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From “Onion” to “Ocean”

Paradox and Change in National Cultures

Abstract: *Differing from the dominant bipolar paradigm of analyzing national cultures, this paper champions a dialectical approach that sees each national culture as having a life of its own full of dynamics and paradoxes. The paper calls for shifting our mindset from the Cold War “onion” way of analyzing culture to a new “ocean” way of understanding culture to capture the dynamics of national cultures and international cross-cultural management in the age of globalization.*

For decades, the field of international cross-cultural management has been dominated by a functionalist bipolar or dimensional paradigm of analyzing national cultures (e.g., Hofstede 1980, 1991, 2001; House et al. 2004; Trompenaars 1994). Two profound perspectives have prevailed in this paradigm. First, national cultures are divided into individualist or collectivist, feminine or masculine, and so forth. As Hofstede stated: “The vast majority of people in our world live in societies in which the interest of the group prevails over the interest of the individual. I will call these societies *collectivist*. . . . A minority of people in our world live in societies in which the interests of the individual prevail over the interests of the group, societies which I will call *individualist*” (1991, 50). Second, the paradigm represents a static and deterministic vision of culture. As Hofstede put it: “Cultures, especially national cultures, are

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extremely stable over time . . . Differences between national cultures at the end of the last century were already recognizable in the years 1900, 1800, and 1700, if not earlier. There is no reason they should not remain recognizable until at least 2100" (2001, 34–36).

The bipolar paradigm rests on a number of assumptions: Complexity is tackled through simplification; nationality or nation-state forms the basic unit of analysis; the focus is on cultural differences; values determine behavior, not vice versa; values are stable over time; and national cultures are difficult to change. The strength of this paradigm lies in its clarity and consistency in identifying cultural dimensions and juxtaposing one culture against another along these dimensions to facilitate cross-cultural comparisons.

Though useful to some extent (e.g., for testing hypotheses and for giving "the first best guess" about certain characteristics of national cultures), this dominant paradigm looks increasingly at odds with today's global cross-cultural management environment. On the practical side, managers are increasingly frustrated by cultural paradoxes they encounter that do not accord with famous cross-cultural manuals (Osland and Bird 2000). The borderless globalization of industries, technology, capital, human resources, and information is fostering unprecedented changes in most societies. Such changes have significant implications for theory rebuilding.

On the academic side, the cross-cultural research front has witnessed growing critiques of the Hofstede paradigm (e.g., Fang 2003; McSweeney 2002). A more dynamic vision of national culture seems overdue. Some important advances have been made in developing a dynamic view of culture, such as new culture negotiation/formation through intercultural interactions (e.g., Brannen and Salk 2000), multiple cultures perspective (Sackmann and Phillips 2004), and multilevel cultural dynamics (Leung et al. 2005). But in the current modeling of cultural dynamics, the main focus is more on organizational culture change (e.g., Hatch 1993) and new culture creation in organization and team settings (e.g., Brannen and Salk 2000; Sackmann and Phillips 2004) than on national culture change. Recently, Leung et al. provided a comprehensive review of culture research and found that "although organizational changes as a reaction to environmental changes have been subjected to considerable conceptual analyses, the issue of cultural change at the national level has rarely been addressed" (2005, 362). It is against the above background that this study has been conducted.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to propose an alternative approach to the study of national cultures and international cross-cultural management in the era of globalization. Differing from the dominant bipolar paradigm, championed in this

paper is a dialectical approach that sees each national culture as having a life of its own full of dynamics and paradoxes. The aim is to explore three underresearched questions: (1) How can we understand intracultural value variations within a national culture? (2) How can we understand the meaning of national cultures from contextual and time points of view? and (3) How can we understand the new identity of national cultures in the age of globalization? These questions are linked, respectively, to the three themes discussed later in this paper.

Boyacigiller et al. have identified two different assumptions of culture. In the cross-national comparison school (referred to as the bipolar paradigm in this paper), culture is assumed to be "a coherent and enduring set of values that members of the nation-state carry and invariably act upon" (2003, 140). In the interactions and multiple cultures schools, culture is seen not just as carried but as the shared understandings through which culture is actively created (i.e., negotiated) by means of social interaction. Culture is "learned and passed on to new members of the group through social interaction; culture is dynamic—it changes over time" (ibid., 100–101). On the one hand, this paper is grounded in the current analysis of these two contrasting views of culture, and it shares the vision to move toward a dynamic view of culture.

At the same time, this paper intends to enrich the current research on cultural dynamics (e.g., Brannen and Salk 2000; Leung et al. 2005; Sackmann and Phillips 2004) in two main aspects. First, whereas most current studies look at cultural change at the organizational culture level, this study addresses cultural change at the national level. Next, although well-thought-out propositions on cultural dynamics are found in the existing literature (e.g., culture negotiation, multiple cultures identity, and multilevel cultural dynamics), few have included the dialectical and paradoxical nature of culture that is, as argued in this paper, crucial for understanding the essence of cultural dynamics. This study draws on insights from yin and yang, an ancient Chinese philosophy, to develop its dialectical view of culture.

As suggested by the title of this paper, I utilize metaphors, namely, "onion" and "ocean," to present my thesis. In the rest of this paper, I start with the "onion" metaphor of culture; then introduce yin-yang thinking and its implications for studying cultural dynamics; and, finally, discuss three themes useful for stimulating new research directions. At the core of these discussions emerges an "ocean" metaphor of culture created to understand national cultures and international cross-cultural management in the age of globalization.

The "onion"

Metaphors craft our thinking in distinctive ways. They are also used to study management, organization, culture, and society (Gannon 2001, 2004; Kao

1997; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Morgan 1986; Ortony 1975; Redding 1994). “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature . . . the way we think, what we experience, and what we do everyday is very much a matter of metaphor” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1). Ortony defines metaphor as “a means of comparing two terms” (1975). According to Lakoff and Johnson, “*The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*” (1980, 5). Gannon defines “cultural metaphor” as “any activity, phenomenon, or institution which members of a given culture consider important and with which they identify emotionally and/or cognitively” and holds that metaphor “represents the underlying values expressive of the culture itself” (2004, xiii).

Hofstede has created an “onion” metaphor to understand culture (see Hofstede 1991, 9; Hofstede and Hofstede 2005, 7; a similar model was also proposed in Trompenaars 1994). Hofstede indicates that culture manifests itself in four different levels that can be illustrated “as the skins of an onion” (Hofstede 1991, 7): symbols, heroes, rituals, and values. This “onion” metaphor of culture is probably the best illustration of the bipolar paradigm. Comparing culture to “onion” offers a number of important analogies.

First, the complex, woolly, and fluid phenomena of national cultures are tackled through simplification, as cultures are reduced into and isolated from each other in terms of discrete “onions”—politically defined and artificially created *nation-states*.

Second, each “onion” has its clearly defined profile, similar to the national boundaries of politically defined and artificially created nation-states. The importance of nationality and nation-state as the basic unit of analysis of national culture has been persistently emphasized.

Third, on the outer surfaces of “onion,” we see symbols, heroes, and rituals that are called “practices” of culture by Hofstede (1991, 8). To understand a culture more deeply, we need to peel the “onion” layer by layer to touch its core. At the core lie the basic assumptions, values, and beliefs that guide human behaviors.

Fourth, values and beliefs determine behaviors. While the outer layers of the “onion” come and go, the core of the “onion” stands firm. In other words, the behavioral part of culture may change, but the “software” of culture—that is, its deep-seated values—will not, because values remain stable: “By the age of 10, most of the child’s basic values have been programmed into his or her mind” (Hofstede 2001, 394).

Fifth, just as “onions” have different sizes and can be categorized into “big” and “small,” national cultures are deterministically different and can be measured, indexed, and distinguished from each other in terms of cultural dimensions. An “onion” cannot be both “big” and “small”—similarly, national culture cannot be both “individualist” and “collectivist,” both “feminine” and “mascu-

line," both "long-term oriented" and "short-term oriented," and so forth.

Finally, when different "onions" meet, they will collide. Similarly, when different national cultures meet, they will collide. Cultural differences will be accentuated, and cross-cultural clashes and conflicts will take place, because each culture has its own indigenous stable history, beliefs, norms, and value systems that hardly change over time.

This "onion" metaphor of culture offers a telling example of the "functionalist" (Burrell and Morgan 1979) and "deterministic" (McSweeney 2002) paradigm in social science research that seeks objectivity, measurement, and prediction. An "analytical" logic runs through the paradigm, because unity must be divided into parts to seek absolute truth. The same logic forms the classical foundation of Western science (Popper 1959/2002). The "onion" metaphor suggests that culture can be researched, and initial understanding, however insufficient it may be, can be achieved through simplification and stereotyping. By doing so, it offers "the first best guess" about certain cultures. Besides, nationality is at least one (though incomplete) component of culture, which some studies have suggested (e.g., Zander and Romani 2004) does matter when it comes to cross-cultural leadership.

Nevertheless, using the "onion" mentality to map out and compare national cultures is not without problems. Whereas the dominant paradigm bipolarizes national cultures in terms of "either/or" cultural dimensions, such as femininity versus masculinity and collectivism versus individualism, evidence from various national cultures (discussed later) shows that culture is intrinsically "both/and," that is, embracing both orientations. Proponents of the bipolar paradigm do not assert that all national cultures are sitting at the extreme ends of each cultural dimension, and many cultures have country index scores lying somewhere between the two poles. Yet, by using bipolar terminologies and definitions and indexing national cultures along the spectrum of cultural dimensions, the dominant paradigm seems to have missed a fundamental dialectical perspective that cultures, like all other universal phenomena, intrinsically embrace paradoxes and change. A culture's strong tendency toward one extreme of a bipolar dimension (e.g., femininity) does not preclude its opposite (e.g., masculinity). Culture assumes capacities to reconcile the opposite poles of all cultural dimensions and can thus be both "feminine" and "masculine," both "long-term" and "short-term," both "individualist" and "collectivist," and so forth, in a dynamic process of change and transformation. This "both/and" perspective of culture is grounded in a dialectical and paradoxical view of universal phenomena as suggested by yin-yang.

Dialectical thinking and Yin-Yang

Dialectical thinking focusing on a dynamic integration of paradoxes was developed in a number of influential Western writings, including those of Friedrich

Hegel and Karl Marx. In modern times, Simmel (1997) developed a dialectical approach to analyzing the dynamics of interconnectedness and conflicts in social phenomena. Love and hatred, harmony and conflict, and attraction and repulsion are two interdependent sides of the same process; that is, social units and behaviors are created and developed dialectically. Similarly, Maslow researched the interconnectedness of human psychology and noted: “What had been considered in the past to be polarities or opposites or dichotomies were so *only in unhealthy people*. In healthy people, these dichotomies were resolved, the polarities disappeared, and many oppositions thought to be intrinsic merged and coalesced with each other to form unities” (Maslow 1954, 233).

A central concept in dialectical thinking is paradox. Paradox is defined as “contradictory yet interrelated elements—elements that seem logical in isolation but absurd and irrational when appearing simultaneously” (Lewis 2000, 760). It is characterized by “the simultaneous presence of contradictory, even mutually exclusive elements” (Cameron and Quinn 1988, 2). The concept of paradox is gaining increasing attention in organization research (e.g., Clegg 2002). Embracing paradoxes or holding that opposite forces exist simultaneously and accepting that opposites coexist and can reverse their positions at a given time in history, is fundamentally reflected in the yin-yang philosophy (see Figure 1).

The yin-yang image, arguably the best-known symbol in East Asia (Cooper 1990), is of a circle equally divided by a curved line forming the black and white areas. The black and the white areas stand for two opposite energies in the universe called yin and yang, respectively. Yin represents female elements (the moon, night, water, weakness, darkness, mystery, softness, and passivity), whereas yang represents male elements (the sun, day, fire, strength, brightness, clearness, hardness, and activity).

The image implies that yin and yang coexist in everything, and that everything embraces yin and yang. There exists neither absolute yin nor absolute yang (the black dot in the white and the white dot in the black). Opposites contain within them the seeds of the other and together form a dynamic and changing unity (Chen 2001). In short, yin and yang cannot survive without each other, and they complement each other, depend on each other, exist in each other, give birth to each other, and succeed each other at different points in time. Yin and yang, water and fire, the moon and the sun, and so forth, are waning and waxing, coming and going, opening and closing, all in the process of ceaseless change and transformation. As Ji, Nisbett, and Su explained:

The idea of change and transformation between two opposite states is the main theme of the *I Ching* . . . or *Book of Changes*. The book not only discusses change in one direction (from young to old or from small to large), but also discusses changes from one extreme to another extreme. For example,

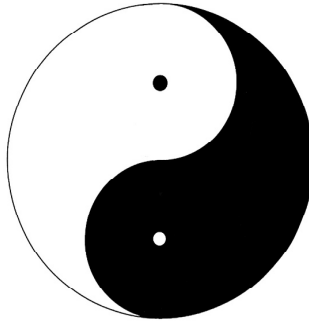


Figure 1. Yin-Yang

when a moon is full, it starts to wane; when a moon is new, it starts to wax. This is the relationship between *yin* and *yang*: When *yin* reaches its extreme, it becomes *yang*; when *yang* reaches its extreme, it becomes *yin*. The pure *yin* is hidden in *yang*, and the pure *yang* is hidden in *yin* . . . Therefore, *yin* and *yang* are dependent on each other, and transformations between the two occur when one of them becomes extreme. (Ji, Nisbett, and Su 2001, 450)

Yin-yang suggests that human beings, organizations, and cultures intrinsically embrace paradoxes for their sheer existence and healthy development. Culture is “both/and” instead of “either/or.” We are both yin and yang, feminine and masculine, long-term and short-term, individualistic and collectivistic, monochronic and polychronic, and high-context and low-context, depending on situation, context, and time. As yin and yang produce each other, a culture’s tendency toward one extreme of a bipolar dimension (e.g., femininity) creates and fosters the opposite tendency (e.g., masculinity) of the same culture. These insights are crucial for answering our research questions about the mechanisms of the coexistence of paradoxical values and behaviors within national cultures and the new identity of national cultures in the age of globalization.

From the vantage point of yin-yang and dialectical thinking, I have identified three themes important for stimulating new research directions in the study of national cultures and international cross-cultural management: (1) the paradoxical nature of culture, (2) the “moment” of culture, and (3) the new identity of national cultures in the era of globalization. These themes address sequentially the three research questions identified above.

Understanding the paradoxical nature of culture

Seeing culture, per se, as a paradox is my first theme. It specifically attempts to understand intracultural value variations within a national culture. Research-

ers have long been interested in value variation. However, value variation has been used mainly to explain differences between nation-states, and little importance has been given to value variation within a culture (one exception is Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961). Although Kagitcibasi (1997), Triandis (1995), and Schwartz (1990), for example, have touched upon intracultural value variation, the paradoxical nature of culture as an intrinsic cause behind such variation has not been discussed. In the literature, cultural variations within national culture are often treated as an issue of differences between the mainstream (national) culture and subcultures or a matter of individual-level deviations and preferences. Deeper philosophical reasons have rarely been explored. This study intends to emphasize that in order to understand intracultural value variation, we need to penetrate the *paradoxical* nature of culture and capture its inner mechanism, which allows for the coexistence of paradoxical values and behaviors.

Simply put, yin-yang suggests that if there exist “+V₁,” “+V₂,” “+V₃,” “+V₄,” “+V₅,” . . . “+V_n” values and behaviors in a culture, there must *coexist* “-V₁,” “-V₂,” “-V₃,” “-V₄,” “-V₅,” . . . “-V_n” values and behaviors in the same culture depending on situation, context, and time. This is not just a matter of variation between national culture and subcultures or between the average cultural patterns and individual deviations as often discussed in the cross-cultural literature but, rather, a fundamental principle to capture the workings of culture and social behavior. Linking cultures to paradoxes and metaphors, we can see that every national culture embraces paradoxical cultural metaphors—metaphors with contradictory meanings and suggestiveness about that culture.

An important feature of Martin Gannon’s third edition of *Understanding Global Cultures* (2004, 379–387) is the inclusion of cross-cultural paradoxes to understand Chinese culture. To advance our cross-cultural scholarship, it is crucial to move a step further. We need to identify paradoxes within national culture and use *paradoxical metaphors* to better explain and understand the nature of that culture. For example, the metaphor of *stugor* (summer homes) is masterfully used to highlight the individualist orientation of Swedish culture (Gannon 2004). However, insiders of Swedish society would also concede that as ubiquitous as the individualistic orientation is, the collectivistic orientation of the Swedish culture is symbolized by another equally powerful metaphor affectionately known in Sweden as *folkhemmet* (“The home of the people”; see Britton 1999). Paradoxically, the individualistic orientation comes hand-in-hand with the collectivistic orientation, as reflected in the Swedish stress on sameness and consensus seeking in social interaction (Daun 1991). Such paradoxical cultural metaphors can arguably be found in all national cultures. For example, the peace-loving Thai Smile (Gannon 2004) goes hand in hand

with apparently aggressive Thai Boxing (*Muay Thai*), which is traditionally practiced near or inside the harmonious Thai Temples.

The Netherlands stood out recently in a survey as the world's best country to integrate good deeds with good business, combining altruism with opportunism (Flynn 2004). This unusual Dutch capacity reflects "an eternal struggle" in the Dutch mind of the two competing metaphors shaping the paradoxical nature of the Dutch culture: the *Dominee* (Vicar) and *Koopman* (Merchant). The former looks for immaterialism with values such as altruism, equality, humbleness, and solidarity; the latter looks for materialism with values such as opportunism, entrepreneurship, self-reliance, liberalism, and courage.

Furthermore, we need to penetrate into one and the same metaphor to decipher its paradoxical meanings. The *Georgian Polyphony* is an example in point. Musical folklore has always been held in high esteem in the culture of the country of Georgia. The art of song and dance was widespread among ancient Georgian tribes. Probably the best metaphor of the Georgian national culture is the *Georgian Polyphony*, named by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as one of the oral and intangible masterpieces of humanity. The *Georgian Polyphony* exhibits a sophisticated jamming of individualist and collectivist orientations. Traditional Georgian polyphonic songs are performed in a choir consisting of eight and more members. The songs are sung in many different voices and pitches. The number of voices can be three, four, seven, or eight. For a listener, it seems that each member of the choir is singing a different song and in a different pitch. There are neither lead nor background singers. Every member has an equal part, making the songs complex in terms of vocals and sound. This seems enigmatic: the choir simultaneously sounds both chaotic and harmonic.

The Georgian polyphonic songs are, with no exception, performed in choirs; it is always teamwork. It takes a lot of time and practice to become a real member of that collective team. However, the team is not just the sum of each individual singer learning his or her own part and then performing collectively. In order to perform the polyphonic songs, each singer has to learn his or her part and all the other parts. To perform one song, each member has to learn up to seven different parts.

Let me come back to the metaphor of *stugor*. I have lived in Sweden since 1991. For me, Swedish *stugor* reflects not only the individualistic orientation of the Swedish culture but also its opposite, that is, the collectivistic orientation of the same Swedish culture. From the Yin Yang and dialectical perspective, spending time alone in isolated and sometimes primitive *stugor* in an untrammled natural setting ("yin") is a direct and natural outcome of the highly collectivistic, structured, and modern work life in the Swedish society ("yang"). Yin and yang need each other, give birth to each other,

depend on each other, exist within each other, and succeed each other at different points in time.

In short, there exists an internal Yin Yang mechanism within every national culture that can generate cultural change from yin to yang and from yang to yin in a dynamic process of internal transformation, even in the absence of external driving forces. Intracultural value variations within a national culture are not merely an issue of differences between the mainstream (national) culture and subcultures or a matter of individual deviations, but they reflect the inner paradox that coalesces within each culture.

Understanding the “moment” of culture

Linking culture and value to context and time is my second theme. It tackles national cultures from contextual and time points of view. In the bipolar paradigm, national cultures have their fixed indexes supposedly reflecting their respective “work-related values.” But there is no indication as to the type of work, the context, or the time in which such indexes should be interpreted and applied. As such, culture is viewed as a context-free and time-free abstraction.

Sweden is the world’s most feminine culture, according to Hofstede (1980, 1991, 2001). This seems true in many contexts. But looking at the speed, scale, and spirit with which Swedish firms internationalize their businesses, we also see a masculine face. Sweden has more large companies per capita than any other country in the world (Birkinshaw 2002). Talking to Swedish and Scandinavian businesspeople as a whole, you realize immediately that they still want to be called Vikings. Swedish work values are often described as reflecting small power distance, where there is no “boss” out there who orders you to do things. However, in the context of the Swedish army, there are difficulties with this logic. Particularly in critical situations, commanding orders are issued and followed seriously. Some decisions are clearly centralized. Therefore, “work values” have to be grounded in contexts to be meaningful and useful.

In traditional intercultural communication research (e.g., Hall 1976), China and Japan are routinely described as typical examples of high-context cultures in which the indirect and reserved style is used; a “yes” may not mean yes and a “no” may not mean no. An insightful explanation is that *face* is valued in East Asia. Certainly East Asians are rather indirect and reserved in many situations, especially in formal settings. If we see “high-context” as a kind of “-V” orientation in China and Japan, we can see there coexists “+V” (“low-context”) orientation in these nations as well. For example, in China and Japan, a karaoke bar is a starkly different environment than an office setting.

In such bars and many other social and informal business settings, which are extremely important for doing business in these cultures, local businesspeople are found to be at least as low-context and "wild" as citizens of any other low-context culture. Mingling with Chinese people, we find that they value not only *hanxiu* (reserved) but also *renao* (lively, cheerful, and festive); they value not only "face" (as discussed in a large body of literature) but also "thick face" ("faceless"; see Chu 1992); they behave not only as "Confucian gentleman" but also as "Sunzi-like strategist" (Fang 1999), depending on situation, context, and time.

The Finns are often stereotyped as "silent people." German playwright Berthold Brecht once observed that although both Swedish and Finnish are official languages in Finland, the Finns "are silent in two languages" (Quantrill and Webb 1998). In formal business meetings, Finns can be reserved and silent in communication. However, the Finns are definitely not reserved and silent in the Finnish sauna. They are completely unabashed about going *au naturel* into the sauna. It is not uncommon for such saunas to include mixed genders, although in most cases, separate saunas are provided, and some sort of wrap is on hand. Although saunas are traditionally regarded as retreats in nature, modern office buildings in Finland are increasingly equipped with saunas spacious enough for even business gatherings. It seems that in the context of the Finnish sauna, the expressive and "talkative" energy of Finnish culture is channeled, and the state of "–Finns" is transformed into its opposite state: "+Finns."²

Thus, in a given context at any particular time in history, numerous different and even paradoxical values "compete" with each other. One value may eventually "beat" other values to become the principal value to guide our action in that particular context at that particular point. In this regard, Osland and Bird proposed a useful metaphor of seeing culture as a series of "card games" in which cultural values are individual cards: "players respond by choosing specific cards that seem most appropriate in a given situation" where "one cultural value might trump another, lessening the influence another value normally exerts" (2000, 70).

Culture has a life of its own

The temporal process has been brutally ignored in the dominant paradigm of national cultures. To capture the "moment" of national culture, we need to return culture to its natural context of time. National cultures are living organisms, not time-free "fossils." It is useful to conceive of culture as having a life of its own. Seen longitudinally or historically, every culture has a dynamic life full of energies, sentiments, dramas, and contradictions. In its

entire life span, every culture encompasses an ocean of infinite potential value orientations $\{+V_1, +V_2, +V_3, +V_4, +V_5 \dots +V_n -V_1, -V_2, -V_3, -V_4, -V_5, \dots -V_n\}$. At a given point, many cultural values have been endorsed, promoted, and legitimized, while other “value cousins” are dampened, suppressed, and destroyed. To be genuinely interested in a culture, we must examine the culture’s own life, we must care about different phases of that life, we must study the dramas and ups and downs of cultural values, and we must understand the “moment” of culture.

During China’s Cultural Revolution (1966–76), Confucianism as a philosophy was vehemently assaulted. In schools across China, pupils were taught to produce “revolutionary” poems and cartoons to demonize Confucius and attack Confucian values. Familial and professional values were destroyed by the-then ruling political ideologies. Market, capital, money, and all material incentives were taken as feudalist and capitalist corruptions. Today, however, many Chinese (for good and for bad) value money-orientation, capitalism, professionalism, knowledge, innovation, creativity, individualism, quality of life, and “sex and the city.” Why were such values as money-orientation and individualism not valued during the Maoist era (1949–76)? Because these and many other values were “suppressed,” “beaten,” “jailed,” and “destroyed.” Hofstede’s original IBM data collection was “held twice, around 1968 and around 1972” (Hofstede 1980, 11) in which China was not included. Had the data also been gathered in China at that time, the index of China would be fundamentally different from what is “estimated” today (see “estimated” index about Chinese culture in Hofstede and Hofstede 2005).

China’s Cultural Revolution is used here to illustrate the ups and downs of Chinese values in one period of the life of Chinese culture. A look at the development of Chinese culture and society from a historical perspective seems to support Rokeach’s (1973) proposition that no values are time free. We can identify numerous “moments” of the life of Chinese culture where some values are shared temporarily while other values come and go. Culture’s internal change mechanism (yin-yang) is one reason. Other reasons include the impacts of changes in ecological environments, ideological preferences, social systems and institutions, globalization and foreign direct investment, technologies, and contingencies (e.g., epidemics, wars).

To study the “moment” of culture requires a serious scrutiny of national culture from a change perspective. “Change” is not a new term in the study of organizational culture, but the change perspective has been extremely underdeveloped in the research on national culture and international cross-cultural management. A fundamental reason lies in the static “onion” approach to culture that asserts that the core of the “onion” (values and beliefs) is stable over time.¹ This inner core also supposedly determines the layers

of the "onion" (behaviors and artifacts). However, the relationship between values and beliefs on one side, and behaviors and artifacts on the other, is a dynamic one. Not only are behaviors shaped by beliefs and values, but they can proactively shape new beliefs and values, thereby germinating the process of culture change. Bem's (1970) research on cognitive and behavioral foundations of beliefs relates directly to this key point. A fundamental finding is that beliefs follow behaviors. Citing Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, Bem explained that:

[If] an individual is induced to engage in behavior inconsistent with his beliefs or attitudes, he will experience the discomfort of "cognitive dissonance," which will motivate him to seek a resolution of that inconsistency. One way he can do this is to convince himself that he actually believes in what he has done, that he actually holds the beliefs or attitudes implied by his behavior. (1970, 54–55)

Bem concluded that "one of the most effective ways to 'change the hearts and minds of men' is to change their behavior" (1970, 54). Hofstede (1980, 2001) made a passing reference on this point without deeper investigation into the implications of Bem's (1970) research finding (beliefs following behaviors) for cross-cultural theory building in the age of globalization: When cultures interact with each other, a behavioral change process begins which, in turn, eventually ignites a value change process among the interacting cultures.

Studying the changing nature of culture does not reject the notion of stability. Rokeach argued: "If values were completely stable, individual and social change would be impossible. If values were completely unstable, continuity of human personality and society would be impossible. Any conception of human values, if it is to be fruitful, must be able to account for the enduring character of values as well as for their changing character" (1973, 5–6). Instead of refuting the notion of stability, we need to put it in a larger dynamic context, seeing stability and change as the yin and yang of culture, which create, encompass, and succeed each other over time. Relying on context-free and time-free cultural indexes to understand culture would make our cross-cultural scholarship stagnate at stereotypic levels, regardless of the degree of sophistication used to construct such indexes.

The discussions so far allow us to craft a new metaphor for understanding the dynamics of culture. Culture can be compared to an ocean. In a given context at a given time, we identify visible values and behaviors just like we identify visible wave patterns on the surface of the ocean. Nevertheless, the culture we see at this moment does not represent the totality and the entire life process of that culture. The ocean embraces not just visible wave patterns on its surface (compared to visible cultural values and behaviors) but

also numerous ebbs and flows underneath of amazing depth (comparable to “hibernating,” unseen and unknown cultural values and behaviors). Given internal mechanisms (yin-yang) and external forces (e.g., globalization, institutional, economic, technological, situational factors), invisible and “unconscious” values and behaviors (ebbs and flows) beneath the water surface can be stimulated, powered, activated, promoted, and legitimized to come up to the ocean’s surface to become the visible and guiding value patterns at the next historical moment. For example, the spirit of Chinese capitalism had long been perceived as something that belonged only to the Chinese diaspora rather than to mainland “Communist” China. However, Deng Xiaoping’s famous tour in southern China in early 1992 and his slogan “To get rich is glorious!” catalyzed an enormous cultural change process in mainland China, making the spirit of Chinese capitalism an integral and essential part of today’s “Communist” China.

Understanding the new identity of national culture in the era of globalization

How to understand the new identity of national cultures in the age of globalization is the third theme. We discussed the “onion” earlier. One additional point is that the “onion” way of seeing culture is a product of the cold war era during which national cultures were like “black boxes” (self-contained, tangible, and rigid “onions”). Few cultures knew what other cultures were thinking and doing. Within this cold war context, we genuinely see the courage and foresight of Hofstede’s (1980) *Culture’s Consequences*. The original empirical data on which this work was grounded were collected in the middle of the cold war (around 1968 and 1972). In an age without the Internet and e-mail but with cold war sentiments and separations, Hofstede conducted his unique empirical investigations at IBM subsidiaries in fifty-three countries and regions.

By measuring “distances” between a large number of “black boxes,” Hofstede masterfully succeeded in convincing the cross-cultural community of the importance of national cultural differences. Moreover, Hofstede revolutionarily challenged the universal applicability of the then U.S.-dominated management theories (Hofstede 1993). By focusing on cultural differences among nation-states, Hofstede (1980) historically contributed to cross-cultural theory building in his times and to the awakening of the minds of practitioners to cultural differences across national borders.

With the end of the cold war and even during the early days of modern globalization of industries, technology, capital, human resources, and information in much of the 1990s, it was, however, not the message of “The Globalization

of Markets" (Levitt 1983) but, rather, that of *Culture's Consequences* (Hofstede 1980) that attracted the most attention. Exotic, sensational, shocking, and bizarre cultural differences of all kinds were heard and experienced when encountering people from different "black boxes." Here we also see the significance of the Hofstede paradigm, which predicts the collisions of national cultures. But the question now is: What do national cultures look like today after numerous "collisions," "clashes," and "conflicts" with one another?

Today, we have entered the era of globalization, which has fundamentally changed our cross-cultural milieu. Globalization in its modern form is not a passing trend but, rather, a brand-new international system that has replaced the cold war system, as it embodies the spread and integration of capital, technology, information, and people across national borders (Friedman 1999). One of the most significant consequences of globalization is that national cultures are not rigid "black boxes" any longer but are becoming increasingly transparent, fluid, elastic, virtual, and mobile. Foreign direct investment (FDI), the Internet and mobile technology, and so forth, are increasingly connecting us and creating shared experiences no matter where, when, or who we are.

If we accept that culture is learned and not inherited, and that it derives from one's social environment, not from one's genes (Hofstede 1991, 5), we can see that today's increasingly shared and learned experience of borderless education, information, markets, capital, products, and services created and nurtured by globalization and new technology legitimizes the necessity and urgency to research the new identity of national culture. Today's unprecedented interactions between nations create behavioral changes in respective nations, which, in turn, bring about changes in values and beliefs in these nations, if reasoned from Bem's (1970) theory that behaviors can influence beliefs.

Multinational firms, often carriers of their own national values, collide, in certain contexts at certain points, with the local values and traditions. But few cultures die because of cultural collisions. Culture survives, and life goes on. More important, if we perceive culture as having a life of its own, we will see that national cultures do not seem to stop learning. Foreign firms interact with and learn from the local environment and simultaneously bring their own national values and corporate practices to the local market, thereby contributing to the cultural change process on both sides. A specific culture learns not only from its forebears as an extension of old traditions but also from its dynamic interactions with other cultures to give birth to "new traditions," new beliefs, and new behaviors. This argument is, in effect, in line with the theory of "negotiating culture" (Brannen and Salk 2000)—that is, new culture creation/negotiation/formation through interactions between different national cultures, although the theory was originally introduced in organizational settings.

Brazil has been portrayed in the literature as a polychronic culture where punctuality and fixed schedules are not regarded as important. Northern Brazilian areas such as Salvador may display such a polychronic propensity, but in places such as São Paulo, Curitiba, and Porto Alegre, the three large cities in southern Brazil, businesspeople are getting increasingly conscious about time, planning, and scheduling. An important reason is that the southern regions of Brazil are more exposed to the process of globalization and foreign direct investment than are other regions. As a result of increasing interactions with multinational corporations, many of which are relatively monochronic (planning, scheduling, and punctuality) in their ways of doing business, businesspeople in São Paulo, Curitiba, and Porto Alegre are becoming more monochronic. Businesses frequently emphasize monochronic behavior even if only Brazilian businesspeople are involved. In Salvador, it is acceptable to be one or even two hours late for a business meeting, because such a delay is expected. But today if you tend to arrive one to two hours late for a business meeting in São Paulo, you would not be considered serious and sincere.

Naylor observed: "Virtually every nation-state of the world is a multicultural one made up of a number of groups. . . . As cultural groups increase their interactions and dependencies, every one of them will have to change some of their beliefs and behaviors" (1996, 93, 208). The yin-yang thinking implies that everything embraces opposite components that interact with each other to form a dynamic and changing unity. It is useful to borrow the concept of "cultural groups" from sociology (Naylor 1996) to study national cultures in terms of the dynamic interplays between various cultural groups within and across national boundaries in the era of globalization.

Individuals, institutions, organizations, brands, professional communities, civil societies, ethnic groups, borderless cultural symbols, emerging global culture (Bird and Stevens 2003), even virtual figures, and so forth, can all be potential cultural groupings for studying the dynamics of national cultures. International executives who have been educated and socialized in various MBA programs that are increasingly similar throughout the world represent an example of a cultural grouping. In today's globalized world of cross-cultural management, cultural groupings are becoming increasingly powerful and mobile, exerting influences both within and beyond politically defined national boundaries. The new identity of national culture may be understood as a product of the dynamic interplays between four major culture groupings: (1) nationality or nation-state-specific culture grouping, which is an arguably diminishingly relevant culture grouping; (2) region-specific or ethnic-specific culture grouping, which is an increasingly important culture grouping shared by people regardless of nationality; (3) organization- and industry-specific culture grouping, which is an increasingly important culture grouping shared

by people of the same organization or industry regardless of nationality; and (4) global culture grouping, which is an increasingly important culture grouping that can be initiated by any individual or community and shared by self-selected memberships globally, irrespective of nationality, such as the culture of global professional and business communities (see Bird and Stevens 2003).

Will globalization lead to nations becoming more and more alike? Yes and No. Yes, because, increasingly, nations are sharing a basic characteristic: They are exposed to and embrace various cultural groupings in the globalized world. Globalization has pushed markets toward "global commonality" (Levitt 1983, 93). Many firms standardize their policies, procedures, and human resource practices across nations (Punnett and Shenkar 2003). No, because the converging forces of globalization would produce myriads of new types of differences among nations than those based on nationality or nation-state. The scale, size, configuration, continuity, pervasiveness, strengths, mobility, and radiations of various cultural groupings in various national cultures will remain different, and the ways in which they interplay will remain different.

Conclusions

The bipolarized and static paradigm of national culture and the "onion" metaphor symbolizing this paradigm were critiqued in this paper. The issues raised and critiques offered of Hofstede's works apply equally to the closely related research streams in the bipolar or dimensional tradition of studying national cultures (e.g., House et al. 2004; Trompenaars 1994). In the era of globalization, merely following the bipolar paradigm by employing different cultural dimensions and increasing the number of societies to be investigated does not seem to be able to advance our knowledge of national culture and international cross-cultural management.

To enrich the current debates on dynamics of culture, I proposed a dialectical approach to the study of national cultures. At the core of this approach lies a paradoxical view of culture and human behavior. Yin-yang forms the philosophical foundation of this new approach. Three themes leading to new research directions have been discussed in order to understand (1) the paradoxical nature of culture, (2) the "moment" of culture, and (3) the new identity of national culture in the era of globalization. It has been proposed that if there exist "+V₁," "+V₂," "+V₃," "+V₄," "+V₅," . . . "+V_n" values and behaviors in a culture, there must *coexist* "-V₁," "-V₂," "-V₃," "-V₄," "-V₅," . . . "-V_n" values and behaviors in the same culture depending on situation, context, and time.

This analysis has also suggested a shift of our research focus from the

traditionally defined notion of national culture to the dynamic interplays among various cultural groupings within and beyond national boundaries to capture the new identity of national culture in the era of globalization. The new identity of national culture is seen as a product of the dynamic interplays between four major culture groupings: (1) nationality or nation-state-specific culture grouping; (2) region-specific or ethnic-specific culture grouping; (3) organization- and industry-specific culture grouping; and (4) global culture grouping, which is an increasingly important culture grouping.

In this paper, culture is likened to an ocean. The ocean has no boundaries, and its various waters are both separate and shared, both different and similar, and both independent and dependent. Let us end this analysis by calling this way of seeing culture an “ocean” metaphor of culture.

Notes

1. In Hofstede’s visual presentation (1991, 9), the “onion” embraces both the outer layers and the inner core. The core is depicted as impossible to peel and impenetrable. In reality, however, onions do not seem to have a core and one can simply keep peeling it into almost nothing.

2. It should be noted that the Finnish “quietude” is not emptiness but a substantial form of cultural action and communication (see Berry et al. 2004)

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