

Chinese business culture as perceived by Brazilian Expatriates

Laura Alves Scherer^{1A} and Italo Fernando Minello^B

^A Federal University of Pampa – UNIPAMPA, Santana do Livramento, RS, Brazil.

^B Federal University of Santa Maria – UFSM, Santa Maria, RS, Brazil.

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article history:

Received 31 December de 2014

Accepted 27 July 2015

Available online in 19 December 2015

Double Blind Review System

Scientific Editors

Felipe Mendes Borini

Keywords:

Expatriates

Culture

China

Guanxi

Save Face

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyze Chinese culture related to business as perceived by Brazilian expatriates in China. For this purpose, literature concerning the expatriate and cultural differences between Brazil and China was reviewed. The qualitative approach was adopted as the study method, carrying out semi-structured interviews with twelve Brazilian expatriate professionals in China. To analyze the data a content analysis technique was used, specifically the categorical analysis, using the following categories: guanxi, standard cultural behavior, role specialization, save face, and respect for hierarchy. The results highlight the difficulty expatriates have in understanding the Chinese standard of behavior in their professional activities, such as: the relationship ties and trust that the Chinese prioritize to make a deal, known as guanxi; the Chinese characteristic to perform only 'their' job function, to be a specialist; the fact they cannot respond to their boss in a direct way because of shame or embarrassment, known as to "save face"; and the hierarchy, highly respected by the Chinese.

© 2015 Internext | ESPM. All rights reserved!

1. Introduction

Today's global scenario has provided the directional growth of corporations with a diverse workforce to the Asia-Pacific region (MALEK; BUDHWAR, 2013). When these corporations decide to internationalize in search of a better performance in the international market, they shall need to develop specific skills to work in a culturally different market. At that moment, a need emerges for companies to send employees to manage their enterprise abroad, disseminating their management model, their technology, organizational culture (ORSI, 2010; MALEK; BUDHWAR, 2013), among other aspects.

According to Caligiuri (2000), these professionals called expatriates have a commitment to achieving the level of performance expected by the organization. In this regard, in the viewpoint of Orsi (2010) and Malek and Budhwar (2013), it is not only enough to have the usual characteristics and skills

needed for domestic operation, but it is also necessary to understand the destination country's culture, the communication process in the context of that country and the expatriate's ability to deal with cultural diversity, whom, is often alone in a strange country.

Trompenaars (1994) suggests that culture influences people's behavior in a specific context, such as in the case of a country, which determines their behavior in relation to their lifestyle, interaction with family, way of doing business and in regards to how they view their professional activity, including their interaction with professionals from countries other than their own. Accordingly, the international experience requires respect for a different cultural reality, as well as an open mind by the professional, since, as the different groups begin to interact, the tendency for conflicts and misunderstandings can emerge (FREITAS, 2010). Thus, once the expatriate's destination country presents different cultural traits

¹ Corresponding author: Email: laurascherer@ymail.com

in the organizational and national levels, distinct behaviors may arise from their usual, such as the case of China for the Brazilians - the focus of this study.

According to Kevin Tang, director of the Brazil-China Chamber of Commerce, China presents cultural differences in relation to Brazil, which could cause understanding difficulties in business.

Even so, China has achieved the position of main trading partner for many countries, including Brazil (CÂMARA BRASIL CHINA, 2012), which, as a result promotes the exchange of professionals to work in these countries. However, many professionals go to China without learning about the background to particular characteristics of Chinese culture, making it difficult to understand the context and often impossible to advance in business.

Thus, the objective of this research is to analyze Chinese culture in relation to business and the perception of Brazilian expatriates in China. It is hoped that getting to know the Chinese business culture from the perspective of the Brazilian expatriate's experience in China, will provide useful knowledge to companies that already have experience there, and/or those who wish to do business with China.

In addition to that, a reflection on the subject of expatriation with regard to how the Brazilian expatriate perceives certain Chinese cultural traits in business, such as the relationship of trust to negotiate - *guanxi* - the sense of shame, the specialization of job functions, found in the perspectives of expatriates interviewed, demonstrates the need for the preparation of the individual being expatriated and the planning of the expatriation process. Their perception directly affects their behavior, their personal relationships with family and friends, their performance as a professional and, consequently, business results.

The following presents the theoretical frame of reference adopted by this article about the expatriate and cultural differences between Brazil and China, followed by the research method, analysis of results, and, finally, the final considerations.

2. The Expatriate

Companies that enter the internationalization process require professionals to represent them in the countries where they are operating. These professionals will live the expatriation experience,

which, according to Freitas (2010), is viewed as complex, transcending the space of the individual and their family, and requiring other skills in addition to that of the professional. The expatriation, which allows the individual to be called an expatriate, takes on the possibility of living another life, to break emotional ties, disrupt certainties, and participate in an adventure in their daily lives (FREITAS, 2010).

Authors such as Caligiuri (2000), Edström and Galbraith (1977) and Freitas (2010) define the expatriate as the employee who is sent by the parent company to live and work in another country.

The decision to work abroad may come from the company, such as when the employee is involuntarily sent to a branch abroad to meet certain activities, or it can be voluntarily from the individual himself/herself, when he/she decides to seek activity in another nation (MACHADO; HERNANDES, 2004; FROESE; PELTOKORPI, 2011).

With regards to the expatriation period, Caligiuri (2000) states that the minimum time is two years working outside their country of origin. Whereas Edström and Galbraith (1977) consider that the period is generally pre-designated between six months to five years.

In considering the abovementioned classifications, this study defines the expatriate as, 'the professional who will work in a foreign country, sent by a company or on their own initiative, generally within a pre-designated period, of at least six months'.

This definition is justified in the sense that voluntary or not, it isn't *sine qua non* that the individual was expatriated to get to know their perception in relation to Chinese culture.

However, for this work, it is important that individual has been in contact with this culture for a period of at least six months, which is, according to Cerdin (2002) cited in Nunes, Vasconcelos and Jausaud (2008), after the period of culture shock, when the gradual adaptation to a new culture begins.

Several characteristics are required of the professionals who take on the experience of working outside their country of origin. In this sense, Nunes, Vasconcelos and Jausaud (2008) argue that business' demand professionals who have these so-called global executive features: capacity for change and transformation, capacity to recycle policy, and management of global and local centers.

Sarfati (2011) highlights that one of the skills required by a global professional is cultural intelligence, that is, a personal characteristic which is a personality trait and a product of an individual's education, while at the same time, a skill susceptible to development. One of the possible ways to develop these characteristics and skills is the well-succeeded experience of expatriation.

Although the professional will have most of the necessary skills, the research by Froese and Peltokorpi (2011) reveals that expatriates can have some difficulties in the adaptation to work because of the cultural distance between countries, which can hurt job satisfaction. Van Erp et al. (2011) are in accordance with this statement and add that international activity can result in interpersonal disagreements, and that these relationship problems can occur in business and personal life.

According to Freitas (2009), to start a job in another country, beyond the comprehension of local society, the expatriates need to understand the significance of organizational identity and image which propitiates the shock of not only a national culture, but also in relation to the culture of the company in which they work.

Through Nunes, Vasconcelos and Jaussaud (2008) it is understood that the literature referring to expatriation presents some common currents. The first of these is presented in the theoretical frame of reference which corresponds with the expatriate and organizational group's need for skills. However, the emphasis of this study is based on a psychodynamic current where the affective processes of social actors are considered, as well as their psychological, political and historic system (CERDIN, 2002; JOLY, 2010). In addition, the cultural current, which considers that individuals construct different interpretations of symbolic phenomena, since they have different perceptions, biographies, interests and roles, highlighting the adaptation of the expatriate to the host country's culture.

Although it is understood that the focus of this work is given in psychodynamic and culture theoretical currents, it is noted that in the empirical analysis, other currents are addressed and mixed in with one another.

In this context, the search for adjustment in the organizational environment seems to be linked to the cultural aspects of the environment where the

individual is placed. One of the factors that contribute to the adaptation of the expatriate professional is to understand the cultural traits of the country they will be sent, in an organizational and national level.

Thus, as this article involves the countries of Brazil and China, the following highlights some of the cultural differences between them.

3. Cultural Differences between Brazil and China

According to Hofstede (1991), culture is the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one group. Each individual can be part of several groups simultaneously, making them the holder of mental programming at different levels, such as a level corresponding to religion or generation, or to a national and organizational level.

As to the national cultures, they can be better visualized when the differences between eastern and western cultures are compared. In order to identify one of these differences, Schein (2009) highlights the study of Redding and Martyn-Johnes (1979) that indicates that eastern societies do not focus as much on distinguishing an individual of the group, as it occurs with the westerns, and so they focus less on the self-realization as an essential process of personality. Concerning the distance to power, the relations of authority in Asian countries such as China, are similar to the Latin countries, according to Hofstede (1991). On the other hand, Chung (2005), when comparing cultural traits between China and Brazil, explains that although there is a high level of respect towards authority, Brazilians consider their superiors as high of knowledge, though fallible; different from the Chinese, where the boss has legitimate power and in the case one does not agree with him, it represents impoliteness.

One of the characteristics forming the basis for the differentiation between countries is their historical facts. According to Motta (2009) and Motta and Caldas (2009), when we study the Brazilian culture, we notice the influence of history over Brazil and its origins, such as the Portuguese colonization, the indigenous people, slavery, immigration; similarly, when we study the Chinese culture, the influence of Confucianism and its millenary culture is evident (HOFSTEDE, 1997; CHUNG, 2005).

In regards to Brazil, for Borges de Freitas (2009) it is difficult to generalize the understanding of values and attitudes and group them into a cultural profile, because of the high level of heterogeneity in its

culture. However, it is possible to observe certain everyday behaviors which have an existential sense, because given this diversity we are able to glimpse “a ‘national soul’ in the way of traits that seem common to everyone” (BORGES DE FREITAS, 2009, p. 40). In this sense, the author presents the main elements of the Brazilian culture as a series of cultural traits. For the author, the traits mean general characteristics, common or frequent, which each individual uses to see himself/herself as a Brazilian.

- **Hierarchy:** tendency to the centralization of power within social groups, distancing the relations among different groups and acceptance of lower groups;
- **Personalism:** society based on personal relations, search of proximity and affection in the relations, paternalism - moral and economic domain;
- **Trickery:** flexibility and adaptability to social environment; the Brazilian way;
- **Sensuality:** taste for the sensual and the exotic in social relations;
- **Adventurous:** more of a dreamer than disciplined; tendency to the aversion for hard or methodical work.

However, Borges de Freitas (2009) emphasizes that his study does not encompass all Brazilian national traits; these traits were structured in order to facilitate an association with the everyday life of Brazilian organizations.

Another characteristic of the Brazilians regarding cultural distance, from the perspective of Rocha (2003), is that Brazilians tend to see themselves as more distant than closer to most people, except for the Latin-Americans and Portuguese, in addition to facing difficulties in trusting strangers. On the other hand, Motta et al. (2010), in his research about Brazilian culture, observes that Brazilians value what is foreign, as a heritage of its colonization. This fact is present in personal and organizational everyday life, which often affects the Brazilian style of working, as the use of models conceived in a different context from Brazil's.

In relation to China, Hofstede (1997) observes that when studying the Chinese culture, we must consider the Confucianism heritage and the view of a long-term planning horizon. Confucius (551-479 a.C.) supported that “an organized society under a benevolent moral code would be prosperous,

politically stable and strong against attacks of enemies. He taught that this moral code started with the reverence and respect to the wise and to the parents”. (CHUNG, 2005, p.86). His teachings influence both the Chinese society and behavior up to this day (CHUNG, 2005; FRACAROLI et al., 2012).

An example of a cultural aspect of China that is rooted in historical facts, and which is much valued by the Chinese, consists of a complex system of social networks, called *guanxi*, which has trust as one of its characteristics (FRACAROLI et al., 2012). The *guanxi* represents a Chinese behavioral aspect related to the influence of the connection network in professional and social results. It is a complex phenomenon in which it is expected that favors be eventually compensated by other favors (CHUNG, 2005).

Another relevant factor when doing business in China is the non-verbal and situational signs, subtle in their communication, capable of being more significant than words (ROBBINS, 2009). Besides the typical way of communication, certain behaviors are also singular to the Chinese culture, as it is the case of alcoholic drinks consumed in celebration situations or agreements between companies, which makes frequent access to drinks during work time, which is not very common in western countries (VU, 2005 *apud* MURITIBA; ALBUQUERQUE, 2009).

In face of the above, some differences can be perceived in relation to the cultural characteristics of Brazil and China. For Chung (2005), the cultural influences gave rise to a series of elements which underpin the cultural traits of the Chinese concerning business, in relation to the cultural traits of Brazilians; as can be observed in Table 1.

Table 1

Differences in the purpose of relationship between the Chinese and Brazilian

| Chinese | Brazilian |
|--|---|
| Personal relationships have consequences in business; | Clear disassociation between social and professional relationships; |
| Emphasis in trust and personal relationship; | Emphasis in agreements; |
| Symbiotic relationships between their professional contacts; | Independence in relationships between distinct companies; |
| Encouraged by economic, political and social interests; | Encouraged by economic interests; |
| Clear social conduct rules, formally defined. | Informality and spontaneity in social conduct. |

Source: Chung (2005).

In this sense, we observe that life in a culture flows in so far as the behavior of the individuals agree to the non-written codes, social rules and customs characterizing that culture, and the same happens in the organizations, as the organizational culture is influenced by national culture (TROMPENAARS, 1994).

This perspective is evident when a person of a certain nationality finds himself/herself in a foreign environment, as in the case of the expatriate. They face a different space than they are used to, both in the professional and personal environment and the distinctions between the cultural characteristics start to unconsciously emerge.

From this context, it can be noted that cultural differences can affect the foreigner's life in the

destination country. Thus, we can say that the psychic distance between the countries can cause psychological distress regarding the cultural, business and macro-environment dimensions (GERVASONI; KUBO; FARINA, 2014). In this sense, as the elements contemplated by the psychic distance are understood by the expatriate, the adapting process starts (TUNG, 1998; TAKEUCHI et al., 2002; GRINSTEIN; WATHIEU, 2008; GERVASONI; KUBO; FARINA, 2014).

4. Research Method

This article adopts a qualitative approach of the exploratory type, with the aim of analyzing the Chinese culture related to business from the perspective of expatriate Brazilians in China. For Richardson (2011), the qualitative research analyzes

Table 2
Profile of the Expatriate Respondents

| Resp.* | Gen* | Age | From | Education | Area of activity in the company | Job Titles/ Positions in China | Expatriation Time |
|--------|------|-----|------|---|---|--|--|
| E1 | F | 21 | RS | Journalism Incomplete | Fashion | Agency Model and free-lancer | 7 months + 4 months until the moment of research. |
| E2 | F | 38 | SP | Foreign Trade, Specialization in Marketing | Lighting | Marketing Director for Asia and later, only for China | 3 years and 4 months until the moment of research. |
| E3 | M | 45 | RS | Electrical Engineering; Specialization in Labor Safety Engineering and MBA. | Equipment for energy field. | Production Manager, Industrial Director, General Director | 7 years |
| E4 | F | 21 | CE | Advertising and Marketing, incomplete | Fashion | Agency Model | 3 months + 3 months + 3 months |
| E5 | M | 43 | RJ | Business Administration | Food | General Manager | 2 years until the moment of research. |
| E6 | F | 40 | SP | Letters and Post-graduate program in Literature. | Food | Coordinator of Sales Administration | 1 years and 7 months until the moment of research. |
| E7 | F | 30 | SP | Architecture | Architecture | Senior Architect | 3 1/2 years |
| E8 | M | 27 | CE | Aeronautical Mechanical Engineering | Exchanges | Vice President of Corporate Social Relations | 7 months |
| E9 | M | 32 | RS | Business Administration and MBA in Business Logistics and Professional Coaching | Heavy line auto parts | Coordinator of Supply Chain | 8 months |
| E10 | M | 47 | RS | High School and Professionalizing Courses in the footwear, leather and similar fields. | Footwear Industry. | Footwear Technician | 8 years until the moment of research. |
| E11 | M | 26 | RN | Safety Engineering Course in England and Safety Technician in Brazil | Quality, Safety, Environment and Health | Analyst of Quality, Safety, Environment and Health | 1 years and 6 months |
| E12 | M | 30 | RS | Industrial Automation, Master's degree on Materials Engineering, MBA in Business Management and in International Business with China. | Commercial Vehicle for cargo carrying | Analyst of supplier development for the group of companies | 6 months + 1 year until the moment of research. |

Source: Prepared by the authors. Note: *Respondent | *Gender

complex and distinctive situations in order to understand the dynamic processes experienced by social groups and to enable, at a deeper level, the understanding of individual behavior particularities, which seem coherent in relation to that proposed by this research. As to the exploratory character, according to Sampieri *et al.*, (2006), this type of study seeks to discuss and to advance in the knowledge about subjects still little researched and/or enlarge already existing studies.

The construction of data was completed through semi-structured interviews, from a previously defined script, with twelve expatriate Brazilian professionals in China. In order to contact the participants, we used a combination of techniques: *purposeful sampling* and the snowball. From the perspective of Glesne (1999), mentioned by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008), a *purposeful sampling* intends to use several sources of information, for instance, the ones used in this study: virtual social networks and indications. From the contact with the first respondent, the snowball technique started, where the participant indicates other people who fit the research criteria (PATTON, 1990 *apud* ERIKSSON; KOVALAINEN, 2008). The respondent profiles can be seen in Table 2.

In relation to the interview script, an instrument was prepared to address: history of life and work experience in Brazil, life and experience in the Chinese company. The interviews lasted about one hour and were carried out and recorded via Skype for further transcription.

For data analysis, we used the content analysis technique, more specifically the category analysis. The defined categories for analysis were not *a priori*, but from the reports of the respondents. According to Bardin (2011), the content analysis is a series of communication analysis techniques which aim at obtaining indexes that allow the inference of knowledge related to the variables inferred in those messages.

A pre-analysis was carried out through a skimming of the interviews, identifying the parts addressing the perception of expatriate Brazilians on the Chinese culture related to business. During the scanning of the material a more profound reading was carried out to gather the parts from the most common subjects. This resulted in the definition of the following categories: *guanxi*, standard cultural behavior, specialization of position, to save face, and respect to hierarchy, as presented in Figure 1. Finally, a data

treatment was carried out with an interpretation of categories compared to the theory related to the subject.

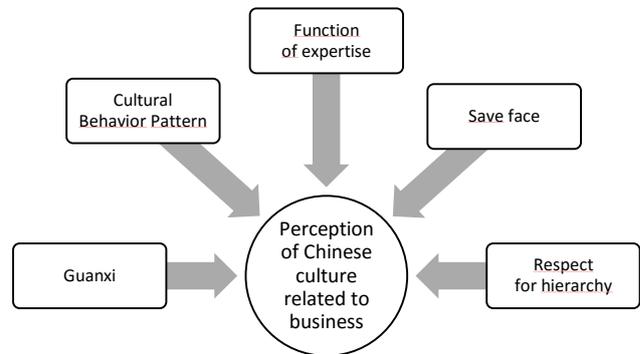


Figure 1: Non a priori defined categories of analysis
Source: Prepared by the authors.

The analysis of the non a priori defined categories will be presented below.

5. Analysis of Results

The categories presented in this section are the result of the similitude among the talks with the interviewed expatriates and they are analyzed in the light of the literature relevant to the subject.

Guanxi

The feelings, thoughts and actions that each individual manifests make up part of our mental programming, which in turn is defined by culture (HOFSTEDE, 1991). The culture which establishes the individual behavioral patterns of a country is called national culture by Hofstede (1991), and it is related to the strong mental programming of its citizens.

In China, one cultural manifestation of crucial importance refers to the complex network system of personal connections, called *guanxi*, based on the bonds of trust between people (SMITH *et al.*, 2011; FRACAROLI *et al.*, 2012).

For Chung (2005), the *guanxi* is a complex phenomenon in which it is expected that one favor will be compensated later by other favors; a cultural trait and a behavioral characteristic of the Chinese which influences their professional and social outcomes.

Selmer (2005) suggests that the *guanxi* could be considered as a facilitator for business success in China. Fracaroli *et al.*, (2012) complements this idea by stating that there are many cultural traits that

interfere in commercial and negotiation exchanges, but the *guanxi* is one of the most relevant to the area of business. The influence of this cultural trait and its repercussions on business were noticed and used as an adaptation strategy by some expatriate respondents, as can be seen in the talks by E3 and E12.

E3: In general, the Chinese, from the moment that you can establish a relationship of trust, they are extremely loyal and that will last a lifetime. If I go to China again in ten years and find people who I related well to there, they will still be my friends and this personal relationship is above any company or institutional relationship that may exist. Things work from person to person, there is no company loyalty, there is no company secret, there is nothing. There is friendship between people, they have a lot of that, the network of theirs they call guanxi, the group that they have grown, they have intimacy, this group is indissoluble, that is what works.

E12: Many Chinese treat you as a friend, because maybe they have a certain interest, they get that... Ah, here in China many things work like guanxi. Guanxi is the relationship, you know, so the moment people know you're looking for something, they want to become your friends, but you never know if they are gaining something externally or not [...] China works that way, everything is relationship, you have to go drink a rum with the guy, you have to go there to laugh with him [...] there's no way you can't fail to notice that it makes a difference, unlike the Brazilians. In Brazil, business comes first, the relationship comes afterwards. Here in China it is just the opposite, first they really value the relationship, they want to know you, know who you are, have a rum with you, if you smoke they want to smoke with you, so then they start thinking about business. That is a difference to the Brazilian market, eh, for them, to establish trust, first comes friendship, then later it leads to the business aspect.

From the reports, it can be seen that by having knowledge of the *guanxi*, the interviewees realized that they could use this Chinese cultural characteristic to their advantage, contributing to the achievement of carrying out business and relating with the Chinese.

Cultural behavior patterns

For Fracaroli *et al*, (2012) there are numerous reports of companies across a wide range of segments and nationalities that continually face difficulty in operating in China and negotiating with the Chinese, mainly due to cultural barriers. In this

sense, from the perspective of Trompenaars (1994), such difficulty stems from people's behavior, which is influenced by a certain country's culture and what conditions one to have a patterned behavior in relation to their lifestyle, how they do business and how they face work. Fracaroli *et al*, (2012) makes a similar point in which business people, their companies and their teams are generally directed to perform standard business practices, and to adhere to the rules of conduct from their own countries.

In face of this, Malek and Budhwar (2013) show the importance of the professional with cultural intelligence, since they are more open to understand cultural differences. An excerpt of E9's report shows a negotiating situation with a Chinese supplier which illustrates this approach.

E9: I had a supplier in the negotiation process and I had to close that negotiation. The Chinese sometimes they are, I won't say to you, stubborn, but often [...] you understand, with time, the Chinese limit, you know? Knowing how much you can do, how far you can go, how far you can't, to make the limit very clear. Well, I won't give you a discount from here on, I'm going to take this example. In this case it wasn't a discount, but it was a new negotiation which I was opening, and the Chinese didn't understand what I was proposing. Here comes a little language difficulty, comes a bit of everything and I had already lost all the patience that I had.

I remember that our office was on the seventeenth floor in a commercial building. I had such a strong argument with the Chinese that the guys heard me speaking there on the first floor of the building.

The guy understood and accepted, I ended up getting what I wanted [...] In addition to a lot of argument and persuasion, there was a kind of yelling going on, as it was a supplier with whom I already had a long-term relationship.

From the report, it can be seen the importance of understanding the cultural behavior of the Chinese in their professional activities in order to know the limits of positioning in negotiations and what attitude to take in the moments that cultural differences emerge in a negotiation.

Function of Expertise

Fracaroli *et al*, (2012) suggests that it is necessary for people who work in companies in China to have knowledge about the peculiarities of Chinese culture in order to learn to deal with differences. For Morgan

(1996), when talking about culture, one refers to the reality construction process in social systems of knowledge, ideology, values, laws and daily rituals, which enable people to see and understand events, actions, objects, expressions and particular situations in different ways. These patterns of understanding represent the foundations that render someone's behavior sensitive and significant (MORGAN, 1996).

One of the behavioral characteristics in the Chinese work environment observed by the expatriates was the way of thinking in relation to their work activities; the Chinese only perform their function and one is an official expert in what he/she does, according to reports by E6 and E11.

E6: What is difficult is this: the thinking, the way the Chinese think, this thing that I was hired for and my role is this one, I cannot get out of here.

They think inside the box, they have to stay here inside the box, I can't step out of it. So this, at times, is a little difficult, because, especially when a problem arises, they do not have that "waist game" – "jogo de cintura" – we are used to having or, ah, let me think another way. Also, if this leaves the box, it is no longer my responsibility, so this is very complicated and we still struggle with this today. I'll give you just one example: you go to the bank, and then you have the person who asks you the question: what are you going to do?

Here you say: "ah, I came to exchange money". Then you go to the counter, there is another person who will give you a form for you to fill in, you fill it in, there is someone else who will check the form, yet another person, then you deliver the form, there is another person who will give you the password and then you go to the bank teller. And this is in everything here, including our office, they also have this thought: I do this here, it's my box, if I was hired to sell, I will only sell, if I was hired, for example, to be a secretary to answer the phone, I will just answer the phone. So, you can't change this thinking overnight.

E11: The people are very dedicated to their work! One's mission can be to tighten a screw, so he does it with great pleasure. He is proud to talk about the work related to this screw tightening. Now if you ask him to tighten the screw the other way, he'll face a huge difficulty. But to do what he was trained to do, which is what he does every day, he does it and he does it with pride, no matter how simple it is what he does, people do, and do well with pride, you know? Each one does what he was assigned to do and he does it well, with pride, and this is cool.

From the reports, it is seen that the Chinese characteristic of only performing their job function - being a specialist, required the expatriate respondents to adopt a behavior of insistence and repetition, to assimilate the way the Chinese work.

Saving Face

Another behavioral aspect of the Chinese related to business is the concern with self-image, known as "face" or "mien tzi" (CHUNG, 2005), or "miànzi" (FRACAROLI *et al.*, 2012; NITSCH; Diebel, 2007), which is represented in Chung's (2005) viewpoint of behavioral patterning in Chinese culture, giving rise to the terms "save face" or "lose face". These expressions denote the indirect exercise of power, in order to maintain the stability and integrity of small social groups, where each member has their hierarchal position.

From this perspective, Fracaroli *et al.* (2012) suggests that the expression "face" consists of one of the aspects of *guanxi*. Smith *et al.* (2011) presents this view in a similar way, arguing that if the individual can't maintain their relationship ties, or *guanxi*, "loss of face" will occur on both sides. Factors such as contradicting someone in public, accepting an invitation too quickly, or also rejecting it, a simple no for an answer may be an attack to "face", therefore the Chinese prefer indirect responses (CHUNG, 2005).

Although some respondents have not used the word "face" in their reports, they mentioned situations that describe the Chinese behavior to "save face" as one of the adverse situations in the workplace that took time to understand, as reported by E2, E3 and E5.

E2: You need to have a special ritual to talk to them, to get something from the Chinese. In the beginning, it was quite difficult because I did not know the ritual. If you ask: will you do this job for me? I will. But the job never arrives, then you have to ask in a different way: the job has to be done by tomorrow! Then they will answer you: tomorrow I can't, I can on Thursday. Then they will answer what they really can do. It has all this negotiation conversation ritual, because they are not very direct people. You have to know the ritual.

E3: They never say no to you, they will always say this to you: "ah, it might be hard to do". In the beginning, when someone says to you: "it is hard to do!"

But if you are Brazilian: "ah, it is difficult, but it will be done". The reality is in China, if it's hard, it won't get done. This is called saving face or losing face, they have a lot of this. They will never say no to the boss, because the head is the highest authority. They have this hierarchy in the head from ancient China and also reinforced by the Communist Party. The boss is always right, so, for an employee to say to the boss: "no, no, this is not allowed" - he has to say it in other ways. And 'other ways' when you do not speak the language and you are not local, is lost in translation, so you have to learn to interpret what they say. The greatest difficulty was precisely this. This lasted about four, five months, to understand when perhaps is a no and what to do to convince people.

E5: You become an executive who asks a lot more, sometimes you ask the same thing in three different ways and receive three different answers and you do not know where the truth lies, so you're always... You give an instruction, and then you have to check to see if they understood the exact instruction you gave. And then you have to check to see if they will do it. This is so much of the culture here.

It is evident that from the moment the respondent expatriates realized the Chinese pattern of behavior in relation to the characteristic of "saving face", they began to think of strategies to deal with it, adapt their way of speaking, asking, and demanding results from the Chinese employees of the company.

Respect for hierarchy

Just as *guanxi* ties are influenced by "face", both are associated with a typically hierarchical context, involving emotional commitment (SMITH *et al.*, 2011). On this subject, Chung (2005) states that the Chinese emphasize the verticalization of relationships, submit to hierarchy and seek to fulfill their obligations through obedience and formal authority.

Selmer, Luring and Feng (2009) illustrate this behavioral characteristic by the fact that in China, older people are respected by the younger, enabling them to request things from the younger people or those who have less power.

When comparing the cultural differences between China and Brazil, Chung (2005) explains that while there is a high level of respect for authority, Brazilians consider their superiors as people of great knowledge yet fallible, which, for the Chinese represents a sign of disrespect, violating the natural

order of things. For this reason, when this cultural dimension emerged in the day to day working relationships between Brazilian and Chinese, the expatriates felt the impact of this behavior, as can be seen in the talks by E3, E5 and E8.

E3: Culturally, they are very rich and very proud, so you have to be very careful. First I had to make myself recognized for my technical and managerial capacity. But from the moment that they recognized me and began to trust me, they obey and do the things that you set. Once you establish processes for them to do, and at first you do a check and a follow up of this process, then you can be sure they will not change. So they are quite reliable in this regard.

E5: You become very professorial, the boss here has a lot of power, but he has a lot of responsibility. They do exactly what the boss orders, if it works, congratulations to the boss, if it goes wrong, it's the boss's bad luck. And here the Chinese does not argue with the boss, he does not pull the rug from under the boss. His attitude is, I will obey the exact orders of my boss, even if I think what the boss asked me to do is stupid. I will definitely do it any way, if it works out the merit is his, if it goes wrong it is also his fault, I did as he ordered,

E8: When I had the final argument with my boss I decided to go to Shanghai; they had opened the Shanghai position already a few weeks earlier. The vacancy was in the argument where he yelled at me saying that what he thought was the right way, raged and beat on the table several times saying it was right. That with all the colleagues around looking and him shouting and banging on the table. I was also getting nervous, I angrily said: look, I 'm not going to argue with you anymore, because I know in one hour you will stop wanting to argue and will leave. I'm going to Shanghai, I'll get the position and I want to go. I will take the same attitude as you, I won't want to argue. It was a very extreme situation where the guy was being physically aggressive because he believed in the hierarchy and not in the power of ideas. He was much more interested in forcing his idea on me rather than convincing me of his idea, to the point where I said: but not in a single moment you gave me an argument that convinced me to change my mind and be in favor of yours - and he told me this: you do not need arguments, I'm your boss, I'm saying that it is this way and that's final!

From the reports it can be seen that both expatriates who were in a fairly high hierarchical position, had to change their way of acting at work in order to suit the company and the communication with their colleagues.

The reports presented support Trompenaars (1994) who suggests that the cultural traits of a certain specific context are responsible for directing the actions of individuals.

Such an approach, according to Fracaroli *et al*, (2012), influences the expatriate individual's way of thinking and acting, in relation to their position in the business environment.

This perspective is supported by the results of this study, as described in the respondent's reports, that several traits of Chinese culture impacted the way Brazilian expatriates act in their workplace. Such traits can be summarized as: culture shock, since a lot of Chinese business practices differ from Brazilian practices; *guanxi*, how they worship the relationships in business, impacting the Brazilians who often saw these situations as stressful and had to learn to deal with it; the "face" which is related to the way of doing business and the values linked to it; and, the way of addressing a Chinese employee, how to talk to him/her, respecting their behavioral peculiarities and hierarchy.

These characteristics were considered adversities which the expatriate had to learn to deal with. This is consistent with Selmer's (2005) viewpoint, which states that since the Western expatriates are unaware of the finer nuances of a cultural and social context, they are led quickly to a considerable amount of stressful situations attributing to their difficulties in business. From a similar perspective, one should also consider the psychic distance between the two countries, which reinforces the difficulty of adaptation (GERVASONI; KUBO; FARINA, 2014). Over time, the expatriate adapts to the environment and learns how to deal with the different situations of their mental model.

6. Final Considerations

By returning to the objective of this article - to analyze the Chinese culture related to business from the perception of expatriate Brazilians in China -, it can be said that the objective was achieved, since it was possible to show different situations lived by expatriate Brazilians in China, revealing the difficulties they faced in the work environment which were related to the Chinese business culture. It is emphasized that the analysis of categories occurred based on the perspective of the expatriate respondents and from the behaviors adopted and reported by them during the process of expatriation,

which allowed the definition of the categories: *guanxi*, standard cultural behavior, specialization in position, to save face, and respect to hierarchy.

As a result, it is highlighted the contribution to the expatriate studies of cultural and psychodynamic currents, with a focus on Chinese cultural traits, such as the relationship ties and trust which they prioritize to do business, called *guanxi*. The perception of doing business this way was used as an adaptation strategy by the expatriate.

The difficulty of understanding the Chinese standard behavior in their professional activities is also highlighted, which demanded from the expatriate a behavior of persistency and repetition to assimilate their way of working, such as the characteristic that the Chinese only performs his/her job function, he/she is a specialist and, the fact that he/she is not able to answer to the boss directly, either for shame or embarrassment, which is called "to save face". These behaviors happen due to the hierarchy highly respected by the Chinese people, which also demanded the expatriate to learn to understand and deal with these situations. As the expatriate encountered and assimilated the Chinese cultural traits, they started to relate better to their colleagues, because they could understand the way of reasoning of the Chinese people in the work environment. This way, the expatriate who starts the experience in China having acquired this knowledge previously, tends to feel less the impact of the cultural shock.

As a limitation, the fact that the expatriates did not have the same time of expatriation is considered; neither did they have positions of the same hierarchical level, which might differentiate the perspective of how to face difficulties. For further studies, we suggest replicating this research with Chinese people in Brazil and cross the data with this research data, in order to compare the perceptions of Brazilians and Chinese about the hosting country.

7. References

- BARDIN, L. **Análise de Conteúdo**. São Paulo: Edições 70, 2011.
- BORGES DE FREITAS, A. Traços brasileiros para análise organizacional. In: MOTTA, F.C.P.; CALDAS, M.P. **Cultura organizacional e cultura brasileira**. 1ª Ed., 8ª Reimp., p.38-54. São Paulo: Atlas, 2009.
- CALIGIURI, P. M. Selecting expatriates for personality characteristics: a moderating effect of personality on

- the relationship between host national contact and cross-cultural adjustment. **Management International Review**, v. 40, n. 1, p. 61-80, 2000.
- CÂMARA BRASIL CHINA. São Paulo, SP, 2012. Disponível em: <http://www.ccibc.com.br/a-china/economia>. Acesso em: 10/11/12.
 - CERDIN, J-L. **L'expatriation**. Paris: Éditions d'Organisation, 2002.
 - CHUNG, T. **Negócios com a China**: desvendando os segredos da cultura e estratégias da mente chinesa. Osasco, São Paulo: Novo Século, 2005.
 - EDSTRÖM, A.; GALBRAITH, J. R. Transfer of managers as a coordination and control strategy in multinational organizations. **Administrative Science Quarterly**, v. 22, n. 2, p. 248–263, 1977. DOI: 10.2307/2391959
 - ERIKSSON, P.; KOVALAINEN, A. **Qualitative Methods in Business Research**. London: Sage Publications, 2008.
 - FRACAROLI, F.; BANDEIRA DE MELO, S.A.; GUEVARA, A.J.H.; A study on the relevance of *Guanxi* culture for Latin American companies doing business with China. **Revista de Negócios**, Blumenau, v. 17, n. 3, p. 54–79, 2012. DOI:10.7867/1980-431.2012v17n3p54-79
 - FREITAS, M.E. **Cultura Organizacional**: evolução e crítica. Coordenador-assistente MASCARENHAS, A.O. São Paulo: Cengage Learning, 2009.
 - FREITAS, M.E. Multiculturalismo e expatriação nas organizações: vida do executivo expatriado, a festa vestida de riso ou de Choro. In: DAVEL, E.; VERGARA, S.C. (Org.). **Gestão com pessoas e subjetividade**. 4ª Ed. p.261-274, São Paulo: Atlas, 2010.
 - FROESE, F. J.; PELTOKORPI, V. Cultural distance and expatriate job satisfaction. **International Journal of Intercultural Relations**, v. 35, n. 1, p. 49-60, 2011. DOI:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.10.002
 - GERVASONI, V.C.; KUBO, E.K.M.; FARINA, M.C. Distância psíquica no processo de internacionalização: a percepção dos expatriados brasileiros. **Internext**, São Paulo, v.9, n.3, p.57-77, 2014. DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.18568/1980-48659357-772014>.
 - GLESNE, C. **Becoming qualitative researchers**: an introduction. 2ª Ed. New York: Longman, 1999.
 - GRINSTEIN, A.; WATHIEU, L. Cosmopolitanism, Assignment Duration, and Expatriate Adjustment: The Trade-Off between Well-Being and Performance. In: EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY WORKING PAPER. **Anais... ESMT**, n.08-011, 2008. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1353128>
 - HOFSTEDE, G. **Culturas e Organizações**: compreender a nossa programação mental. Lisboa: Edições Silabo, 1991.
 - HOFSTEDE, G. **Cultures and Organizations**: software of the mind. Nova York, 1997.
 - JOLY, A. Alteridade: ser executivo no exterior. In: CHANLAT, J-F.; TORRES, O. L. **O indivíduo na organização**: dimensões esquecidas, v.1., 3ª ed. 12ª Reimp. São Paulo: Atlas, 2010.
 - MACHADO, H.V.; HERNANDES, C.A. Alteridade, expatriação e trabalho: implicações para a gestão organizacional. **Revista de Administração Contemporânea**, v.8, n.3, p.53-73, 2004. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S1415-65552004000300004>
 - MALEK, M. A.; BUDHWAR, P. Cultural intelligence as a predictor of expatriate adjustment and performance in Malaysia. **Journal of World Business**, v.48, n.2, p.222–231, 2013. DOI: 10.1016/j.jwb.2012.07.006
 - MORGAN, G. **Imagens da organização**. São Paulo: Atlas, 1996.
 - MOTTA, F.C.P. Cultura e organizações no Brasil. In: MOTTA, F.C.P.; CALDAS, M.P. **Cultura organizacional e cultura brasileira**. 1ª Ed. 8ª Reimp. p.25-37. São Paulo: Atlas, 2009.
 - MOTTA, F.C.P.; CALDAS, M.P. Cultura organizacional e cultura brasileira (Introdução). In: MOTTA, F.C.P.; CALDAS, M.P. **Cultura organizacional e cultura brasileira**. 1ª ed., 8ª Reimp., p.15-21. São Paulo: Atlas, 2009.
 - MOTTA, F.C.P.; ALCADIPANI, R.; BRESLER, R. Cultura brasileira, estrangeirismo e segregação nas organizações. In: DAVEL, E. VERGARA, S.C. **Gestão com pessoas e subjetividade**. 4ª ed., p.237-257. São Paulo: Atlas, 2010.
 - MURITIBA, P.M., ALBUQUERQUE, L.G. Características da gestão estratégica de pessoas para as organizações internacionalizadas. In: ALBUQUERQUE, L.G., LEITE, N.P. (Org.). **Gestão de pessoas**: perspectivas estratégicas. São Paulo: Atlas, p.154-163, 2009.
 - NITSCH, M.; DIEBEL, F. Guanxi economics: Confucius meets Lenin, Keynes, and Schumpeter in contemporary China. **Revista de Administração Pública**, Rio de Janeiro, v.41, n.5, p.959-92, 2007. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0034-76122007000500008>
 - NUNES, L.H.; VASCONCELOS, I.F.G.; JAUSSAUD, J. **Expatriação de Executivos**. São Paulo: Thomson Learning, 2008.
 - ORSI, A. **Gestão internacional de pessoas**: políticas de recompensas para expatriados por empresas brasileiras. 2010. 185f. Tese (Doutorado em Administração)-Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2010.
 - REDDING, S. G.; MARTYN-JOHNES, T. A. Paradigm Differences and their relation to management functions, with reference to southeast Asia. In: NEGANDHI, A. R.; WILPERT, B. (Ed.). **Organizational Functioning in a Cross-Cultural Perspective**. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1979.
 - RICHARDSON, R.J. **Pesquisa Social**: métodos e técnicas. 3ª Ed. São Paulo: Atlas, 2011.

- ROBBINS,S.P. **Fundamentos do comportamento organizacional**. 8ª ed. São Paulo: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009.
- ROCHA,A. Por que as empresas brasileiras não se internacionalizam? In: ROCHA, A.(Org.). **As novas fronteiras: a multinacionalização das empresas brasileiras**. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Mauad, 2003.
- SAMPIERI,R.H.; COLLADO,C.F.; LUCIO,P.B. **Metodologia da Pesquisa**. São Paulo: Mc Graw-Hill Interamericana Brasil Ltda, 2006.
- SARFATI,G. Gestão Multicultural. **GV Executivo**, São Paulo: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, v.10, n.2, p.36-39, 2011.
- SCHEIN, E.H. **Cultura Organizacional e Liderança**. São Paulo: Atlas, 2009.
- SELMER, J. Cross-cultural training and expatriate adjustment in China: Western joint venture managers. **Personnel Review**, v.34, n.1, p.68–84, 2005.
- SELMER, J.; LAURING, J.; FENG, Y. Age and expatriate job performance in Greater China. **Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal**, v.16, n.2, p.131–148, 2009. DOI: 10.1108/00483480510571888
- SMITH, P. B.; HUANG, H. J.; HARB, C.; TORRES, C. How Distinctive Are Indigenous Ways of Achieving Influence? A Comparative Study of *Guanxi*, *Wasta*, *Jeitinho*, and “Pulling Strings”. **Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology**, v.43, n.1, p.135–150, 2011. DOI: 10.1177/0022022110381430
- TAKEUCHI, R.; YUN,S.; TESLUK,P. E. An examination of crossover and spillover effects of spousal and expatriate cross-cultural adjustment on expatriate outcomes. **Journal of Applied Psychology**, v.87, n.4, p.655–666, 2002. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.4.655>
- TROMPENAARS,F. **Nas ondas da cultura: como entender a diversidade cultural nos negócios**. São Paulo: Educator, 1994.
- TUNG, R. L. Americans expatriates abroad: from neophytes to cosmopolitans. **Journal of World Business**, v.33, n.2, p.125-144, 1998. DOI:10.1016/S1090-9516(98)90002-5
- VAN ERP, K. J.P.M.; GIEBELS, E.; VAN DER ZEE, K.I.; VAN DUJIN, M.A.J. Let it be: expatriate couples' adjustment and the upside of avoiding conflicts. **Anxiety, Stress & Coping: An International Journal**, v.24, n.5, p.539-560, 2011. DOI: 10.1080/10615806.2011.571768

About the Authors

- **Laura Alves Scherer** is Master in Administration. Assistant Teacher at the Federal University of Pampa – UNIPAMPA, Santana do Livramento, RS, Brazil. E-mail: laurascherer@ymail.com
- **Italia Fernando Minello** is Doctor in Administration. Associate Professor of the Postgraduate Program in Administration at the Federal University of Santa Maria – UFSM, Santa Maria, RS, Brazil. E-mail: italo.minello@uol.com.br

A cultura chinesa nos negócios na percepção de Brasileiros Expatriados

Laura Alves Scherer^A e Italo Fernando Minello^B

^A Universidade Federal do Pampa – UNIPAMPA, Santana no Livramento, RS, Brasil.

^B Universidade Federal de Santa Maria – UFSM, Santa Maria, RS, Brasil.

DETALHES DO ARTÍGO

Histórico do Artigo:

Recebido em 31 de Dezembro de 2014

Aceito em 27 de Julho de 2015

Disponível online em 19 de Dezembro de 2015

Sistema de Revisão “Double Blind Review”

Editor Científico

Felipe Mendes Borini

Palavras-chaves:

Expatriados

Cultura

China

Guanxi

Salvar a face

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo consiste em analisar a cultura chinesa relacionada aos negócios na percepção de brasileiros expatriados na China. Para este propósito, abordou-se sobre a literatura referente ao expatriado e às diferenças culturais entre Brasil e China. Como método de estudo, trata-se de uma abordagem qualitativa em que foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas com doze profissionais brasileiros expatriados na China. Para a análise dos dados foi utilizada a técnica de análise de conteúdo, especificamente a análise categorial, sendo as categorias: guanxi, comportamento cultural padrão, especialização de função, salvar a face, e respeito à hierarquia. Como resultados, evidencia-se a dificuldade de compreensão do comportamento padrão dos chineses nas suas atividades profissionais por parte dos expatriados, como: os laços de relacionamento e confiança que os chineses priorizam ao fazer um negócio, denominados guanxi; a característica de o chinês executar somente a sua função de trabalho, ser um especialista; o fato de não conseguir responder ao seu chefe de uma forma direta, por vergonha ou constrangimento, que denomina-se “salvar a face”; e a hierarquia bastante respeitada pelos chineses.

© 2015 Internext | ESPM. Todos os direitos reservados!
