Managers’ Perception

All managers agreed that their ENZ subordinates’ PD values differed from their own, and furthermore, they attributed the PD values to cultural differences. As discussed already, when exercising power over their ENZ subordinates, the managers claimed to prefer to be less directive in their communication style with the ENZ subordinates. Manager G (personal communication, December 11, 2008) said, “I treat them as adults. I don't want to treat them like kids. I don't want to keep telling them what they should do. I leave them alone. I sort of hint [to] them [about] the jobs [I] require them to do.” Manager S (personal communication, January 14, 2009) explained he prefers the employees to be more self-directive in daily work: he tells them, “I like it when you [the employees] have recommended solutions already when you report to me about any problems. It is the best if you have already try [*sic*] the solutions before you come to me for suggestion[s]”.

Two managers claimed that the Western management style promotes less directing and monitoring from the managers when managing the subordinates. Manager A (personal communication, January 16, 2009) said,

I feel that we have quite a big difference between the Western culture and the Eastern culture. For example, we [the Eastern culture] emphasise hierarchy. But, according to my management experience in New Zealand, [I] feel that it is different from the Eastern culture in the boss-subordinate relationship. Therefore, directing is not a good management style when managing the ENZ subordinates.

Manager S (personal communication, January 14, 2009) said, “ENZ employees value an individual work environment, and they are self-motivated; they need a goal for them to achieve, and less interaction with the others”.

The managers said that their ENZ subordinates show less concern for authority figures, compared to Chinese workers. Eight out of nine managers claimed they have had experiences in the past when they felt their authority as a manager was undermined. When they were asked if they had ever felt that their powers were challenged by the ENZ staff, all but one of the managers answered *yes*. Manager A (personal communication, January 16, 2009) stated,

When I first started dealing with them [the ENZ subordinates], I felt that although I was the boss, they would still stand by their principles. This is a big difference [from the Chinese staff]...they may [be] strongly against an issue that they disagree with. Chinese are more conventional, so that once the boss has decided on an issue, they would not insist [on changing it]...[I] should respect the rules of the culture, unless I decide not to hire any ENZ employees. I have to compromise to and accept [the culture] to have [my business] localised [*sic*]. And [because of] this, sometimes I had a sense of frustration about my authority.

Manager W (personal communication, January 14, 2009) said,

There were] many minor [challenging behaviours from the ENZ staff]. For example, when I worked in McDonalds before...if an ENZ employee was delegated some tasks that they [were] not willing to take, they would show unhappiness immediately. The Chinese employees there might be [unhappy] too, but in comparison, the ENZ employees show [their emotions] more strongly and obviously, and their [level of] confrontational emotions can be higher.

One third of the managers talked about what they perceive a good manager should be in ENZ subordinates' eyes. The managers used the words *understanding*, *casual*, *less hierarchical*, *respectful* (toward the employees), and *efficient* (on problem-solving), to describe the qualities of being a good manager or leader. "In their [ENZ subordinates'] eyes, yeah, a good manager is probably more understanding and more...casual. Definitely not hierarchy [*sic*] though. It is also the company's culture. We are flat," said Manager Z (personal communication, December 17, 2008). Manager C (personal communication, January 21, 2009) observed, "I worked in [an] ENZ owned company before, and I know [that the typical] ENZ boss is very kind and casual." When asked his view of how his ENZ subordinates see the power he has, A (personal communication, January 16, 2009) replied,

I think I have no problem. They should accept my management style. ... Basically, I show good respect to their expertise. They are in charge of their areas completely. If they have any problems, they call me Mr. Efficiency, because I solve problems on time. This is what I believe a good manager should do. Your care to your employees is the source of your power.

In communicating power distance values with Chinese managers at work, the ENZ subordinates reportedly see themselves as equal to their managers, although they acknowledge their superiors' management roles. "I really appreciate the ENZ employees. They don't feel they are lower level [*sic*] than their bosses. They are very confident. They do whatever they should be doing, instead of doing it according to the boss's facial expression and the look in the eyes" (C, personal communication, January 21, 2009). The Chinese perceive ENZ subordinates' power distance as allowing them to challenge the decisions of the managers, asking questions about things they disagree with, and expressing their own opinions to the managers and

expecting them to be accepted. This view was also expressed by Manager Z (personal communication, December 17, 2008),

Of course, [they challenge me] all the time...It's because, well, I think it's New Zealand culture, which is different from the Asian culture. In Asian culture, I know people were more subjected to the hierarchy. So if the boss tells you to do something you do it. But New Zealand culture is different, like they always challenge.

As reported by the managers, the ENZ subordinates may become less challenging and more cooperative when they are dealing with the owner-managers than when they are dealing with the employee-managers. When employee-manager W (personal communication, January 14, 2009) was refused by the ENZ manager (subordinate) on the request he made, he asked for support from the Chinese boss (owner). The ENZ manager finally met the request. Although manager S is an employee-manager, she is the top boss in all of New Zealand. She believes that her ENZ subordinates understand her power, and therefore they show more respect to her than they do to other managers in the organisation. "I feel that if you have the power, they [the ENZ subordinates] see it. [They] know the power you have. They also know that I am the one responsible for their pay reviews. I have the right to increase or drop their pay rates" (S, personal communication, January 14, 2009).

Owner-manager M (personal communication, December 28, 2008) claimed that only he had the power to tell people off in the company, and an ENZ subordinate refused to acknowledge the authority of the Chinese manager that M had newly appointed to act on his behalf in daily business operations. In other words, M said that both he and the ENZ subordinates believed only M had the right to tell people off in the company.

Immigrant versus Member of Host Culture

Immigrant identity

The managers view their immigrant identity as unrelated to PD and authority. In other words, when they were asked directly about whether they felt being an immigrant diminished their power as managers, the answer was no. They explained that since they have been here for a long enough time to learn and understand the culture, they know how to exercise power with ENZ subordinates.

Seventy-seven percent of the managers stated that during the period when they first started managing ENZ subordinates, they worked hard to win respect from the ENZ subordinates. Manager L explained that was because the ENZ subordinates and he were cultural strangers, who did not understand each other, and lacked confidence and trust in each other. It took him time to build up confidence and trust from the ENZ subordinates about his abilities, which L believed were power of personality, financial power, and business power.

Manager M (personal communication, December 28, 2008) also claimed that when he first launched his business, the ENZ workers he employed did not show as much respect to him as they do now,

At the beginning...it takes [*sic*] time to settle down. I had to understand them. They have [*sic*] to understand me. They might be thinking I was just another Chinese man who worked [at] takeaway[s]. That's what [is in] their mind, which [was] Chinese are not good on [*sic*] management.

M used dominating and threatening styles in dealing with the non-compliance communication behaviours of the ENZ. "I changed them. If I don't change you, I am sorry, you have to go. That's the thing. Then people see, 'Oh, okay, that person has [*sic*] been taken up (told off) and [left]'. That's a good warning to everyone" (M, personal communication, December 28, 2008)

Dominant cultural group

Although Chinese are a minority cultural group in New Zealand, their culture can be dominant in some circumstances, when businesses are owned and run by Chinese, serving the general domestic market as well as serving the Chinese community in New Zealand. In organisations like this, the ENZ subordinate employees become the minority group temporarily every day when they come to work. Manager S (personal communication, January 14, 2009) says that although the ENZ subordinates can feel the difference in conflict communication styles and PD values between their culture and the Chinese culture, they show an avoiding communication style. In other words, she says they give in, because they feel that disagreement comes from cultural value differences that are hardly changeable. She reported that she found the ENZ employees compromising. As S (personal communication, January 14, 2009) explained,

I feel that the [*sic*] most of the time they (the ENZ subordinates) compromise. Especially when they face problems that are related to culture, they will compromise, for they would [*sic*] believe it is Chinese culture, and it is the way that Chinese look at the issue. They would not be disputing too much about it. Actually, I feel that in companies where Chinese are the minorities or 50 percent of the company's labourers, the problems [disputes] can be more likely to exist. They [the ENZ employees] would feel that 'You [Chinese employees] are [the] majority [of the company], and you all hold the same opinion about one particular issue. That's it then; I wouldn't worry too much about it'.

Two of the managers explained they become less powerful, and are likely to give in a conflict, when the ENZ subordinates have expertise knowledge, and therefore expertise power, and when they believe they are the minority cultural group. Owner C (personal communication, January 21, 2009) explained that she usually

gives in when she disagrees with the ENZ workers in making decisions about the shop, as she believes that they know better about the market than she does,

We (C and the ENZ workers) often have different ideas. But, the [*sic*] most of the time, I would use theirs, because I feel I am always learning from them.

Their ideas, I believe, are more appropriate to our business. My thoughts can be influenced by the Asian culture, so I give up. My employees are from the dominant culture of the society, with which I am seldom in contact with [*sic*].

My thoughts can be out-of-date because of my age, can be Chinese style”

(personal communication, January 21, 2009).

Other non-Culture Factors

A number of non-culture factors were pointed out by the managers, which they believe also play a part in their choices of conflict communication styles. They include the size of the business, the personalities of the managers, the number of years of work experience of the managers, and the language barrier.

Manager J (personal communication, December, 19, 2008) explained that he is able to implement a flat communication structure in his branch, because the size of the company is relatively small. He mentioned that in the main office, the number of employees is a few times larger than his branch. The structure in the main office is more hierarchical, rules are set formally, and the boss is more distanced from the frontline staff.

Eighty-eight percent of the managers indicated that their choices of conflict communication styles were also decided by their personalities. A couple of managers mentioned that work experience and growing knowledge changed their ways of communicating according to the situational context, and that can be unrelated to the culture of the other party, but is a more general management approach,

I think every manager grows up from the first day they try to start their own business to something different each year. It's more than cultural. There is something to do with experience, to do with this person's growing knowledge. These all lead up to the changes. [The] cultural factor is one of the factors [to] lead to change," (L, personal communication, December 22, 2008).

Last but not least, the managers also claimed that proficient English language ability is a key factor that enables the managers' communication with their ENZ subordinates.

Chapter 5: Analysis

Conflict Communication Styles

People's choices of conflict communication styles can be explained by cultural variability dimensions: individualism-collectivism (Brew & Cairns, 2004; Smith et al., 1998; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2002; Trubisky et al., 1991); power distance (Hofstede, 2001); the concept of low- and high-context communication (Brew & Cairns, 2004; Hall, 1976), and face concerns (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991).

Individualists tend to use more self-defensive, controlling, dominating, and competitive styles in managing conflict than do collectivists. By comparison, collectivists tend to use more integrative and compromising styles in dealing with conflict than do individualists (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001, p. 48). Self-face concern is highly related to dominating conflict style, and other-face concern is highly associated with avoiding, integrating, and compromising styles of conflict management (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991).

Brew and Cairns (2004) propose that Hall's (1976) high- and low-context communication as a dimension in cultures, speaks directly to communication style types. Low-context communication is usually practiced in cultures that value individualist goals. "Members of low-context cultures tend to separate person and issue, are confrontational, and the members use logic-deductive thinking and explicit codes of speech. In contrast, members of high-context communication cultures typically value collectivist goals, intermesh person and issue, are indirect, and rely on contextual cues and situational knowledge, resulting in the use of implicit references and indirect speech acts"(Brew & Cairns, 2004, p. 333).

Chinese conflict communication styles as reported in the literature

According to the literature, Chinese culture is one of the collectivistic and high-context cultures. Chinese are likely to be more concerned about the group's needs, goals, and interests than in individualistic cultures (Trubisky et al., 1991). The indirect conflict communication style is favoured by members of collectivistic cultures (Hall, 1976). Therefore, Chinese tend to avoid conflict due to the assumption that conflict is destructive of harmony in relationships (Brew & Cairns, 2004), as maintaining harmony in the organisation is important for Chinese managers (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001; Tjosvold & Sun, 2003).

According to Ting-Toomey and Oetzel, (2001), Chinese managers, when dealing with minor conflict, “are supposed to consider the personal relationships and try to smooth over the conflict and maintain interpersonal harmony in the workplace” (p. 146). They also suggest that the Chinese managers are expected to use conflict communication styles that are nurturing and mentoring, because in Chinese culture, subordinates want to be treated like family members (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

Research in intercultural communication shows that Chinese are likely to use integrative and compromising conflict communication styles (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001), which are claimed as cooperative conflict styles (Leung & Kim, 2008); in task-related conflicts, Chinese are likely to use obliging and avoiding conflict styles (Chua & Gudykunst, 1987; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991; Trubisky et al., 1991) that are unassertive styles (Trubisky et al., 1991). The smoothing conflict communication style is another unassertive conflict style, which emphasises avoiding conflict and maintaining harmony (Leung & Kim, 2008).

Chinese conflict communication as described by interviewees

In accordance with the literature, the findings of this research show that smoothing, integrating, obliging, and avoiding are conflict communication styles

often used by the managers. For the purpose of maintaining harmony, the managers seem to prefer to use unassertive and cooperative types of conflict communication styles (refer to Chapter 2 for definitions). Smoothing and integrating styles are often the first choices of the managers (for example, Managers L, J, S, and A) to communicate with the ENZ staff, when they are aware that potential conflicts are likely to happen. S (personal communication, January 14, 2009) also felt that sometimes she has to compromise with her ENZ subordinates in the hope of preventing or ending a conflict, especially when the conflict with the ENZ subordinates is a minor disagreement with an ENZ manager (who is also subordinate to the Chinese manager).

In response to the immediate conflict scenario described in the interviews, four managers chose option C, that is, an integrating conflict communication style. Three managers of the other five chose option C as one of their combined options. The obliging conflict communication style was preferred by two managers as one of their options. Three managers chose avoiding as a favoured conflict communication style, and one of them preferred the avoiding conflict communication style to all other styles, as the only option in dealing with the immediate conflict situation. The style of compromising and the style of getting help from a third-party were only chosen by one manager as one of the options.

In dealing with the long-term conflict scenario, eight out of the nine managers chose the option that described the integrating conflict communication style. Two of the eight managers had more than two options. Only one manager chose the compromising conflict communication style alone to deal with the situation.

The responses by the managers to the conflict scenarios reveal the managers' intended conflict communication styles; however, these responses do not necessarily conform to the conflict communication styles actually used by the Chinese managers

in the real conflict situations. In other words, the integrating conflict communication style is the ideal conflict communication style in the managers' perceptions, although it was not used as often as the responses to the scenarios suggest.

Without first hearing the definitions and descriptions of the conflict communication styles, the managers were asked to describe in their own words their conflict communication styles in work-related conflict situations with their ENZ subordinates. In the descriptions given by the managers, the word *compromise* was used by managers S (personal communication, January 14, 2009), A (personal communication, January 16, 2009), and C (personal communication, January 21, 2009) to describe the situations in which they gave in to the ENZ subordinates in conflicts or disagreements. In fact, this is a use of obliging conflict communication style, which is to concede to the other party in a conflict (Leung & Kim, 2008). The intention of *avoiding conflict* was also revealed from the descriptions of the managers. Some managers, such as L (personal communication, December 22, 2008), W (personal communication, January 14, 2009), and A (personal communication, January 16, 2009), preferred to avoid direct conflict by employing third-party mediators. The value of maintaining harmony is revealed in various ways from the managers' descriptions. "There was no direct 'no' from him to me. ...on the surface we all work together harmoniously" said owner-manager L (personal communication, December 22, 2008). When manager S was asked if she thought the compromise she used in dealing with the employees (as reported by herself) was typical Chinese communication behaviour, she denied it,

I don't think so. Because I manage both Chinese and ENZ employees, I think the essence of management is the same regardless in the East or the West. ...

Moreover, I think everyone knows, although China now is promoting a harmonious society, in fact, it is the same in New Zealand: everyone in New

Zealand promotes harmony. Harmony is an important matter that is above everything” (personal communication, January 14, 2009).

In this subjective view, Manager S reflects a typical Chinese cultural value. Because of the cultural differences, the managers find themselves spending more time on exchanging ideas with the subordinates to make sure the ENZ subordinates understand them. This is the managers’ implementation of an integrative style.

These findings generally support Hypothesis 3: Chinese managers prefer Chinese conflict communication styles (cooperative and unassertive), even with the ENZ subordinates.

Chinese managers’ self-reported adaptations in their conflict communication styles

The findings show that the managers also used aggressive conflict communication styles in some conflict situations. Chinese managers occasionally chose aggressive conflict communication styles, dominating (Manager G, W, and Z,) and threatening (Manager M) in conflict communication situations with their ENZ subordinates. In the actual practice, the descriptions given by the managers showed that they used a mixture of conflict communication styles in order to achieve their ultimate goals. For example, some managers used the integrating conflict communication style as their first choice; however, when faced with confrontational communication behaviour, the managers acted strong and chose dominating and even threatening styles to deal with the ENZ subordinates. Manager G used a dominating conflict communication style when he told his ENZ subordinate to stop arguing and to do what he was told. Manager W was being dominating when he tried to make the ENZ manager (subordinate) follow his orders, and he felt angry when the ENZ manager refused. In addition, owner-manager M used threatening conflict communication to deal with an ENZ manager’s non-compliance behaviour.

Moreover, some managers used a conflict communication style that combined integrative and dominating styles. Five managers (G, S, Z, A, and L) said in different ways that they allowed discussion from the subordinates when making a decision, and provided opportunities for them to express their ideas or disagreements. But the final decision was made by them. Manager G said if he was not persuaded by the ENZ subordinates after discussion, they had to do as G wished; Manager S said she liked to listen to different opinions, but she made the final decision.

When the managers were asked if they used the same conflict communication styles when they communicated with their Chinese subordinates, they indicated that they felt the Chinese subordinates were not as challenging as the ENZ subordinates; when they delegated a task to a Chinese subordinate, normally the subordinate just did as the managers wished, so there was no need for them to use a dominating communication style. The findings reveal that the managers' choices of conflict communication styles were affected by the other conflict party's conflict communication styles, which are influenced by their own PD values.

Furthermore, the findings also reveal that *face* is a factor that influences the choices of conflict communication styles by the Chinese managers. As suggested in the literature, when in conflict, the ENZ subordinates' individualist, culture predicts, they will show high concern for their own face. The confrontational communication behaviours reported by the Chinese managers show their intention of protecting their own face. In contrast, the Chinese managers, who are collectivists, show high concern for the other party's face in conflict, which result their conflict communication styles of obliging, smoothing, avoiding and integrating. However, the Chinese managers with high PD value would expect more respect and obedience conflict communication styles from their subordinates rather than the confrontational communication style of their ENZ subordinates. The Chinese managers used

dominating and even a threatening conflict communication style in some incidents, claiming their demand for respect and obedience as managers.

Generally, the managers acknowledged that they had become more direct in their conflict communication styles. Manager G (personal communication, December 11, 2008) claimed he had learned the ENZ style of communication from his previous ENZ manager. Manager Z (personal communication, December 17, 2008) indicated that she as a subordinate also challenged her boss, and she believed it was an adaptation to the ENZ conflict communication style. Manager L (personal communication, December 22, 2008) reported that he has become more straightforward and “less soft” when communicating with the ENZ subordinates. Manager W (personal communication, January 14, 2009) explained that he had been rather obliging in the beginning of managing ENZ subordinates, who were using a straightforward and dominating communication style in conflicts. Manager A (personal communication, January 16, 2009) admitted that his management style is now more towards ENZ style, which he perceives as more straightforward. He reported that after observing and learning from the management styles of colleagues who were ENZ managers, he became less obliging, and got used to the ENZ subordinates’ culture’s freedom of speech. Manager Z (personal communication, December 17, 2008) explained that she expected her subordinates to come to her directly when have problems, instead of to Z’s assistant, and she always approached the subordinates directly when they failed to do it. Owner-manager L (personal communication, December 22, 2008) urged his ENZ manager to complete a project development plan “in a very direct way”.

Therefore, the research shows the more straightforward communication style in the managers’ communications to the ENZ subordinates is an adaptation to the ENZ conflict communication style. Since the managers used a mixture of conflict

communication styles, it is argued that the use of dominating and threatening styles are modifications of the Chinese managers' conflict communication styles, the modifications depend on the specific conflict situations.

ENZ subordinates' dominating conflict communication styles, according to the managers

“Individualists tend to use more self-defensive, controlling, dominating, and competitive styles” (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). ENZ subordinates are members of an individualistic culture (Carl et al., 2004). Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) suggest that subordinates in individualistic cultures are supposed to bring problems they have to their managers' attention, and that such behaviour reveals individualistic cultural members have high self-concerns. As reported in Chapter 4, five managers said they found the ENZ subordinates could be dominating and very direct in dealing with conflict with their managers, in contrast to a submissive communication style they were used to from Chinese subordinates.

According to the Chinese managers, the ENZ subordinates demonstrated the typical individualistic, low-context, and high self-face oriented culture. When describing the ENZ subordinates' conflict communication behaviours, the following comments were made: ENZ subordinates can be pushy on a particular issue in hoping to change the Chinese manager's mind (manager S); ENZ subordinates are more likely to defend themselves when they are questioned by the Chinese managers than the Chinese subordinates (managers G, M, J, W & L); ENZ subordinates are up-front and straightforward in expressing their ideas with the Chinese managers, and even challenging or questioning the Chinese managers' decisions (managers A, J, C, W, G, S, & Z). In addition, the ENZ subordinates are often goal-oriented and focused on the task when communicating in conflicts (managers A, W, S, Z) show their individualistic value. The Chinese managers found that their ENZ subordinates

were more likely to defend themselves when in disagreements (managers J, Z, W, G, M, and L). This reflects the high self-face concern culture of the ENZ subordinates.

The adaptation to the ENZ conflict communication styles of the Chinese managers and the adaptation of their understanding of the ENZ subordinates' conflict communication styles provide evidence to disconfirm Hypothesis 4: ENZ conflict communication styles are rejected by Chinese managers.

Power Distance Perceptions

The managers' Power Distance (PD) perceptions in their work contexts differ from their own PD values. Their PD *perceptions* are about the reported communication behaviours of their subordinates, as well as of themselves, whereas, PD *values* are revealed from the managers' preferred, ideal communication behaviours for their subordinates and for themselves as managers (Hofstede, 2001). This section therefore analyses the difference between the PD perceptions of the actual contexts and the PD ideal values of the Chinese managers toward their ENZ subordinates in New Zealand workplaces.

Hofstede's Power Distance Index Values

Hofstede (2001) developed the concept of power distance, which helps to identify the relationship between boss and subordinate in a hierarchy, including its values components. As stated in Chapter 2, an asymmetrical power distribution over members within an organisation is inevitable (Hofstede, 2001). The unequal distribution of power is formalised in hierarchies, and the boss-subordinate relationship is the basic element for the organisation's hierarchical pyramids (Hofstede, 2001).

The boss-subordinate relationship is a basic human relationship which bears resemblance to even more fundamental relationships earlier in life: those of parent and child and of teacher and pupil. Both as bosses and as subordinates people can be

expected to carry over values and norms from their early life experiences as children and school pupils (Hofstede, 2001, p. 82),

The views of the managers in this research support this statement,

We've got big influence from the history. It's the people they show their respect to--older people. And to the work; they show their respect to the manager, the boss. It's kind of a culture. But, in New Zealand [culture], it's very minor [unimportant]. I disagree with that (M, personal communication, December 28, 2008).

“Actually, Chinese may have a custom which is that our education mode was to teach us [to] be absolute [*sic*] obedient to the elders and bosses. Obedience is like your nature”(S, personal communication, January 14, 2009).

In Hofstede's (2001) summary of the key differences between low and high PD values in work organisations (Table 1), Chinese culture ranks high in PD values, and New Zealand culture is low in PD values. Accordingly, this difference should be evident in the present study.

Table 1. Key Differences Between Low- and High PDI- Societies I: Work

Organisation	
Low PD	High PD
Decentralized decision structures; less concentration of authority;	Centralised decision structures; more concentration of authority
Flat organisation pyramids	Tall organisation pyramids
Small proportion of supervisory personnel	Large portion of supervisory personnel
Hierarchy in organizations means an Inequality of roles, established for convenience;	Hierarchy in organisations reflects the existential inequality between higher-ups and lower-downs
The ideal boss is a resourceful democrat; Sees self as practical, orderly, and relying on support;	The ideal boss is a well-meaning autocrat or good father; sees self as benevolent decision maker.
Managers rely on personal experience and on subordinates;	Managers rely on formal rules
Subordinate expect to be consulted;	Subordinates expect to be told
Consultative leadership leads to satisfaction performance, and productivity.	Authoritative leadership and close supervision lead to satisfaction, performance, and productivity.
Subordinate-superior relations pragmatic	Subordinate-superior relations polarized, often emotional

Note: From Adapted from “Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations (2nd ed.),” by Hofstede, 2001, p.107.

Chinese managers’ perceptions of the boss-subordinate relationship

Although all the interviewed managers perceived that Chinese culture is high in PD, the research findings indicate that the Chinese managers perceived lower PD values for themselves than expected, according to Hofstede’s PDI values (1984, 2001). These differences are matched with Hofstede (1984, 2001)’s proposed low PD culture values in comparison with high PD culture values (see Table 1). In

Hofstede's (1984) study of PD for IBM, he argued that "power distance is a measure of the interpersonal power or influence between a boss and a subordinate as perceived by the *less* powerful of the two, S" (pp. 70-71). This research study focuses on the perceptions of the Chinese managers, and although on the one hand, as managers they are the more powerful ones in their organisations, their immigrant identity, on the other hand, makes them less powerful as members of a minority group in New Zealand society. How they perceive their power and how it is exercised in their communication with their ENZ employees contributes in finding out the PD values and perceptions of themselves and the ENZ subordinates. That in turn contributes to an understanding of their conflict communication styles.

As reported in Chapter 4, power to make decisions is important to all the managers. A number of views expressed by the managers about the communication style they use in a decision-making process show a low PD perception for both managers and their ENZ subordinates. Six of the managers, or two-thirds of them, agreed that the ENZ subordinates are usually direct when they have questions about any issue. When making decisions, five managers said they listened to subordinates' opinions, and two managers indicated they always gave explanations for the decisions they made and allowed opportunities for the subordinates to ask questions or make suggestions. Manager A (personal communication, January 16, 2009) reported,

My management ideology is formed in New Zealand. I experience their [NZ] culture, slowly. Of course, I also learn from the textbooks. But more important is to practice in the real world. So I believe a leader's power is not given by his/her status, but by his/her judgements and decisions."

This view demonstrates that Manager A's PD value is lower than the typical PD value of Chinese as described by Hofstede (2003), in which he states that bosses in

high PD cultures emphasize individual credibility and expertise, democratic decision-making processes, equal rights and relations. The managers' comments, on the other hand, reveal a lower PD value and decentralized decision structures.

Power in organisations is mainly exercised through influence on people's careers (Luhmann, 1975). When asked, in their view, how their subordinates see their power as managers, Manager S (personal communication, January 14, 2009) explained that New Zealand's work environment [the employment environment] influences employees' values toward the boss-subordinate relationship. S used the words "care" or "don't care" to describe the views of her employees toward her power as a manager to dismiss them. She said,

I feel in this overseas work environment, even Chinese [have] changed a lot. As I wanted to say earlier, so many people don't care [about my power as a manager]. Because they found that it is the way how the New Zealanders [members of the host culture] live. If I fire an employee, they can find another job tomorrow, with similar pay rate, not so much difference, so that they don't care. Because they don't care, they wouldn't feel [concerned] about your authority, or agree with you all the time" (S, personal communication, January 14, 2009).

In other words, in manager S's view, both the ENZ and Chinese employees have little regards for her managerial powers to fire them.

Manager L also agreed with this view by indicating that his power and authority are more respected now due to the stronger competition in the job market than in years past when he started the business,

I would say I get more straightforward, and less soft. For example, now, we have more Kiwi employees standing outside waiting for positions. That mean[s] in our organisation we face stronger competition. They all know that. And they [are]

facing all these more applicants coming in, the stronger competition is coming in. they know the organisation is safe, they don't want to lose the organisation. I would say they value the organisation and their positions better" (personal communication, December 22, 2008)

When the managers were asked whether they felt their immigrant status diminishes their power as manager, they answered "No". In their view, the challenges by the ENZ subordinates to the Chinese managers' power and authority were mainly due to the cultural values in the two different cultures, and were less related to their immigrant status. Therefore, Hypothesis 2, which is "In the Chinese managers' perceptions, ENZ subordinates think they have more power because of their status as members of the ethnic majority," was not confirmed.

Chinese managers' perceptions of the ENZ boss-subordinate relationship

According to Hofstede (2001), "Differences in the exercise of power in a hierarchy relate to the value systems of both bosses and subordinates and not to the values of the bosses only, even though they are the more powerful partners"(p. 82). The findings reveal that the ENZ subordinates demonstrate low PD values, which is consistent with Hofstede's (1984) summary. All the managers claimed that through daily interactions with their ENZ subordinates, they found that the ENZ subordinates showed less respect for the Chinese managers' authority than did the Chinese subordinates in the ways of being confrontational and challenging, being task-focused in making decisions, and being less concerned about others' face even when they are dealing with their boss. Publicly demonstrating anger, directly refusing requests, not meeting requests, behaving aggressively and arrogantly, making direct and public criticism of others, and not appropriately treating the status of others are the common face-losing behaviours in business environments (Applbaum, 2006). These behaviours were consistent with the descriptions given by

the managers about the ENZ subordinates' communication behaviours. These are the same behaviours that resulted in the managers' culture shock in their initial dealings with the ENZ subordinates.

Although the low PD value of the ENZ subordinates was perceived by all the managers, the individual PD scores the managers gave for their relationships with the ENZ subordinates differed from each other, which indicates the differences in the power relationship between each manager and ENZ subordinates. Hofstede (2001) argues that, "In the same way that patterns of inequality between groups in society are supported by both dominant and subordinate values, patterns of power inequality within organizations reflect the values of both parties" (p. 82).

Manager C (personal communication, January 21, 2009) described that in her daily interaction with the ENZ subordinates, the ENZ subordinates communicate as if they are her equals. As discussed earlier, Manager C demonstrated the lowest PD value and PD perception of her relationship with ENZ subordinates among the nine managers. According to C, the main reason she holds less power than other managers is that she lacks expertise in the business. In comparison, Manager S's ENZ subordinates showed higher PD behaviours than did C's, because Manager S believed the ENZ subordinates were a minority cultural group in the mainly Chinese organisation. She gave the opinion that that results in compromising conflict communication behaviours by ENZ subordinates and higher tolerance toward Chinese cultural values, including the PD value.

The Relationship of PD, I-C and Face, and Conflict Communication Styles

The managers showed understanding of the differences between their Chinese culture and the culture of their ENZ subordinates, leading to the differences between their PD values and conflict communication styles. In general, all the managers

claimed that as new immigrants to New Zealand they have adapted New Zealand culture, either intentionally or unintentionally, and to varying degrees.

It can be argued that the connection between high power distance and a cooperative and integrative conflict communication style seems to be contradictory. People with more power and demonstrated high power distance values may naturally prefer to be dominating, as they have the ability to take control over the party of less power. However, the literature suggests that Chinese culture, ranked high in power distance values, has a high face-concern for others, which results in the use of a cooperative and integrative conflict communication style. This claim is supported by the findings of this research. The preferred conflict communication styles of the Chinese managers in the three scenarios show that the nine Chinese managers favoured the integrating conflict communication style the most.

However, some of their reported incidents show exceptions to the managers' preferred conflict communication behaviours. For example, Manager C showed lower PD value than the other eight managers, and used obliging conflict communication style, while manager M showed higher PD value, and used threatening conflict communication style when communicating with his ENZ (subordinate) manager, who refused to comply with his orders. This supports the argument made by Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2002) that individual PD scores should be given attention, especially when studying a small-sized sample.

The degree the businesses depend on the local ENZ subordinates' skills influences the power relationship between the managers and the ENZ subordinates. The findings show that expertise power is an important power source that decides the Chinese managers' PD values towards their ENZ subordinates. Managers A (personal communication, January 16, 2009) and C (personal communication, January 21, 2009) explained that they gave in to the ENZ subordinates in conflict

communication, because they believed their ENZ subordinates were more expert in the business than they were and had better understanding of the local business environment than they did. This reflects that the Chinese managers acknowledge the ENZ subordinates hold more expertise power than they do. Moreover, Manager L (personal communication, December 22, 2008) believes his ENZ (subordinate) manager accepted his authority and power because L has more expert knowledge than the ENZ manager. Being an owner-manager like L, Manager A showed a lower PD value than L did, and this can be explained by the different levels of their respective expertise in the field. Moreover, Manager C, who showed the lowest PD behaviour towards her ENZ subordinates among the nine Chinese managers, indicated she had absolute no idea about the business when she first started it, and she had been highly reliant on her ENZ subordinates in all the aspects of the business. Manager G, who used the dominating conflict communication style with the ENZ subordinate, indicated that the manager position he was in could only be held by someone who is proficient in both Chinese and English communication skills, as the local Chinese community was the major target market.

Through learning about their ENZ subordinates' PD values, the managers have found explanations for the ENZ subordinates' communication behaviours, more specifically in conflict situations. While the owner-managers' adaptation to NZ culture was as the result of considering the development of their businesses, the employee-managers were more focused on having their management style accepted by their ENZ subordinates. Therefore, new balances in the power relationships between the managers and the ENZ subordinates have been created. The Chinese managers' conflict communication styles have been modified as the result of acknowledging the new power relationship. This means their current conflict

communication styles and PD values are different from the time when they first started working with the ENZ subordinates.

All the managers indicated that when giving instructions or orders to the ENZ subordinates, they found that they had to be prepared to give good explanations and sometimes even to argue with the ENZ subordinates. They reported that if they were dealing with Chinese subordinates in the same situation, who are expected to anticipate the needs and wishes of their managers (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001), they would not need to give the explanations. Therefore, it can be argued that the managers' adapted conflict communication styles were affected by the ENZ subordinates' communication behaviours (which resulted from their PD values). The Chinese managers' perceptions of the ENZ subordinates' PD views were reflected in their use of conflict communication styles.

Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusions

This qualitative research study aimed to explore the relationship between the power distance perceptions and the conflict communication styles of Chinese managers of ENZ subordinates in New Zealand workplaces. The study is based on the perceptions of the Chinese managers of the communication behaviours of their ENZ subordinates as well as their own, specifically in conflict situations at work.

The existing literature about intercultural conflict communications focuses on examining the relationship of conflict communication styles and key cultural constructs of PD, I-C, and face concerns. Very little literature directly looks at the relationship of PD and conflict communication styles. However, the evidence in this study supports a relationship between high PD and a conflict communication style that seeks cooperation with subordinates. In studies that make comparisons between cultures, American culture has been used the most to represent an individualistic culture. Although known as an individualistic and low PD culture, New Zealand has been overlooked in the intercultural conflict communication research literature.

Chinese culture, according to the consensus of scholars, is collectivistic and has a high PD. The literature suggests that the conflict communication behaviours of Chinese are predictable from studying their culture. In other words, Chinese demonstrate high other-face concerns in communicating conflicts. Moreover, the collectivist Chinese culture values of maintaining harmony in relationships, and avoiding direct conflict. The Chinese conflict communication behaviours influenced by the culture tend to be more indirect leading to obliging, smoothing, avoiding and integrating conflict communication styles.

By using a qualitative data-collection method, qualitative interviewing, the study investigated nine Chinese managers' perceptions of a) their own power distance values; b) their perceptions of their ENZ subordinates' power distance values; c)

their choices of conflict communication styles; d) their ENZ subordinates' conflict communication styles. Both quantifying and non-quantifying were used as the data-analysis methods. The relationships of each of the above four variables were studied and analysed.

Answers to the Research questions

The overall question that guided this research project was, *What is the relationship of the cultural dimensions of power distance, individualism-collectivism, and face concerns, and of immigrant status on the conflict communication styles of Chinese managers of ENZ subordinates in the New Zealand workplace?* The question grew out of an interest in exploring the relationship between culture and the way Chinese managers in New Zealand communicate about conflict. PD, as one of Hofstede's (Hofstede, 1984, 2001) cultural variables, is used in this research in finding out about the nine Chinese managers' PD values, and their perceptions of their ENZ subordinates' PD values, which are used to compare with the conflict communication styles of these Chinese managers in communicating with their ENZ subordinates. Some previous studies looked at Chinese managers conflict communication styles in China (such as Chen & Cheung, 2005; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001), but no study has been done about Chinese managers' conflict communication styles in New Zealand. This research topic aimed to explore this undiscovered area.

The research found that the Chinese managers' conflict communication styles are influenced by their PD values and perceptions. The power relationship of the Chinese managers with their ENZ subordinates is different from what they had experienced with their Chinese subordinates. This is a factor in the Chinese manager's changed PD values. The change in PD values has also affected their choice of conflict communication styles with their ENZ subordinates. Another factor

that affected the Chinese managers' use of conflict communication styles was their perceptions of the ENZ subordinates' PD views.

The relationship of PD and conflict communication styles suggested by the literature is the lower PD and more individualistic cultures prefer a more dominating conflict communication style. This is reflected in the ENZ subordinates' PD views and conflict communication styles as perceived by their Chinese managers. The research also found that the nine Chinese managers demonstrated lower PD values than was suggested in the literature, and did use a dominating conflict communication style in some circumstances. These findings differ from the predictions of the published studies about both Chinese PD values (according to Hofstede, 1984, 2001); and conflict communication styles (according to Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

The dominating conflict style used by the Chinese managers in some conflict situations can be also explained by face-concerns and I-C. The Chinese managers, as collectivists, normally show high other-face concerns in conflict that in turn results in their use of the typical conflict communication styles suggested in the literature. When the individualist ENZ subordinates being dominating, which reflects their intention of protecting their own face, the Chinese managers changed their preferred conflict communication styles to confront to the ENZ subordinates conflict communication behaviours. They become more dominating and show self-face concerns.

Overall, the mixture of conflict communication styles—obliging, integrating, smoothing, dominating and threatening—used by the Chinese managers in different conflict situations may not necessarily always be consistent with the Chinese conflict communication styles suggested in the literature. The results of culture-general studies show members of collectivistic and high PD cultures are more obliging,

smoothing and integrating in conflict communications. The divergence from the literature can be the result of the differences in the managers as well as the influence of their ENZ subordinates' PD values.

Specifically, sub-question 1a asked, *Does the Chinese manager use Chinese conflict communication styles with the ENZ subordinates?* Sub-question 1b was closely related: *Does the Chinese manager modify Chinese conflict communication styles?* The predicted conflict communication styles in the literature—integrating, obliging, smoothing and avoiding—were used by the Chinese managers when in conflict with the ENZ subordinates. However, these typical Chinese conflict communication styles were not the only conflict communication styles used by the nine Chinese managers who participated in the study. The typical NZ conflict communication style dominating was preferred by the managers in some conflict situations. The mixtures of conflict communication styles used by the Chinese managers are the effect of the managers' changed PD values, the managers' perceptions of ENZ subordinates' PD values, and the ENZ subordinates' conflict communication styles in particular conflict situations.

Sub-question 2 asked: *If the Chinese managers' conflict communication styles changed, what are the reasons for modifying their conflict communication styles with the ENZ subordinates?* As has already been noted, the Chinese managers reported they modified their preferred conflict communication styles while dealing with conflicts with ENZ subordinates. In other words, the ENZ's dominating conflict communication style was the main reason for the managers' conflict communication styles modifications. Face-concerns as a culture factor also influenced the Chinese managers' choices of conflict communication styles.

The research also wanted to investigate the relationship of the Chinese managers' immigrant status and their conflict communication. Sub-question 3 posed

this question: *Does their immigrant role (less power than dominant culture) account for their modifications to their preferred conflict communication, in their perceptions?*

Their identity as immigrants was not regarded by the Chinese managers as a factor that influences either their conflict communication styles or the conflict communication styles of the ENZ subordinates. The managers all reported that their authority as managers was what mattered. This interesting finding calls for further research into the perceptions of ENZ subordinates of their Chinese managers, specifically regarding immigrant status.

Sub-question 4 aimed to find out how the Chinese managers see their ENZ subordinates' behaviour in conflict communication. It asked: *In the perceptions of the Chinese managers, do their ENZ subordinates use ENZ conflict communication styles?* The Chinese managers reported their ENZ subordinates use the conflict communication style predicted in the literature for low PD and individualist cultures with high self-face concerns—dominating. Their choice of conflict communication style with the Chinese managers was not influenced by the Chinese managers' conflict communication styles, but the by their own low PD value, in the Chinese managers perceptions. The managers reported that their collectivistic and high PD culture requires subordinates to show respect and obedience to authority, while the ENZ subordinates, as members of a low PD and individualistic culture, promote human equality, and advocate freedom of speech, which results in their dominating conflict communication style.

Significance

Gaining an understanding of the intercultural conflict communication in New Zealand workplaces is an important research goal. The study draws attention to intercultural conflict communication in the New Zealand workplace that has been overlooked in existing intercultural communication studies. The findings of the study

show that the conflict communication styles used by the Chinese managers can be different from the typical intercultural conflict communication styles as predicted in the existing literature. By exploring factors that contribute to this difference among the Chinese managers, this study reveals that the managers' communication styles have been affected by their subordinates of ENZ culture. Moreover, this research study also shows the importance and usefulness of the PD dimension in studying intercultural conflict communication.

Limitations and future directions

This study focuses on Chinese managers' perceptions. To gain a fuller understanding into the NZ intercultural conflict communication in the workplaces, further studies are needed. While this study is the first step in what could be a series of NZ intercultural communication research projects, the next step is studying the ENZ employees' perceptions of PD, their identity as New Zealanders of the European generations, and of conflict communication with Chinese managers as their subordinates.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions and Scenarios

1. How long have you been a manager?
2. How many staff do you manage?
3. Were you a manager in China, before coming to New Zealand? If so, for how long?
4. How many have you managed in the past?
5. Which one of the age groups do you belong to?
 - a) 20-30 30-40 40-50 50-60
6. Are your employees all European New Zealanders (ENZ)? (or have you ever managed ENZ subordinates?)
 1. In terms of managing people, managers usually have responsibility for directing, monitoring, introducing new policies, resolving conflicts, and generally enabling workers to accomplishing the goals of the organisation. Would you agree with any of these responsibilities? Would you like to add anything to or change any of them?
 2. What sort of power do you believe the manager has? (mention the five bases of power)
 3. Do you have these powers you mentioned in your organisation? (Why and why not?)
 4. In your view, how do your ENZ subordinates see the power you have?
 5. From your daily interactions with the ENZ employees, what are their understandings to the role of manager, in your opinion?
 6. In your view, would a Chinese subordinate have the same view as the ENZ subordinates?
 7. Do you feel the ENZ employees accept your authority as manager?
 8. Do the ENZ employees ever refer to your outsider identity?
 9. Do you feel being an immigrant diminishes your power as manager? (If so, what do you think the reasons are?)
 10. Can you tell me about a situation that illustrates what you've told me?
 11. Have you ever felt that your power in the organisation was challenged by an ENZ subordinate?
 12. We know that in our daily working environment, it is very common to have different ideas and opinions, whenever we are having a meeting to solve a problem, making a plan, or assigning a task. That can be happening to everyone

in the organisation. Can you tell me about a specific situation that has happened recently between ENZ employees who report to you, and what you did?

- 1) How would you describe the way you communicated during the conflict?
 - 2) How effective do you think your style was?
 - 3) How would you describe the way in which your subordinate(s) communicated during the conflict?
13. How effective do you think the way you communicated would be if the person you had disagreement with were a Chinese?
14. Would you prefer to adapt your conflict styles to manage the conflict with your ENZ subordinate better? (And why?)
15. Do you think your conflict style has changed when dealing with ENZ employees?
16. Or would you rather say you have replaced your Chinese conflict style with a different conflict style?
17. According to the examples you have given to me, would you think the same situation would happen between a Chinese subordinate and you? If different, in what way were they different? Example?
18. Have you ever involved in a disagreement episode where you were a third-party mediator?
19. Have you ever had any experience when your usual conflict style didn't work in a conflict with an ENZ subordinate? What was your solution to that?
20. Apart from the above discussions we had, is there anything you would like to add?

Scenario One

You are assigned by your boss (if the interviewee is the owner, ask him/her to imagine the situation) to design an organisational change plan. The plan is very important, for it involves lots of changes including new policies, and if implemented, it is going to make a big difference in the organisation. Which way listed below would you choose to help you accomplish the task?

1. You would draft a few possible options, then discuss each of them with your boss, and see which one of them your boss prefers.
2. You have a good knowledge of what you are doing, so that you would try your best to design the proposal, and confidently present it to your boss.
3. You would go and talk to your subordinates directly, and see how they would think about changing plan, and what suggestions do they have.
4. None of the above, I have my own way of doing this. (please explain)

Scenario Two

The new policy is now ready to be implemented. After the announcement, one of the subordinates you are managing directly, approaches you and says that he/she is shocked with the new policy. He/she requests you to reconsider it and make certain modifications. Otherwise, he or she will be resigning. This employee is one of your senior staff in the organisation, who has contributed a lot to the organisation, and is highly respected by everyone in the company. It would be a loss if the organisation loses the person. Which one of the following options would you choose?

1. Feel insulted. You are the one in charge of this. Besides, the policy has been passed by the boss. The behaviour of the staff shows that he/she is challenging your knowledge and is not giving you enough respect by threatening you that he/she would be resigning.
2. The person may have his/her own views. But everything has its pros and cons. Now it's the time to change, and everyone the organisation should accept it without questioning, since no policy can satisfy everyone in an organisation. You would just ignore the opposite voice, and hopefully he or she will calm down.
3. Arrange a meeting with the person immediately to show your respect toward the staff. Listen to his/her opinions. You would be happy to discuss with him/her, to see if you can work together to come out with a solution that satisfies his/her needs while still having the new policy implemented.
4. Tell the person the new policy cannot be changed. However, you would be happy to offer something else in exchange, since he/she is a valuable staff in the company, and you want to make sure he/she is happy.
5. Since employees are the most important asset of the organisation, you would report to your boss about this person's concern, and suggest amending the policy to satisfy the person's expectation.
6. Try to find another person in the organisation who has a good personal relationship with the person, and ask him/her to be the middle person (a third-person intermediary) to resolve this problem.
7. None of the above, I have my own way of dealing with this. (please explain)

Scenario Three

The new policy has been implemented for six months now. The person who had issues with it did not leave the company. You have noticed that he/she has been much more distanced from you, and has been avoiding talking to you since then. Which of the following would you do?

1. Go to talk to the person directly. Tell him /her that you have noticed this distance, and would like to meet with him/her to talk about it.
2. Pretend you haven't noticed the difference. As long as it does not affect his/her performance, it is his/her personal choice. You don't mind.
3. Try to be nice to the person, and do something to please him/her, so that he/she can forget about the past.
4. Be hard on the person; let him/her know that this is not the right behaviour toward his/her boss.
5. Apologise to the person for implementing the change. Tell the person that you will try to satisfy his/her expectations next time.
6. None of the above, I have my own way of dealing with it. (Please explain).

The relationship of power distance perceptions and conflict communication styles

My name is Yimei (Amanda) Wang, and I am a Master of International Communication student at Unitec. Part of my degree programme involves a research project on a subject of my choice. My research topic is to analyse the relationship of power distance (PD) and conflict communication styles that are held by Chinese managers and European New Zealander (ENZ) subordinates in New Zealand workplaces. I am doing the research within the School of Communication and have the approval of the school to carry out the research.

What I am doing

I want to analyse the relationship between the power distance perceptions of New Zealand Chinese managers and their use of conflict communication styles in dealing with ENZ subordinates. By taking part in this research project you will be helping me to understand the perceptions of Chinese managers towards their managerial role in dealing with their ENZ subordinates. More specifically, the research will focus on conflict communication styles and power distance perceptions.

What it will mean for you

I want to interview you and talk about:

- Your opinions toward your managerial role in your current position;
- The strategies you prefer to use in conflict situations at work;
- How would you describe the conflict communication behavior of you and your subordinate(s)?

I would like it if you could meet with me for about 60 minutes to talk about these kinds of things. I will come to you either during or after your working hours, (whichever you prefer). I will record the interviews and will be transcribing them (typing the conversation out) later. All features that could identify you will be removed and the record will be destroyed once the transcription is done.

If you agree to participate, you and your organisation will be asked to sign a consent form. This does not stop you from changing your mind if you wish to withdraw from the project. Your organisation can also ask for you to be withdrawn. However, because of the schedule, any withdrawals must be done within 2 weeks after we have interviewed you.

Your name and information that may identify you will be kept completely confidential. All information collected from you will be stored on a password protected file and only the researcher and my supervisors will have access to this information.

Please contact me if you need more information about the project. At any time if you have any concerns about the research project you can contact my supervisor: My supervisor is Linda Beamer, phone 815 4321 ext. 8893 or email lbeamer@unitec.ac.nz

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (#903)

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 10/12/2008 to 10/12/2009. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 7248). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.



The relationship of power distance perceptions and conflict communication styles

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that any withdrawals from the project must be done within 2 weeks after I have been interviewed.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me and that the only person who will know what I have said will be the researcher. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on a computer at Unitec for a period of 5 years.

I understand that my discussion with the researcher will be recorded and transcribed.

I understand that I can see the finished research document.

I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Participant Signature: *Date:*

Project Researcher: *Date:*

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (#903)

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 10/12/2008 to 10/12/2009. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 7248). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.