

Problems of Cross-cultural Diplomatic Negotiations and Globalisation

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[Abstract: Diplomatic negotiations involve different cultures. It is evident that diplomats are influenced by their respective cultures. Diplomatic negotiation is a method of cooperation and means of resolving conflict peacefully with other nations, cultures, and other forms of transactional partners. In some cases, culture influences diplomatic negotiators and their behaviors, which, in turn, create problems like negotiation failure. The problems of cross-cultural negotiations generally arise from misunderstanding and misinterpretation of their distinct systems, symbols and signs by their counterparts. This article argues that current trends of globalisation can assist in bridging cultural gaps with different nations and solve the problems associated with diplomatic negotiations across cultures by interconnecting different cultures, creating interdependencies, and supporting the growth of technologies.]

Keywords: Culture, Globalization, Diplomacy, Negotiation, Technology, Interdependency.

Introduction

Diplomatic negotiation is a method of conflict resolution and cooperation involving different cultures. It is often considered that the problems of cross-cultural diplomatic negotiations be *largely* be declined by the process of globalisation. On balance, globalisation can help eliminate problems associated with diplomatic negotiation across cultures in three different ways – (1) interconnecting different cultures, (2) allowing interdependence in every sphere of life, and (3) supporting the growth of technology. Against this backdrop, this article sheds light on the question: To what extent globaliasation help decline the problems associated with diplomatic negotiations across cultures? From the

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academic perspective, this article aims to contribute to the knowledge of the researchers, exploring the challenges of cross-cultural diplomatic negotiations and the role of globalisation to mitigate those challenges.

Methodology

This article used information from secondary sources to answer the proposed research question. As secondary sources, information was collected from various scholarly articles and publications.

Structure of the Paper

In order to make an objective assessment, this article will first define culture and globalization (*section I*). Then the article will explain how and why some aspects of culture could potentially be problems in the diplomatic negotiations (*section II*). It will then highlight some of the problems related to cross-cultural negotiation. Finally, the article will analyse how globalisation could positively reduce those problems (*section III*).

SECTION I

Culture

Definitions of culture are numerous and also are often ambiguous. (Moran and Stripp 1991 and Zartman 1993, cited in Salacuse 1998: 222). Geert Hofstede (1984) treated culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (Hofstede 1984: 21).

Raymond Cohen identified three key features of culture: (1) culture is not a quality of individuals as such, but of the society of which they are part of; (2) culture is acquired - through socialisation by individuals from that particular society; and (3) every culture is a unique complex of features incorporating every area of social life (Cohen 1993: 23-24).

According to Clyde Kluckhohn (1951) “Culture consists patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reaction, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values.” (Kluckhohn 1951 cited in Cohen 1987: 65). Culture is essentially an amalgamation of perceptions, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, values of a certain community that uniquely identify them amongst communities.

Defining Globalisation

Over the last few decades, the world has been experiencing globalisation, which can be defined ‘simply the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness.’ (cited in McGrew 2014: 16). Three major

characteristics can describe it: (a) widening of social, political, and economic activities across political boundaries, (b) increased interconnectedness in almost every sphere of social existence, from economic to ecological, and (c) the growth of worldwide systems of transport, communication technology, increases the pace of global interactions and processes (McGrew 2014: 18).

Globalisation facilitates the integration of the present-day world economy. It means that most national economies depend on the global market. Consequently, economic instability in one region could potentially have adverse effects on another region (McGrew 2014: 17). As globalisation has intensified, transnational and global issues, which require global regulation, for example, climate change, WMD, and others, have been recognised (McGrew 2014: 17). Fuelled by advances in technology, globalisation makes communication easier amongst different nations and cultures.

SECTION II

Problems associated with diplomatic negotiations across-culture

Culture influences diplomatic negotiations as diplomatic negotiations involve, in general, people of different cultures. It is natural that diplomats are influenced by their respective cultures. It affects the goals negotiators set and how they will behave and take action (Tinsley, Taylor and Adair 2012: 186). However, one should be mindful that culture is one of many factors like national interests of economic and political nature, which can affect diplomatic negotiations.

The problems associated with negotiating across cultures generally comes from the fact that every culture uses different systems of symbols, which are governed by different codes of meaning. This diversity is most ostensive in the realm of language (Cohen 1987: 66; Bell 1988: 241-242). The signs and sounds used by one culture may be incomprehensible to another culture. This incomprehensibility arises from newness with strange marks, articulations and gestures, and incongruity of the underlying conception. Even the dictionary meanings of the words can have different understandings in different cultures. Cohen (1987) cited the example of the word, 'peace', in Arabic *salaam* and in Hebrew *shalom* means peace. But those words have quite different understandings in the Islamic and Judaic traditions with serious implications for Egyptian-Israeli relations. In 1979, a peace treaty was signed between them. But because of different expectations of scope and pace of the relationship, they experienced trouble (Cohen 1987: 66).

A certain pattern of behaviour may be desirable to one culture but not to the other cultures. For example, in the hierarchical Japanese culture, it is common for the party with lesser status to avert eye contact to show respect for the other party's superior status. But in the US culture, this eye avoidance tendency connotes different understandings – caginess, or deception. Thus, the meaning

of any sort of negotiation behaviour may change with the change of the cultural boundary. Differences in negotiating behaviour, may lead to misattribution. This misattribution may eventually lead to the failure of negotiation (Tinsley, Taylor and Adair 2012: 189-190).

Glen Fihser (1980) identifies that culture can have effect on negotiation in four ways. First, 'by conditioning one's perception of reality' (Cohen 1997: 17) - it means human minds are information processors - ways in which a person receives, stores, organizes, and uses information are primarily influenced by her culture. It further means that when people from same culture, communication during negotiation will not be any major problem – at least in the cultural sense. In diplomatic negotiation, when participants are from different cultural backgrounds, there is a possibility of difference between the intention of one party and the meaning understood by the other party due to cultural implications (Fisher 1980: 13-14).

Second, 'blocking out information inconsistent or unfamiliar with culturally grounded assumptions' (Cohen 1997: 17). In the normal process of learning, certain internal consistency develops amongst our beliefs, images and information constructs. The human mind does not want any disruption in this consistency. We try to perceive new information and ideas that fit into our existing ideas or beliefs. Otherwise, we tend to reject it. But international negotiation obviously involves new ideas and beliefs that may not be consistent with ours (Fisher 1980: 14). Cross-cultural discrepancies may contribute to the failure of negotiation. For example, in the 1993-94 MFN (Most-Favoured-Nations) negotiations, the USA misinterpreted Chinese signals. Consequently, there was a fundamental misjudgement by linking the topic of human rights with trade, notwithstanding that the negotiation was not going forward positively, to begin with (Cohen 1997: 19).

Third, 'projecting meaning onto the other party's words and actions' (Cohen 1997: 17). It means that when one party tries to project the meaning of certain messages same meaning to the other party. Hence, confusion arises in full circle in a cross-cultural situation (Fisher 1980: 15). Sometimes negotiators may assess foreign cultures through their cultural lenses (Faure and Sjöstedt 1993: 6). This may lead one of the parties, by mistake, to offer premature concessions in the mistaken assumption that the other party in the negotiation, motivated by the same eagerness for compromise, will reciprocate in kind. For example, in 1955, there was a negotiation between China and the USA regarding civilian repatriation. Initially, the USA made substantial concessions. China did not show any flexibility. Thus, the USA decided not to insist on the immediate release of all civilian detainees held on the mainland. China believed that holding hostages would be politically beneficial. China miscalculated the US sensitivity to human rights issues. As a result, the relationship between them turned bitter (Cohen 1997: 15).

Fourth, 'possibility of impelling the ethnocentric observer to an incorrect attribution of motive' (Cohen 1997: 17). It means that chances of assuming motives in cross-cultural situation is relatively low (Fisher 1980: 15). Failure to interpret the counterpart's intentions in a diplomatic negotiation, because of cross-cultural misunderstanding may deprive one party's ability to foresee future moves and thus be unable to take necessary and preventive or remedial actions. In 1954, the US ambassador misunderstood Nehru's reaction to the 1954 US-Pakistani arms deal. As a result, the USA government was not ready for the spasm of outrage that shook Indian opinion (Cohen 1997: 221).

In short, cultural differences amongst diplomatic negotiators sometimes may hinder negotiation processes and outcomes. However, the following section will analyse how globalisation can help to reduce the problems that may arise from cultural differences or misunderstandings in diplomatic negotiations.

SECTION III

Globalisation and problems associated with cross-cultural diplomatic negotiations

Analysing the concept of globalisation and the problems associated with diplomatic negotiation across cultures, it is possible to show that, on balance, globalisation can contribute to reducing potential problems of cross-cultural diplomatic negotiations. But it does not necessarily mean that globalisation led to the homogenisation of culture. As Tomlinson argues that it "... far from destroying [cultural identity], [globalisation] has been the perhaps the most significant force in creating cultural identity." (Tomlinson 2000: 270).

Firstly, the problems associated with conditioning one's perception of reality will likely reduce with the help of the technological advancement associated with globalisation. It is possible to check and verify information on a culture and relevant cultural practices provided by the negotiating parties in international diplomacy by using multiple technologies. For example, the use of audio and video technologies allow the teams to check speech tones and gestures, and facial expressions. If there is any inconsistency in the information provided by the negotiating parties, it is possible to identify them by using technology. Thus, it minimises the possibility of a cultural misunderstanding occurring. Moreover, it is now easier to have information about different cultures from the internet. For example, different cultures have different connotations of pointing and finger-wagging. This difference in cultural understanding may have a negative effect on any diplomatic negotiations. But because of the process of globalisation with the development of information technology allows the negotiating parties to have knowledge about different cultures before the negotiation, thereby reducing the cultural distance in the negotiation process.

Secondly, regarding the problems of blocking out information that are inconsistent or unfamiliar with culturally grounded assumptions, it will more likely decline by the process of globalisation. As globalisation facilitates interdependence and interconnectedness, every country in diplomatic negotiation, for national interests, will try to accept the new ideas and beliefs, which may be inconsistent with their respective culture. We can consider the example of the approach of the USA during the Clinton administration towards China, where the USA related the human rights record of China with trade in the MFN (Most-Favoured-Nations) negotiation. However, the Clinton administration later acknowledged that his previous approach to the USA-China relations had failed. He then decided to *de-link* China's privileged trading status from its human rights record (Broder and Mann, 1994). Here, the catalyst to change the decision is globalisation and economic interdependence. For example, as of December 2017, China is the largest trading partner of the USA (United States Census Bureau Report, 2017).

Thirdly, discrepancies between cultures in diplomatic negotiation may lead to offer premature concessions by one party. It typically happens when one side interprets a certain message that means the same to the other party. But globalisation facilitates to reduce this problem through increases in interconnectedness and interdependence across countries and cultures. Each country involved in the diplomatic negotiation will try to maintain the relationship with other countries. For interdependence, they will be reliant on each other. If any of the parties offers a concession, influenced by their culture, and the other party does not respond in kind, their relationship will break down in the future. Thus, in this global network, associated with the growth of technology, parties involved in diplomatic negotiation will try to understand the positions of each party honestly to maximise their self-interests.

Fourthly, the problem of assuming incorrect motives in cross-cultural negotiations also likely to decline because of the globalisation. Interdependency, facilitated by globalisation, leads the negotiating parties to engage in constructive dialogue, where each party should be able to express its own as well as others' positions, perspectives and motives more clearly. In the current globalised world, almost every country is dependent on each other. Some of the global problems like environmental degradation, climate change, and others require global attention and cooperation. For example, it is almost impossible for any state, be it politically or economically powerful, to solve the environmental problems on their own. People from different countries are engaged in environmental diplomacy. They have different views that their own cultures and experiences may influence. However, they are clear about their positions. Because they have developed a common long-term goal through the process of globalisation - to protect and preserve the environment for future generations.

Conclusion

Globalisation creates opportunities for different nations and cultures to be interconnected and interdependent. It allows the parties involved in any diplomatic negotiations to work together to achieve their common goals, thereby reducing cultural obstacles. Also, intensified by advances in technology, globalisation helps to reduce cultural misunderstandings. On balance, the process of globalisation helps to bridge the cultural gaps and associated problems in diplomatic negotiations by creating interdependency, interconnection amongst different cultures, and the advancement of technology.

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