

CULTURE, CONFLICT STYLES, AND UNDERSTANDING:
CULTURAL IMPACTS ON THE USE OF CONFLICT STYLES IN CROSS-CULTURAL
COMMUNICATION

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of the School of Social Sciences

Indiana University Southeast

May 2023

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Masters in Interdisciplinary Studies

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April 18, 2023

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Today, we live within communities that are becoming increasingly globalized. Technological advancements allow us to engage, in real-time, with individuals on the other side of the globe, giving us the ability to connect with one another on a scale never witnessed before in human history. For all the benefits this ability to freely communicate affords us, conflict, that timeless feature of human interaction, remains ever present. Conflict, and our understanding of it, is further complicated when it occurs cross-culturally. Triandis (2000) notes, “[C]onflict is greater when the two cultures are very different than when they are similar” (Triandis, 2000, p.145). Different cultures have their own unique ideas on how conflicts are approached and managed when communicating with others (Brett, 2000; Carnevale & Choi, 2000; Leung et al., 2011; Tjosvold et al., 2001; Triandis, 1989; Triandis, 2000; Triandis et al., 1971). This uniqueness, if not properly understood, can result in misunderstandings between individuals of differing cultures, leading to an escalation in conflicts. Understanding the existence of differences in how different societies approach conflict is the focus of this study.

Folger et al. (1993), define conflict as “the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals” (p.4). We know that the process to manage conflicts varies from individual to individual. Conflict styles are one way to understand this variation (Folger et al., 1993; Friedman et al., 2000; Oetzel, 1998; Rahim, 1983; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978; Thomas & Kilmann, 2008; Thomas & Schaubhut, 2008; Ting Toomey et al., 1999). These styles are the “patterned responses to conflict in a variety of situations” (Ting-Toomey et al., 1999, p. 48). Conflict styles are highly researched subjects within many academic fields. From the social sciences to business, researchers are working to understand conflict styles to promote better communication (Cai et

al., 2002; Croucher et al., 2012; Folger et al., 1993; Friedman et al., 2000; Oetzel, 1998; Rahim, 1983; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978; Thomas & Kilmann, 2008; Thomas et al., 2008; Ting Toomey et al., 1999). We understand conflict based on five distinct styles: avoiding, accommodating, compromising, competing, and collaborating. They are found along two axes of human behavior, assertiveness, and cooperativeness, which satisfy the balance of concern for oneself and others (Folger et al., 1993, p.182; Rahim, 1983, p.369; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978, p.1139). Conflict styles fall along these two axes based on whether there is a high or low need for either or both parameters, depending on the goals of the individuals engaged in conflict.

The complexities of conflict increase when we introduce cultural influences into the discussion. There is much more to culture than meets the eye. Individuals may think that culture is based on where an individual is from, their dress, religion, cuisine, etc., where in fact, an individual's culture is much more than this. This study discusses elements of culture, specifically the differences between individualism (found in many Western countries) and collectivism (found in many Eastern countries and Central and South American countries), and how these societal differences affect interactions between nations and influence international conflict. Culture adds complexity not only to our understanding of conflict generally but also when conflict occurs cross-culturally.

The benefits of understanding the effects of culture on conflict are beneficial to human society at many levels, including fostering better relations and communication between governments, businesses, and other organizations (Brett, 2000; Janosik, 1987; Triandis, 2000). Cross-cultural interactions are becoming commonplace thanks to technology and an ever-increasing global marketplace. Economic trade, on a global level, finds businesses and

governments engaging more frequently than ever before. As beneficial for humanity as this trend is, it does come with its own unique problems. Cultural differences can lead to great misunderstanding and likely foster mistrust between interdependent parties. (Brett, 2000; Janosik, 1987; Triandis, 2000). These factors lead to the underlying questions this study seeks to better understand: Do different cultures understand the conflict in the same way? What impact does culture have when a conflict occurs between two parties from different cultures takes place? Do these cultural differences foster mistrust between interdependent parties who are of differing cultures? Understanding different approaches to conflict styles is key to building a sustainable working relationship and interdependence that will endure over time.

This study looks at the historical interactions of two firmly established nations, the United States and the People's Republic of China, during the 1970s and 1980s. This is a point in history when the two nations had minimal formal relations but were interested in creating a relationship that could prove mutually beneficial for both. The purpose of this study is to better inform individuals and institutions, both public and private, about these differences, with the hope that it can better inform those individuals who are engaged in cross-cultural interactions. The ultimate goal of any good relationship should be mutually beneficial and lasting outcomes for all parties involved.

This thesis explores this in the following ways. It begins with a literature review that examines the general principles of conflict, conflict styles, how they are defined by researchers, and how they are used to manage interest in conflict. This review includes a discussion of culture, how it is defined, and the differences between individualistic versus collectivist societies, as well as a brief discussion of international conflict. Finally, the literature review concludes with an overview of the case study, which lays out the historical period that is to be

analyzed in this study and present the study's research questions. Following the literature review, the methodology discusses the research process and how data was collected and analyzed. Next, the findings section details the main themes found in the data. A discussion section then brings the research findings back into conversation with existing literature and research. Finally, it concludes with a conversation about the limitations of the study and my conclusions.

Literature Review

This study is interdisciplinary in nature and therefore, research from a variety of disciplines such as business, communication, history, psychology, human resource management, and sociology are referenced. While this study did not exclude any relevant source from consideration, the collection of literature is guided by three themes: conflict, conflict styles, and finally culture and conflict.

Conflict and Power

Cohen-Chen et al. (2022) define conflict as “an endemic aspect of social life that pervades social interactions across all domains of society, from interpersonal quarrels to organizational disagreements to extreme forms of intergroup conflict” (p.1). One could make an argument that conflict permeates our existence, that it is essential to human functionality, at least socially. Folger et al. (1993) add, “The most important feature of conflict is that it is based in interaction” (p.4). Many of us deal with some form of conflict daily, and that is not necessarily a bad thing. Conflict is how we work through issues socially. In general, society may think that engaging in any form of conflict is “bad” but this is not the case.

Conflict can be both productive and destructive. (Folger et al.,1993). According to Folger et al. (1993), conflict can be defined as *realistic* and *nonrealistic*. Realistic conflict is

defined as those “based in disagreements over the means to an end or over the ends themselves” (Folger et al., 1993, p. 8). Nonrealistic is a conflict that exhibits “expressions of aggression in which the sole end is to defeat or hurt the other” (Folger et al., 1993, p. 8). An example of realistic conflict between individuals would be trying to decide with my partner what we will have for lunch; I want a cheeseburger and they want pizza. A productive form of conflict is one that ends in us both agreeing on where and what to have for lunch, despite incompatibility. On the other hand, in nonrealistic conflicts, there is less interest in preserving relationships as the parties involved in the conflict act “to serve their own interest” through the “defeat” of the other party involved (Folger et. al., 1993, p.8). These conflicts, both good and bad, often begin and end with the words that we choose when interacting with others.

Human conflict is often a *war of words* between individuals and Folger et.al (1993) argues that conflict is “colored by the interdependence of the parties” involved (p.5). No matter the language that we humans speak, words carry great meaning. Researchers claim that “[h]uman communication has been simultaneously identified as an instrument of harmony and a weapon that produces discord” (Bray & Rzepecka, 2018, p.1). The words that we choose when communicating with others transfer thought, ideas, and emotion, and by doing so, become extremely powerful. It has been noted that “first-line studies treat communication as an element that structures conflict” (Bray & Rzepecka, 2018, p.5). There are other considerations to consider when engaging in conflict, including the relationship between those engaged in conflict and the role of power.

The Relationship Between Power and Conflict

Power has been defined as “the ability of one party to change or control the behavior, attitudes, opinions, objectives, needs, and values of another party” (Rahim et.al, 2000, p. 28).

Folger et al. describes power as “the capacity to act effectively” (Folger et al., 1993, p. 69). In conflict, power essentially lies in who has the perceived upper hand, either through relationships or through available resources. Individuals weigh these options before, during, and after the conflict to help them frame the conflict taking place. These options guide people through conflicts and the course of action that influences conflict management (Folger et al., 1993). The more power I’m perceived to have, the more risk I may be willing to take when engaging in a conflict with others.

The more power an individual has, the more control they can exert over a situation. Likewise, a lack of power can limit the options of individuals engaged in a conflict. When an individual “can exert more influence than others because he or she holds greater power resources or is more willing to employ his or her resources, the odds against reaching a mutually satisfying solution increase” (Folger et al., 1993, p.117). Individuals weigh what is at stake when engaging in conflict. The more power that an individual has in the relationship, the more likely they are to wield that power in a conflict in seeking a favorable outcome that satisfies their needs over the other individual.

The relationship between the parties is equally important when it comes to outcomes in conflict (Folger et al., 1993). We know this to be true simply based on our own personal experiences. Take for instance a conflict that you have had with a friend or a loved one. During those conflicts, were you willing to give in a little on your position, even though you may have been in a position of power in the relationship? Now think of a time that you were in a conflict with a stranger. How would you use a position of power to your advantage in shaping the outcome of your conflict? According to Folger et al. (1993), “people constantly define and redefine their relationships” and this is referred to as *relational control* (p.113). When engaged

in conflict, individuals consider this, often subconsciously, in how they frame their communication with another party during the conflict. We approach these relationships based on our concerns for our self-interest and our concerns for the interest of other parties. These concerns are the base for understanding conflict styles.

Conflict Styles

There are five conflict styles that are utilized to describe how interdependent parties engage in conflict. These include *avoiding*, *accommodating*, *compromising*, *competing*, and *collaborating* (Folger et al., 1993; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978). It is important to note that other researchers have assigned differing terms to some of the five terms. For example, the terms *accommodating* and *obliging* are interchangeable, the *competing* style is sometimes called *dominating*, and *collaborating* style can be known as *integrating* (Folger et al., 1993; Rahim, 1983; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978). This terminology may be interchangeable, but they are nonetheless describing the same human behavior; however, for the purpose of this research, when referring to the different styles, it is best to keep to a consistent set of terminology. Therefore, I am utilizing the five styles highlighted above.

Conflict styles fall along two axes of behaviors, one that satisfies an individual's concerns for themselves (assertiveness) and the second, their concerns for the other party (cooperativeness) (Folger et al., 1993; Rahim, 1983; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978). A person who is exhibiting an *avoiding* style of conflict is viewed to be displaying low amounts of assertiveness and cooperativeness (Thomas & Kilmann, 1978). An individual who engaged in a *competing* style would likewise be exhibiting high amounts of assertiveness and low amounts of cooperativeness, whereas an

individual engaged in collaboration would display both high amounts of assertiveness and cooperation (Thomas-Kilmann, 1978). Accommodating is low on assertiveness and high on cooperativeness while compromising is viewed as being neither high nor low on either aspect of behavior (Thomas-Kilmann, 1978). When choosing a conflict style, an individual is said to consider the goal, the long-term consequences of their actions, the situation (including existing relationships), and the ethical implications (Folger et al., 1993). Understanding these contextual elements is important when it comes to interpreting their usage, and how a party decides what is appropriate in each situation is something I find of particular interest.

Prior research demonstrates, “People with different dispositions tend to create different social environments for themselves” (Friedman et al., 2000, p.32). A great deal of research has been devoted to understanding the use of conflict styles in the context of business and organizational practices. Even if the setting or power within the relationship changes, conflict styles among businesses and organizations tend to remain an important topic of study. However, the use and understanding of conflict styles become extremely varied when culture is introduced. By introducing cultural differences, individuals and institutions must understand many new variables to effectively manage conflict in each situation.

Culture: Comparing Individualism and Collectivism

Human culture is an interesting and complex area of research. Culture is described as “a shared meaning system, found among those who speak a particular dialect, during a specific historical period, and in a definable geographical region” (Triandis, 2000, p.146). Culture, therefore, can exist both nationally and internationally at the same time. Thinking of it this

way, an individual living in the United States is culturally different from an individual living in Tokyo, Japan. At the same time, that same individual in the United States resides in the Midwest and may well be culturally distinctive from someone living in the heart of Brooklyn, New York. They both identify themselves as “Americans,” but can lay claim to two distinct cultural identities. For the purposes of this research, I conceive of culture in a much broader/generalized understanding of the term so that I can better understand the nations interacting as a whole.

Two central concepts regarding culture that impact this research are *collectivism* and *individualism*. Triandis (2000) states, “Western individualist cultures sample mostly the *content* of communication, whereas, Eastern, collectivist cultures sample mostly the *context* of communication” (p.145). When comparing individualistic and collectivist societies, Triandis (1989) adds “[I]ndividualist give priority to personal goals over the goals of the collectives; collectivists either make no distinctions between personal and collective goals or if they do make such distinctions, they subordinate their personal goals to the collective goals” (p.509). Individualistic cultures tend to be more concerned with self-interest in comparison to the more collective societies, with researchers referring to individualism as “idiocentric and allocentric” (Triandis, 1989, p.509). Thus, how most individuals view themselves and where they see their role within a society, can often be the determining factor in whether society views itself as individualist or collective in makeup. This is where research into perceptions of the “self” becomes relevant to cultural research.

How an individual sees this relationship is critical to understanding the dynamics of individualistic versus collectivist cultures. Where collectivists are concerned, “the self is conceived as an aspect of a collective – a family, tribe, work-group, religious group, party,

geographic district, or whatever is considered an ingroup by members of the culture” (Gelfand et al., 1996, p.399). How an individual identifies their relationship to others in their society, and the importance they place on their “self” is important here. Referring to the example provided by Gelfand et al. (1996) an individual’s perspective on their immediate circle and those individuals that come and go is an indicator of which society, individualistic or collectivist, they

Individuals who exhibit collectivist behavior are guided more by concern for group interest rather than self-interest. Collectivists conform to the “goals” of the collective (Gelfand et al., 1996, p.399). In a collectivist culture, individuals act as the “collective expects, asks, or demands and rarely opposes the will of the collective” (Gelfand et al., 1996, p.399). In general, collectivists, by nature, exhibit more concern for the interest of others in the group rather than being concerned for their own self-interest. Those that exhibit behavior that leans towards satisfying their own self-interest are said to be individualistic in nature. A final consideration of importance when discussing individualism and collectivism is in-groups and out-groups.

In-groups and out-groups are, at a basic level, how we separate and organize those individuals we encounter daily. Triandis (1989) stated that in-groups could be “defined on the basis of similarity” of the individuals in question (Triandis, 1989, p.509). In-groups are individuals that have interests that are common to our own. In-groups are neither fixed nor do they require nor do they require an existing relationship. The relationship between the two is very fluid as “the definition of the in-group keeps shifting with the situation” (Triandis, 1989, p.509). In-groups can change at a moment's notice, based on the situation and the context of the moment and several in-groups can exist simultaneously within a group or culture.

Out-groups, on the other hand, do not share the same identities and interests as those in

the in-group (Triandis, 1989). Those individuals and groups that are assigned to our out-groups are not merely strangers. Like in-groups, out-groups can vary from situation to situation. In principle, we can assign an individual to our in-group in certain circumstances, and when those circumstances change assign them to the out-group. Triandis (1989) states that the “difference when interacting with the ingroup and the outgroup was larger in the collectivist than in the individualist cultures” (515). Relationships with out-groups do not carry the same “intimacy and familiarity (Flicker et al., 2007, p.34). Koch and Koch (2007) state that when it comes to out-groups “collectivists may exhibit increased opportunism when interacting with outgroup members”(p.211). Social identity is significant when it comes to the study of individualistic and collectivist cultures.

The study of in-groups and out-groups becomes extremely important when discussing collectivistic and individualistic cultures. It has been stated that “[s]ocial behavior is a function of ingroup norms to a greater extent in collectivist than individualist cultures” (Triandis, 1989, p.509). In collectivist cultures, there is more consideration given to the preservation of in-group relationships, as “[p]eople in collectivist cultures are especially concerned with relationships” (Triandis, 2001, p.909). In collectivist cultures, concern for others is much more important than in individualistic cultures. The collectivist predisposition to favor the members of the in-group versus members of an out-group can lead to misunderstandings and conflict when interacting with individualistic cultures.

Cultural Effects on Conflict

Conflict and its management become rather complex when it occurs between two different cultures. The conflict between interdependent parties is difficult enough to manage when parties are from the same culture, let alone different cultures. How can we agree on a

path forward, if we do not have the same understanding of what the path forward is? When viewing the topic of conflict through a cultural lens, Triandis et al. (1988) argued that “Cultures provide particular ways of viewing the environment” (p.328). Peng et al. (2000) added, “[I]n international business ventures, most conflicts appear to stem from conflicting cultural values” (p.33). How an individual in the United States manages and approaches a conflict within their group may be the opposite of how an individual living in China deals with a similar situation.

An understanding of these differences in cultural communication is essential before moving forward. One example of the need to better understand cultural differences in the use of conflict styles comes from journalist Flora Lewis, who, in 1979, noted officials from The United States and Saudi Arabia had a significant “communication gap” based upon their cultural approaches to conflict that interfered with one another during negotiations (Lewis, 1979, p.A2). Lewis’s observations at the time clearly showed the importance of understanding how different cultures frame conflict and how differences can impact negotiation and outcomes.

In-group versus out-group relationships also need to be understood when it comes to conflict. Research by Peng et al. (2000) notes, “Chinese engaged more easily in conflict with strangers (outgroup members) than with friends” who were considered members of the ingroup (p.35). Furthermore, research has found that lying is found to be “an acceptable behavior in collectivist cultures, if it saves face or helps the in-group” (Triandis, 2001, p.917). It was also found that “vertical idiocentrics who tend to be very competitive, were also high in deception, because they had to lie to win” (Triandis, 2001, p.917). Thus, individuals in collectivist cultures tend to lie based on their high concern for others, whereas those of individualistic cultures lied based on their high concern for their own self-interest. These cultural tendencies have strong implications for this research project.

Researchers interested in aspects of organizational leadership, communication, and other business practices have studied the relationship between culture and conflict. Interestingly, research has found that “the meaning of four of the five [conflict] styles was understood differently by individualists and collectivists; dominating was the only style interpreted similarly by both groups” (Cai & Fink, 2002, p.81). Oetzel (1998), studying the effects of ethnicity, found that “obliging and avoiding conflict styles are not necessarily perceived as negative by many Asian and Latin ethnic groups (p.133). Cai and Fink (2000) note that “obliging and avoiding are not understood identically in all cultures,” as collectivist cultures in the East may not place a negative emphasis on these styles as do individualistic cultures of the West (p.72). In individualistic cultures, like the United States, competing in conflict may be a socially acceptable conflict style in some instances, such as negotiating the purchase of a home or new car. Those in a collectivist society may find competing as an inappropriate response to conflict. Therefore, obliging and avoiding may be employed by members of collectivistic cultures to maintain mutual-face interests and relational harmony (Oetzel, 1998, p.133). However, Lian and Tui (2008) cite some inconsistencies within the data collected concerning conflict styles and culture. They noted that “[t]he perception of dominating style could also be culture-bound as in the eastern culture, the subordinates’ respect for older superior tends to lend greater acceptance of their dominating styles thus negating it perception” (Liam & Tui, 2008, p.52). Many contextual factors are at play, so it is important to understand the complexities of culture when it comes to conflict.

International Conflict

International conflict comes with its own nuances that must be considered. As previously mentioned, differing cultures may have different understandings and approaches to conflict

(Triandis et al., 1988). Serious miscalculations could increase the risk of the conflict escalating into the severing of trade agreements, cutting off diplomatic relations, and even into armed conflict. A point that must be considered when approaching international and diplomatic conflict is that even when vast nations come into conflict with one another, a single individual or a select few individuals are representatives of that nation's interest. An individual can have their own independent interests and may be willing to place them above the interest of the institutions they represent (Fisher & Ury, 2011; Harden, 2021). Harden (2021) proposed, “Narcissistic leaders, specifically more narcissistic US presidents, place greater emphasis on their own personal gains—namely, whether policies maintain their inflated self-image. This focus on image maintenance drives them to unilaterally initiate disputes against other Great Powers (GPs)” (p.2). This speaks to the notion of an American president having two independent concerns when negotiating with global leaders. Authoritarian regimes also face uncertainties that can affect their negotiating styles. Some of the same concerns for oneself may exist among these leaders. And in some cases, “Authoritarian leaders have less institutional protection for their leadership survival than democratic leaders, particularly early in their tenure. Conversely, authoritarian leaders tend to be highly concerned about their survival in office in the early period of power struggle” (Bak, 2020, p.263). Taking this all into consideration, it makes dealing with both democratic and authoritarian leaders difficult based on the position those leaders find themselves in at the time.

There are many nuances to managing international conflict. Fisher and Ury (2011) add, “How you see the world depends on where you sit. People tend to see what they want to see” (p.25). It is important to think about the problem from other individuals' perspectives. If one enters a negotiation with another country that has strong feelings against them, it may be difficult to reach. Understanding issues from their “side of the table” may help individuals reach some common

ground. Another important point about international conflict is that “two sides don’t just make a deal and walk away” (Fisher, Ury, & Spector, 2004, p.103). Seldom do nations enter into an agreement that does not result in further interactions between the two in the future.

On an international scale, we know continued interactions are important for matters of trade and treaties between nations. Fisher et al (2004) explain, “Reaching agreement is about more than signing a piece of paper. The paper provides a legal framework. But the sides have to build a relationship that allows them to deal with their disagreements” (p.103). The important takeaway is that interactions, no matter if they are on an interpersonal or international scale, have great consequences for future interactions and relationships. This is especially important when it comes to international conflict. What takes place today can influence interactions for years to come, maybe even generations.

Case Study

This study explores the relationships between culture and conflict through an examination of historical interactions between the People's Republic of China and the United States of America during the 1980s. Prior to the formation of the PRC, both the United States government and Western businesses had a working relationship with the previous Chinese government. However, these interactions became less frequent and direct after the PRC came to power. There were a few events that contributed to this including the Korean War in the early 1950s, U.S. support of The Republic of China (ROC) occupying Taiwan/Chinese Taipei, along with the United States' overall attitude toward the spread of communism post-World War II (Fairbank 1967; Vogel 2011; Young, 1968). Then in the mid-1970s, in the waning years of the rule of Mao Zedong, China sought to open new relations with the United States government and American companies who might wish to do business with China (Vogel,

2011). By the 1980s, as the result of reforms in China, many under Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, interactions between the Chinese and American governments and business leaders continued to increase in frequency (Vogel, 2011). This is where this research focuses its examination of culture and conflict styles, as a new generation of government and business leaders on both sides learned to interact with one another.

Historical interactions between China and the United States provide examples of how conflict plays out on an international scale and how culture can impact those interactions. The Chinese are historically a collectivist society and the United States an individualistic one. Some also argue that political ideology is a key point of tension and a source of conflict between these two superpowers. The People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded upon communism and socialist ideologies, and the United States of America (USA) is founded upon ideals of individual freedom and a strong belief in capitalism. Yet for all their cultural and political differences, the destinies of these two great nations have become deeply intertwined. Over time, both parties have become increasingly interdependent due to increased amounts of trade between the two, geopolitical goals, and military commitments around the globe.

With interdependence on a scale such as that found here, there is bound to be conflict at some point in the relationship. It would be safe to say that the relationship between China and the United States is strained today. Yet does it have to be? Could the United States or China have taken a different path had they had a better understanding of cultural differences when the conflict emerged early in the thawing of relations in the 1980s? During an increasing number of interactions during these decades, the opportunities for, and instances of, conflict were numerous. Equally present are the opportunities for understanding are present, which is why I view this period as offering the best opportunity for examining cultural impacts upon conflict

as each party was reconnecting with one another. Now that we have a solid foundation of existing literature, we can introduce the research questions for this study:

RQ1: What conflict styles are most evident/utilized in American and Chinese government and business interaction during the 1970 and 1980s?

RQ2: How do conflict interactions between the Americans and Chinese during the 1970s and 1980s support or challenge our understanding of conflict styles?

RQ3: What opportunities and limitations do cultural differences of conflict pose upon government and business interactions between Americans and Chinese?

Methodology

In seeking to answer these research questions, this study utilizes qualitative content analysis. This method was chosen as qualitative research “is useful for understanding a range of societal issues that arise from particular cultural context” (Tracy, 2013, p. 7). The research also utilizes an iterative approach, as it allows for the alternating “between considering existing theories and research interest, on the one hand, emergent qualitative data on the other” (Tracy, 2013, p.8). As this is an interdisciplinary project, this approach is extremely helpful for analyzing the data collected from historical documents concerning interactions between the Chinese and their American counterparts and examining them from a communications point of view.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study was conducted remotely, using online academic research and government databases. Chinese and American primary source documents from the late

1970s and 1980s were examined. The total number of documents collected for analysis was 105 documents, over the years 1970 to 1989. They break down in the following ways: 10 from the U.S. State Department, 6 from academic archives, 5 from the White House, 3 from defense/intelligence agencies, 17 from U.S. Embassy communications, and 64 from newspaper reports. A considerable effort was made to find an archive that contained primary source documents originating from the Chinese side of the relationship. However, no Chinese-to-Chinese communications or primary source documents originating and circulating among the government of the People's Republic of China were able to be located for examination.

These documents were useful in providing insight into the communication going on during this time and how it affected each party's interactions with one another during the conflict. Newspaper sources, like the New York Times, provided accounts of interactions in the form of reports or interviews containing direct quotations regarding official interactions. Newspaper accounts were provided regarding business interactions, as many business dealings were not a matter of public record. The examination of the earliest interactions between government and businesses associated with these two nations should give this research a solid foundation upon which to analyze cross-cultural interactions. By analyzing early interactions between the United States and the People's Republic of China his research began to better understand the impact culture has upon the use of conflict styles and how they in turn affect interactions between differing cultures.

Data Analysis

This study takes an iterative approach to qualitative content analysis to answer the research questions. Given this research is interdisciplinary in nature, an iterative approach is best suited to this style of research, as it allows for the oscillation between both deductive and

inductive approaches to analysis. The goal of this is to allow the research to take us where we need to go. In other words, it allows for “a reflexive process in which the researcher visits and revisits the data, connects them to emerging insights, and progressively refines his/her focus and understandings” (Tracy, 2013, p.184). This study, while guided by existing literature and research to create pre-set codes, still allowed new codes and themes to emerge naturally in the data. This is the constant comparative method of data analysis.

The first-level coding process was an exhaustive search of the source data to identify any potential codes that existed in the data collected (Tracy, 2013). This process started off with a deductive approach, utilizing the research from the literature review to guide the coding process. Pre-set codes included: *conflict, cooperation, collaboration, mutual, bilateral, acts of negotiation, culture, friendly, equal, stability, ideological, modernization, hegemony, sincere,* and *criticism*. As this research uses an iterative approach, the process also allowed for codes to emerge inductively. This took shape in the form of codes being identified that merged two pre-existing codes to describe important pieces of data. Examples of this included: *bilateral relations, bilateral agreements, mutual benefits, mutual interests, mutual concerns,* and *economic collaboration*. Once this takes place, a second-level coding process took shape.

In second-level coding, a “researcher critically examines the codes already identified in primary cycles and begins to organize, synthesize, and categorize them into interpretive concepts” (Tracy, 2013, p.194). It is at this stage of the analysis that I began to identify and focus more on the codes that pertain directly to the research questions. Finally, during this exhaustive analysis process, a codebook emerged that contained the codes that allow for the identification of themes in the research. In total, 183 codes emerged from the analysis process.

Findings

Four themes emerged that were best suited to answer this study's research questions. These four themes are the following: *a desire for relations, competitive acts, exerting power over others, and historical conflict*. The desire for relations is best described as acts that are committed by both the Americans and Chinese that symbolize collaboration. Competitive acts are those acts committed by the Chinese and Americans that represent a desire to win something from the other. Competitive actions are best illustrated through a concern for one party's interest over the other. Exerting power over others comes from communicated actions that are meant to control another party. These differ from competitive acts, as these acts originate not from a sense of competitiveness but take the form of being punitive to get the other side to comply. The final theme, historical conflict, introduces data that provides context to better understand interactions that shape conflict interactions occurring between the United States and the People's Republic of China. Understanding historical influences can aid in making more informed conclusions about the research questions.

A Desire for Relations: Collaborative and Cooperative Acts Which Benefit Both

From the beginning of the data analysis, it was quite evident that both the American and Chinese desired to build both diplomatic and economic relations with one another. Early on, there were actions that exemplified this desire to build a relationship together and as equal partners. The data supports this in a few ways. First, it comes in the form of *friendly, open, and frank discussions*, which occur during communication between Chinese and American officials. The second way that this desire for relations is identified in the documents is through collaborative acts that occur between the United States and China.

This is often identified through the use of terms like *mutual* and *bilateral*. Examples of

these phrases include *mutual benefits*, *mutual interests*, *mutual concern*, *bilateral relations*, *bilateral talks*, and *bilateral issues*. These phrases come up frequently when both sides are negotiating a topic of diplomatic interest and were working collaboratively on a suitable, mutually beneficial outcome. Another point of data retrieved from the research documents that highlighted collaboration was identified as acts of *economic collaboration*. Acts of economic collaboration are found throughout the documents collected and a strong argument could be made that at times, they were the sole driver of the emerging relationship between the Americans and the Chinese.

Considering these elements, the theme of a desire for relations is used to answer RQ1 and RQ2. RQ1 asked: *What conflict styles are significant in American and Chinese government and business interactions during the 1970s and 1980s?* Secondly, RQ2 asked: *How do conflict interactions between the Americans and Chinese during the 1970s and 1980s support or challenge our understanding of conflict styles?* The theme of a desire for a relationship is well positioned because it provides numerous examples of relationship-building and the collaborative efforts that both the Americans and Chinese took to achieve a relationship that was mutually beneficial. Relationships, in many cases, start with friendly acts and encounters, and that was supported in the data.

Friendly, Open, and Frank Discussions

It is very difficult to build a relationship without some form of friendliness taking place between groups. A sense of friendliness also aids in any collaboration taking place. While not necessary, it is extremely helpful when both parties interacting with one another are amicable. Interactions between the Chinese and Americans during the 1970s and 1980s were no different. A great deal of “friendly” terminology was identified during communication between the two

groups. In the beginning, it was important that both sides were “open” with each other and that they were frank in their discussions. This was important so that both the Chinese and Americans clearly identified their needs and concerns to each other, leaving no ambiguity between them. These considerations are important in building a solid relationship.

Being friendly is often a catalyst for a relationship to form and it was no different with the United States and The People’s Republic of China. There are many acts found in the data that can be identified as being friendly in nature. For example, in his letter on May 29, 1971, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai (identified in the early documents as Chou En Lai), addresses American President Richard Nixon multiple times as “his excellency” and welcomes the future visit of Dr. Henry Kissinger who is representing the United States in these opening rounds of talks (Enlai, 1971 May 29). Dr. Kissinger returns the sense of friendliness in subsequent meetings to establish relations by commending his host on how pleasant he is received and how he has longed for the opportunity to interact with Chinese leaders in person (The White House, 1971 July 29). These friendly encounters occur throughout the documents collected, well into the late 1980s, after relations between the two countries had been normalized.

In a February 26, 1989, meeting in Beijing, President Bush, and Chairmen Deng met to discuss ongoing Sino-U.S. relations along with other world matters (The White House, 1989 February 26). The meeting started off with numerous examples of friendliness between the two leaders. For example, like any good friend receiving a guest, Chairman Deng asked President Bush about his trip getting to (The White House, 1989 February 26). In the same conversation, both leaders have a very cordial conversation about their shared love of the card game Bridge (The White House, 1989 February 26). The interactions between the two leaders were so cordial that it led to the official writing the classified summary to note the extremely pleasant

atmosphere in which the President was welcomed (The White House, 1989 February 26).

Friendliness is just one aspect of the desire for relations. To build a good relationship, one needs to be “open” with the other, and the data collected from the research documents supported this as well.

In the early interactions between the United States and the People’s Republic of China, there is a great deal of “openness” and “frankness” with one another. These elements are especially evident in the early interactions, especially those with Premier Zhou Enlai and the Nixon Administration. On May 29, 1971, in a letter to President Nixon, the Chinese Premier is open with the United States that the key issue to be addressed before any relationship between the two powers can move forward is the issue of America’s role in Taiwan (Enlai, 1971 May 29). The Chinese are open and upfront about their views towards Taiwan, with Premier Zhou stating, “It goes without saying that the first question to be settled is the crucial issue between China and the United States which is the question of the concrete way of the withdrawal of all the U.S. armed forces from Taiwan and Taiwan Straits area” (Enlai, 1971 May 29). The Chinese were open and honest with American officials that the situation with Taiwan must be addressed before proceeding further in any relationship.

I would argue that this openness stems from a concern not only to get off on the right foot in this relationship but also from genuine safety concerns that the Chinese held about having another powerful nation’s military on their doorstep. China already shared a border to the North with the Soviet Union, and while both share a common ideology, they were not allies. By 1970, the Sino-Soviet split had taken place and in 1969, the two powers engaged in a brief military conflict, known historically as the Sino-Soviet Border Conflict (Burr, 2001). It is likely that given recent events, China did not want another potential adversary to have a foothold so close to

its shores. Being open about Taiwan was their way of establishing boundaries going forward for a potential relationship.

The United States was equally open and frank with the Chinese in a subsequent meeting that year, attended by Premier Zhou and Dr. Kissinger. At this meeting, Dr. Kissinger addressed the Chinese Premier and openly conveyed that the United States was agreeable to the request of the Chinese; however, there were some conditions (The White House, 1971 July 29). In the meeting, Dr. Kissinger stated, “I will be absolutely candid with you, because I want to make sure that if we disagree, it will be in full knowledge of each other’s point of view, and because I hope with full candor we will come closer to an agreement” (The White House, 1971 July 29). Dr. Kissinger, knowing the real potential for conflict early in the relationship, was open and frank with the Chinese to minimize expectations and the potential for conflict. The data analysis suggests that Dr. Kissinger did this to help get the relationship between the Chinese and the Americans off to a proper start.

Once this was established, Dr. Kissinger was able to assure the Chinese that they did indeed view Taiwan as part of China and that would be the fact going forward in their relationship (The White House, 1971 July 29). However, Dr. Kissinger was open and frank when he told Premier Zhou that issues and time frames surrounding Taiwan and China relations were contingent on the American President's political career, i.e., the remaining time of his elected term and his potential for re-reaction (The White House, 1971 July 29). This was a way of stating that while The President of the United States has concerns for the Chinese and desires a relationship, he must also think of himself first and his political position and re-election (The White House, 1971 July 29). This raises an interesting finding that when an American President is making a crucial decision, they often are forced to weigh considerations on what is good for

the Nation and what is good for their individual political careers. As noted in the literature review, American Presidents have been documented as putting their own self-interests ahead of the good of the people, especially in areas concerning issues that may affect their chances of re-election (Harden, 2021). This is especially important for understanding the potential influences on international conflict.

The Chinese, by the nature of their political ideology, are not necessarily as burdened with the dilemma facing a sitting U.S. President. These ideological differences have the potential to influence communication that is taking place between the two powers and therefore influence the emerging relationship between the two powers. However, by being open and frank with the Chinese concerning these dualities facing the American President, the chances for conflict and misunderstanding between the parties were mitigated to some degree, as frustration on the topic of Taiwan would continue and be a source of continued conflict throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The desire for a relationship between the United States and the Chinese was not based on friendliness, openness, and frankness alone. Perhaps the clearest evidence of a desire for a relationship was found in the collaborative acts that the two undertook during the 1970s and 1980s.

Mutual, Bilateral, and Economic Collaboration

In analyzing the data collected, it was evident that individuals on both sides had a great desire to collaborate on various issues that affected interdependent Chinese and American interests. The Chinese utilized a great deal of collaborative language in their dialogue with American officials, both diplomatic and business. The Chinese frequently utilized the terms “mutual” and “bilateral” when speaking of their relationship with the United States. These terms were utilized as codes for identifying collaborative acts taking place between both the United

States and China. The context in which this is most evident is the early face-to-face meetings between Chinese and American officials, especially the high-level one attended by Dr. Henry Kissinger and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai regarding... They were also present in many of the high-level ambassadorial meetings which took place.

One example of the use of such terms was discovered in a document that originates around the midpoint of the study period. A report back from the American embassy in China reported on a celebratory banquet (the only context given for the banquet was that it was celebrating the return of one of the attendees) that the Americans had hosted several high-ranking Chinese government officials (United States Embassy China, 1981 June 17). The document summary notes that the conversation was very frank and open on both sides (United States Embassy China, 1981 June 17). The Chinese Foreign Minister, in his toast to the American delegation, used a variety of collaborative terminology such as “mutual concern,” “mutual understanding,” “friendship,” “bilateral relations,” “amicable cooperation,” “friendly relations,” “peaceful coexistence,” and the need to “advance the Sino-U.S. relations” (United States Embassy China, 1981 June 17). In his meeting with Premier Enlai, Dr. Kissinger speaks on the foundation of a Sino-U.S. relationship, noting that it should be grounded in the fact that the two sides “cooperate on matters of mutual concern on a basis of mutual respect and equality and for the benefit of all mankind” (The White House, 1971 July 29, p.4). Relationships are built on common interests, goals, or outcomes and relations between the Americans and Chinese appear to be no different. Perhaps the greatest shared interest, goal, or outcome of a relationship between the United States and China was economics. The data suggests the greatest support for collaboration between the two powers was that of economic collaboration.

Economic Collaboration

The New York Times archival database was critical to this portion of the research.

Economic collaboration was an important news topic during the 1970s and 1980s and even more so when it concerned business interactions between the United States and the People's Republic of China. Economic collaboration was identified as the most prominent collaborative activity viewed in the data. Economic collaboration, through trade, helped build and grow the emerging relationship between American and Chinese partners. On the Chinese side of the relationship, these collaborative acts were largely the result of China's desire to gain access to modern technology, and the latest Western scientific advancements. American business leaders' eagerness for collaboration stemmed from their desire to turn a significant profit. The Chinese population was in the hundreds of millions, each one a potential new customer for American trade goods. Not to mention that the Chinese were sitting on a vast amount of Natural resources ready for the taking. Collaboration would prove lucrative for all involved.

Getting to the point of economic collaboration was not always a direct move from point A to point B. Both sides had to get to know one another and learn the intricacies of each other's business ideologies. Speaking of the Chinese, American business leaders found that "they are not market-oriented;" Yet, "their word is their bond" and "they are very trusting" (Butterfield, 1977 January 30, p. IES25). More importantly, I viewed these early interactions as serving to challenge any existing stereotypes that Americans and Chinese may or may not have had of one another. In most instances observed in the data, all parties involved were eager to collaborate with one another.

One example of economic collaboration that clearly illustrates a desire for relations comes from an enterprising American entrepreneur, Stanly Greenfield, who inks a lucrative deal

with the Chinese to supply them with “microprint versions” of printed publicly available government documents and scholarly articles (Kleinfield, 1979, January 13, p.27). The collaborative effort between Mr. Greenfield and the Chinese government was a result of roughly two years of hard work, as it took quite a while for Mr. Greenfield to get in touch with the proper Chinese officials (Kleinfield, 1979, January 13, p.28) The American entrepreneur actively pursued relations with the Chinese, working over a span of four years and the Chinese access to a previously unattainable source of knowledge. (Kleinfield, 1979, January 13, p.28). As the article author points out, many business professionals might have given up the desire for relations drove the American businessperson to not quit on a potential collaborative relationship, which in the end netted Mr. Greenfield hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue and the Chinese access to the latest government and academic papers (Kleinfield, 1979 January 13).

The data also highlighted several collaborative acts being committed between the Chinese and American oil experts. During its opening up to the West, the Chinese had a great desire to exploit the developing nation's vast and highly lucrative natural resources. This led to a great collaborative opportunity for both the Chinese and the Americans. The Chinese sought out American bids to “explore and drill” for oil in China (Lueck, 1983, August 18, p. D1). The partnership formed between the Americans and the Chinese was collaborative because Americans were not just paying for access or selling a service to China, nor were the Chinese selling their abundant resources out to the highest Western bidder.

The data showed that in the agreements negotiated between the Chinese and Americans, each side would collaborate on the project by bringing something unique to their partnership. One document noted that the “joint ventures have involved a variety of oilfield equipment and services concerns as well as major production companies” (Lueck, 1983, August 18, p. D2). The

collaboration came from American companies having access to the latest oil drilling tech and expertise and the Chinese owning the resource itself and the ability to provide a large workforce to exploit the resource. American companies agreed to provide the necessary technology and expertise, with the Chinese agreeing to provide the facilities and human power to complete the project. Through this economic collaboration, American companies would profit financially from their relationship with China, and the Chinese would also benefit financially, as well as have the added benefit that their collaboration would serve to educate their own people on how to access their companies' resources effectively and efficiently.

Economic collaboration between the Americans and the Chinese was a very lucrative endeavor during this period. As a result, large sums of money were changing hands between the two nations, and as a result, the Chinese needed to expand its banking system to “facilitate trade with the United States” (Arenson, 1979 January 24, p.D1). The amount of business collaboration taking place ultimately made it necessary for China to adopt a new financial system that could facilitate business communications, which only led to more economic collaboration between President Carter, at the time, referred to this as “a new and irreversible course in Chinese American relations” (Gwertzman, 1979 February 1, p. A1). The desire for relations had set the two countries on a path where they were becoming more dependent on the other for all forms of trade.

Within the data, we can see evidence that a great deal of cultural collaboration was taking place. Interactions that were taking place on an economic level were also serving to educate each other about their respective cultures. One large area of cultural exchange comes in the form of academic programs, which allowed both Chinese and Americans to study abroad and immerse themselves in the other's culture. This collaborative exchange also extended between university

faculty (Neuffer, 1986 January 5, p. EW69). These programs were extremely collaborative and were seen at the time as a way for students in both countries to obtain an education and training that would serve them for “careers in Chinese-American relations” (Neuffer, 1986 January 5, p. EW69). They were also forms of economic collaboration as “American universities and associations” made “serious financial commitments” to these exchange programs (Neuffer, 1986 January 5, p. EW69). There was a huge desire for these programs as many individuals saw great opportunities resulting from the ever-increasing volume of Sino-American collaboration.

Summarizing this section a few things stood out to me. The first is the historical level of collaboration that took place between the Chinese and Americans. The willingness of the Chinese to put the past behind them and move forward with a relationship was surprising given the political narrative that exists between the United States and the Peoples' Republic of China today. The friendliness of the communication taking place between the two from the beginning of this period was clear. For their own unique reasons, both parties desired enhanced relations. I believe the argument could be made that the United States government wanted to take the relationship much slower in some respects and was even caught off guard in some cases by the level of collaboration that the Chinese were willing to undertake to modernize their country and develop relations.

Competitive Acts: Competition to Win the Day

For all the collaborative acts mentioned, there also existed many examples of competitive acts taking place. In any relationship, at some point, there is bound to be some conflict. The relationship between the United States and the Peoples' Republic of China was no different. Competitive acts were often found in many of the same interactions that collaborative acts were found. Even in examples of both nations desiring relations, we can find competitive acts.

Competition is not always a bad thing, and it is natural for parties to oscillate between conflict styles. In fact, competitive acts can lead to a more beneficial outcome for both parties involved in a conflict if they re-center the important interests of each party (Folger et al., 1993). The numerous competitive acts were identified in the data with codes such as *competition*, *competitive*, or *escalatory*.

These acts were generally viewed as those committed out of a strong concern for one's self-interests. The competition was viewed as good and bad by both the Americans and the Chinese. Getting the best deal for yourself was something to be expected by both sides when negotiating a contract. They also used the competition to illustrate matters of principle (ideological differences) and when things did not go as one side desired, each used competitive acts to achieve their own agendas and in some cases, the upper hand so to speak in the relationship.

This theme is beneficial for examining and answering RQ1 (*What conflict styles are significant in American and Chinese government and business interactions during the 1970s and 1980s?*) and RQ2 (*How do conflict interactions between the Americans and Chinese during the 1970s and 1980s support or challenge our understanding of conflict styles?*) By identifying competitive and escalatory acts in the data, we can make inferences about the role they play in conflict interactions and the use of conflict styles. Competition is generally associated with a high concern for self (Folger et al., 1993). Likewise, individualistic cultures are viewed as giving “priority to their personal goals over the goal of their in-group” (Triandis, 2001, p.909) It was interesting to see where the data compared to the research because the Chinese did not engage in behaviors that would be considered collectivist. During many of the interactions, the Chinese were as competitive as any individualistic Western nation observed during the same period.

Competition and Competitive Acts

Americans are used to competition as it is engrained into our everyday society.

Americans compete in sports, compete for academics, compete in our careers, and Americans compete among family and friends. It is part of who Americans are as a society. Therefore, it is understandable competitive acts would be a significant part of the data resulting from the analysis of interactions between the United States and China. What was surprising was the data that showed the Chinese were equally adept at using competitive acts to achieve their own interest. Even though China is considered a collectivist society, they had little trouble adapting to the negotiating style of the Americans. Just as a bulk of collaborative acts were found in communication involving issues of economics, so to were acts that can be viewed as competitive.

Even though the Chinese were equally interested in collaborating with American businesses, they did not blindly agree to every proposal the Americans put on the table. The Chinese engaged in a considerable number of negotiations before finally committing to some of the agreements that were present in the research documents. Chinese used competitive acts to secure themselves the best deal possible in diplomatic and/or business dealings, which frustrated many American officials. One American was perhaps caught off-guard by the competitiveness of the Chinese and “complained that the Chinese had tried to squeeze out all of his company’s technical data without signing a contract” (Butterfield, 1981 February 8).

The Chinese were also equally ready to engage in competitive acts when it came to global affairs and diplomacy. Given the preceding findings, it would be incorrect to perceive the Chinese as an ally of the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, more like a friendly trading partner. When it came to world affairs, the Americans and the Chinese at times took competing viewpoints. For example, one of the issues that helped bring the Chinese and Americans together

was their mutual distrust during this era of the Soviet Union. In 1984, the United States viewed Soviet influence as a destabilizing factor in several hotspots around the globe (Weisman, 1984 April 29). Yet, the Chinese took a competitive position and stated that the destabilization was due to “American interventions in those areas that have exacerbated tensions” (Weisman, 1984 April 29, p.1). A 1982 memo from the Directorate of Intelligence noted this in a summary: “Beijing has decided up an extended period of confrontation with the U.S. in order to probe for further concessions on the Taiwan issue and to gain more time to work out a compromise formula acceptable to broad segments of the leadership” (Directorate of Intelligence, 1982 March 19). The Chinese were very adept at using stalling as a competitive act while engaged in negotiations. While negotiating a trade agreement over grain, the Chinese stalled the talks when the agreement was leaked (Some thought the Carter Administration had intentionally leaked it) to the press (King, 1980 October 25). The Chinese, through their competitive act of stalling, were able to shift the narrative and momentum back in their favor (King, 1980 October 25). The Chinese were also not afraid to use other competitive acts when engaging with the Americans.

In some cases, the Chinese would cancel contracts with Americans or outright ban the importation of certain trade items. In the early part of the 1980s, the Chinese at one point banned “imports of certain American commodities,” which in the end was reported to be “a relatively small loss in overall United States commodity trade” (King, 1983 January 20, P.). The previous day, the Chinese negotiator had warned that they “would respond strongly if Washington went ahead with unilateral controls, as it did by placing quotas on textile and clothing imports from China” (Wren, 1983 January 20, p.A1). In other words, if the United States took the competitive step of instituting trade restrictions, the Chinese would escalate the situation through a competitive action of their own. In the American press, it was reported that the Chinese had

taken this step as a response to the “failure of the Peking and Washington to reach agreement on ceilings for textile and clothing imports from China” (King, 1983 January 20, P. D11). This is an example of China’s willingness to engage in a competing conflict style to get the best possible deal when negotiating with the Americans. A document from the following month detailed how the Chinese had been “holding out for a larger share of the American market” (Wren, 1983 February 3, p.D11). This gives us an insight into how competing acts can fuel competition between partners in a relationship.

The United States was attempting to impose its own competitive terms on the negotiations to protect its own textile market from what it viewed as a trade imbalance with the Chinese. (Wren, 1983 January 20, D11). By imposing their own competitive terms, the U.S. may have forced the Chinese hand and into escalating the situation by imposing their own bans. The conflict that was occurring between the two nations risks spiraling out of control as each side escalated the situation by committing further competitive acts to protect each one's own interest and perhaps save face on a global stage. One astute observer at the time noted that the situation “could become more serious if China also reduced purchases of corn and timber” (Wren, 1983 January 20, p.A1). Such is the risk when engaging in competitive acts amidst a conflict. At a certain point, competitive acts in conflict become so escalatory that they can reach a point of being a form of control. Competition is used to sway the actions of another and bend them to your will.

Exerting Power Over the Other: Controlling Others in the Relationship

No relationship has the perfect balance of power. It is typical for one member of the relationship to hold more power at a time over the other (Folger et al.,1993). Now, this is not to say that the one with the most power always has it or chooses to wield it. Power is defined as

“the ability of one party to change or control the behavior, attitudes, opinions, objectives, needs, and values of another party” (Rahim et.al, 2000, p. 28). What we do know is that members typically do not like to relinquish power to another member (Folger et al.,1993). The same can be said for the relationship that existed between the United States and the People’s Republic of China during the 1970s and 1980s. The United States controlled much of the power early on in the relationship, but the data suggests that they may have been hesitant to utilize it in some cases. By the early 1980s, the United States is seen in the data as being more willing to use its power over China to influence its behavior. Counter to this is that China doesn’t always recognize the United States power in the relationship.

There are numerous examples in the data showing China using its own power to push back at the United States, and toward the latter half of the 1980s uses its power to exert influence over the United States. Certain codes emerged in the data to suggest that the Americans and the Chinese were attempting to use their power over each other. Speaking of the United States and its fondness for the weaponization of trade, code words such as *restriction(s)*, *curbs*, *embargo*, *denial*, *block*, and *stoppage* were used to identify when it was attempting to exert its power over China. Regarding the Chinese methods, they were more indirect, and you observed tactics being used to exert power over the Americans through communication in the press to influence public opinion. Codes such as *criticism*, *hegemony*, *hegemonism*, *Soviet Union*, *Soviets*, and *superpower* were used to identify when China was attempting to use its power in the relationship to influence the behavior of the United States.

The findings suggest that as China modernized, the influence that the United States could exert over it waned. However, that did not stop the United States from trying to exert its power over the Chinese. Data showing the exertion of influence and the control one group has over the

other was important for answering all the study's research questions. RQ1 asks: *What conflict styles are significant in American and Chinese government and business interactions during the 1970s and 1980s?* RQ2 asks: *How do conflict interactions between the Americans and Chinese during the 1970s and 1980s support or challenge our understanding of conflict styles?* Finally, this is the first of finding themes that speak directly to RQ3, which asks *What opportunities and limitations do cultural differences of conflict pose upon government and business interactions between Americans and Chinese?* The theme of exerting power over another is positioned well because it often takes conflict to the extreme. In this theme, we see how power is used in a relationship to influence outcomes and control the behavior of another group or individual.

Exerting power often leads to extreme uses of competing styles of conflict or even avoided if you consider the dominant power avoiding legitimate concerns of the subordinate partner. This theme can reinforce our understanding of the conflict behaviors of individualist societies and at the same time challenge our perception of collectivist tendencies concerning conflict. Lastly, it can give us insight into how different cultures may view the use of power in a relationship. This theme will be broken down into two sub-themes to better explain its function in the findings. The first sub-theme is *controlling resources to influence a relationship*. In this theme, we examine the use of power by the dominant partner of the relationship. In the second sub-theme, we discuss using criticism and foes to influence relationships. This theme is viewed through the lens of the partner with the least amount of power, but still having the ability to exert its own unique power structure to influence outcomes in the relationship.

Controlling Resources to Influence a Relationship

What is the use of having power if you do not wield it? This is more a question of ethics; however, it has implications for studying conflict communication and history. In the case of this

study, the documents collected for analysis would support that for most of the period covered, the United States held the most power in its relationship with China. Power, in this case, comes not from a physical force that one group or individual can exert over the other, but from controlling resources that are important to the other. The resources most desirable to China that the United States held were access to advanced technology and trade. Realizing this, the United States was able to use access to tech as a bargaining chip to control its relationship with China. In conflicts over issues important to the United States, it would communicate to the Chinese that they could be restricted from accessing the technology which they desired in the future. To put it bluntly, the United States was using the Chinese desire for tech to extort them into complying with the wishes of the United States, particularly when it came to global matters will be illustrated by the case of Iran in the early 1980s.

The first Presidential administration to truly weaponize trade to control the behavior of the People's Republic of China was that of Ronald Reagan. This weaponization was particularly evident in the United States' efforts to curtail the government of Iran from gaining Silkworm missiles, which are produced by The People's Republic of China (Farnsworth, 1987 October 23; Gargan, 1987 November 4). Iran was using these Chinese-made missiles to attack American oil interests in the Gulf region (Gargan, 1987 November 4). This led to a series of events that played out in the American media where the United States communicated to the Chinese that it was unacceptable for China to continue arms sales to Iran.

Even though China denied direct sales to Iran, the United States was able to exert the power it held within its relationship with the Chinese to influence them to cease arms sales to the Iranians. (Gargan, 1987 November 4). The United States wielded its power over China by communicating with the Chinese that their access to tech was in jeopardy should they choose to

proceed with supplying missile technology to the Iranians (Farnsworth, 1987 October). In the end, the Chinese desire to acquire high-tech items from the United States outweighed their desire to potentially sell arms to Iran (Gargan, 1987 November 4). In this case, it was more beneficial for the Chinese to maintain the relationship with the United States, and they agreed “to try to stop its weapons from reaching Iran” (Gargan, 1987 November 4, p.A3). Thus, the United States was able to exert its power in the relationship by communicating the threat of restricting the flow of high-tech goods to their country. Once the United States was able to get China to submit to its desired behavior, the United States rewarded the Chinese for complying with their wishes by communicating to them publicly that exports to China for high-tech items could increase soon (Shipler, 1988 March 10).

Even though a serious diplomatic conflict had emerged between the United States and China, the United States was unwilling to sacrifice its entire relationship with the Chinese over it. As one official noted, “No cutback in permitted exports was instituted” and that only “a proposed expansion was suspended” (Shipler, 1988 March 10, p. A11). By taking this approach, the United States was able to still maintain its relationship with China, yet exert its power in the relationship to influence the Chinese government's behavior. Had the United States completely cut off sales to China, it may have done irreparable harm to the relationship. Certainly, there were hard feelings at the time between the powers. Yet it was mutually beneficial to both parties to continue with the relationship.

Using Criticism and Foes to Influence Relationships

The United States did not always have the upper hand in the relationship. As the data revealed, the Chinese are very astute observers and excel at adapting to the situation that they are presented with. Throughout the documents, we can see that the Chinese adapt well to the

circumstances they are presented and at times, they are able to take a perceived disadvantage and turn it in their favor. The Chinese did this many times by using communication, especially direct *criticism*, as their preferred method of exerting power over the United States. The media and the court of global opinion were China's preferred battlegrounds for this. The Chinese resorted to this tactic in the data frequently during the administration of President Ronald Reagan, to push back against the competitive actions of the United States. It came as a response to the previously mentioned tightening rules regarding the export of high-tech trade items to the Chinese.

The documents collected show that the United States began to take a more critical approach to China during this period, compared to the three prior Presidential administrations. Much of the conflict observed between the United States and China during this period stemmed from interactions with the State Department and Secretary of State George P. Schultz (Gelbs, 1983 February 3). In response, the Chinese would often characterize the United States “as a hegemonistic superpower like the Soviet Union” or a “double hegemonism” and “equal threats to peace” as the Soviets (Gelbs, 1983 February 3, p.A3; Wren, 1983 January 30, p. E4). One of contributing factors to the People’s Republic of China and the United States building relations in 1970 was their mutual distrust of the Soviet Union (The White House, 1971 July 29; The White House, 1971 August 19). Understanding the history here, the Chinese were able to use this to their advantage when conflict would arise in their relationship with the United States.

A New York Times article from the period stated that the Chinese are “masters at playing upon a partner's guilt, suggesting that he ought to be doing more to save the relationship” (Wren, 1983 January 30, p. E4). The Chinese used criticism effectively as a form of competitive communication. not like a blunt instrument but wielded it like a scapple. The United States was able to recognize that China would push the limits of rhetoric without going so far as to cause

irreparable harm to relations (Directorate of Intelligence, 1982 March 19). Culture also plays an important role here.

The Chinese use of criticism was not to end the relationship with the U.S. but more of an effort to remind the American officials of their commitment to their relationship and to do better by China. This speaks to the fact that the Chinese, at their heart, are a collectivist society. In collectivist societies, there are strong in-group and out-group dynamics (Gelfand et al., 1996). By the time of the Reagan administration, the Chinese had dealings with three prior American presidents and had established strong economic ties with American businesses. I argue that at this point, the Chinese could have viewed the United States as part of the in-group. Since the United States was a strong trading partner, the Chinese could have likened them to what Gelfand et al. (1996) referred to as a “workgroup” (p.399). In the Chinese view, the actions taken by the Reagan administration would have been viewed as a violation of the trust of the group. Therefore, by comparing them to the out-group (The Soviet Union), the Chinese were reminding the Americans of the obligations to the in-group, which was its relationship with The Peoples Republic of China. The Chinese were willing to push the limits of criticism to shame the United States into returning to the in-group and preserving the relationship status quo.

Historical Conflict: Managing but Never Resolved

Culture and history often work in unison together to effect cross-cultural communication between the United States and China during the 1970s and 1980s. History and culture both play an important role in influencing the conflict and communication that took place during this period. In this section, I will give more focus on some of the historical aspects of conflict in Sino-American relations. History has major implications for conflict communication between the Chinese and the United States. While it may not be as obvious as the communication concepts

that have been discussed in the study thus far, history does play a crucial role here and is an important consideration in answering the research questions. History is important because interactions in a past way heavily on present-day and future interactions between individuals and nations (Folger et al., 1993). The United States and China are no exceptions, so how they have previously managed conflict can and will dictate how future conflicts are managed. Therefore, historical conflict is essential to gaining a better understanding of the research questions and the issues being discussed in this study.

The theme of historical conflict is well-suited for answering RQ1 and RQ2. RQ1 asked: *What conflict styles are significant in American and Chinese government and business interactions during the 1970s and 1980s?* Secondly, RQ2 asks: *How do conflict interactions between the Americans and Chinese during the 1970s and 1980s support or challenge our understanding of conflict styles?* This theme is well positioned to speak to a certain aspect of RQ2 that previous themes are not, specifically how the use of certain conflict styles can and do influence future interactions between individuals and groups. Given the scope of this theme, many of the same codes, such as competing, avoiding, accommodation, compromise, collaboration, negotiations, conflict, and escalation were identified in the data. This aided in reinforcing the importance of how their intersection is critical to understanding and providing additional context to conflict.

They are important because the actions taking place in those themes, power, collaboration, and competition, all can influence and shape future interactions between the Americans and the Chinese. You yourself know this to be true. If you reach out to someone for assistance on a project and they make every effort to assist you, would you hesitate to ask them for assistance in the future? Now think of that same situation only this time that individual is

dismissive and pushes back every step of the way. How will either outcome shape your future interactions? This is why history is so impactful. Looking at it from this perspective a coding framing was established. Codes of interest were *avoiding, accommodating, collaborating, competing, and compromising* along with *historical, conflict, Taiwan, Shanghai Communique, Taiwan Relations Act, Sino-Soviet Conflict, and the Soviet Union*.

When engaging in a conflict, China and the United States both choose conflict styles that best suit their concerns at the time. A serious point of conflict that repeatedly is discussed in the research documents is the status of Taiwan and the Taiwanese Straits. Taiwan is a good example of how the use of conflict styles not only affects the present day interactions but also future ones as we continue to see the status of Taiwan be a source of conflict between the United States and China. This serves as a prime example that conflict is truly never resolved, it is only managed.

An Independent Nation or Chinese Territory

If there were to be any relationship between the United States and China, the Chinese made it very clear that Taiwan must be recognized as part of China and that it was the legitimate government of the island (Enlai, 1971 May 29; The White House, 1971 April 27; The White House, 1971 July 29; The White House, August 19). On the issue, representatives for the United States took an accommodating, albeit pseudo-avoiding, approach to the Chinese request that they officially recognize Taiwan as part of the Peoples' Republic of China (The White House, 1971 July 29; The White House, August 19). The result of this ended in a collaboration between the United States, under the Nixon Administration, and the Peoples's Republic of China which came to be known as *The Shanghai Communique*.

On February 27, 1972, The Shanghai Communique was announced in which it clearly states the position that “The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the

Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position” (The Shanghai Communique, 1972, p. 132). The conflict between the two powers surrounding Taiwan was for all intents and purposes seemingly settled. Yet that was not to be the case.

When President Nixon resigned from office and Ford took over, he soon after communicated to the Chinese that his administration would “adhere to our policy concerning Taiwan” as part of China (United States Office of the White House, 1974, p.2). President Jimmy Carter subsequently followed through with plans for the official normalization of relations with China in the following administration (Gwertzman, 1979 February 1). However, the data also suggests that it is around this time that the Carter Administration began communicating a different message to the Chinese concerning Taiwan.

The Shanghai Communique states that the issue over Taiwan is one for the Chinese to decide for themselves. The Nixon administration had seemingly settled that issue, yet the data Carter Administration began to take a more competitive approach to the issue. It signaled it was taking a more competitive stance on the issue by communicating to the Chinese that the United States has a “vital interest in the peaceful resolution between Taiwan and Peking” (Smith, 1978 December 16, p.8). At the time, officials in the United States claimed that the Chinese accepted this position with some acceptance may have been out of an attempt to go along “without losing face” (Smith, 1978 December 16, p.8). Why did the Chinese accept this?

In using an accommodating style of conflict with the United States and avoiding direct conflict about Taiwan, the Chinese were in a better position to reap the benefits of the formalization of relations with the United States the following year (Gwertzman, 1979 February 1). Yet kicking the can down the road so to speak isn't beneficial for managing conflict. The

Chinese, by accommodating or better yet avoiding conflict with the United States in this instance, I would argue that China essentially created a cycle of “give an inch take a mile” with the United States.

By avoiding direct conflict at the moment, and communicating effectively with American officials, the Chinese were setting a precedence for future interactions with the United States. Likewise, by taking a competing approach with the Chinese on the issue of Taiwan, and essentially going back on their word, the United States was influencing future conflict interactions with the Chinese.

These actions set the stage for future conflicts between the United States and China. The Reagan Administration continued to take a competing approach with the Chinese. They did so by continuing to sell defense materials to Taiwan based upon the Taiwan Relations Act, while still claiming to adhere to the commitments made in the Shanghai Communique of 1972 (United States Embassy China, 1981 June 16; United States State Department, 1981 June 10). Unfortunately, both the United States and China would continue this cycle of conflict. It was perpetuated through the continued use of a mixture of conflict styles such as competing, and accommodating. The data collected indicated to me that neither side was willing to collaborate on a lasting solution.

The issue of Taiwan still plagues us to this day. Arguably the issue of Taiwan was almost resolved once with the issue of The Shanghai Communique in 1972. However, by not collaborating on a binding resolution, the Chinese and Americans missed an opportunity to strengthen their relations and reduce the chances of future conflicts. By engaging in conflict styles such as avoiding, accommodating, and competition, each party was not able to manage the conflict. This has led to a cycle of conflict that continues to this day. The actions of the past have

meaning today. This continued historical source of conflict between China and the United States illustrates to us just how important the influence of conflict styles can be in communication and history.

Discussion

Now that we have firmly established the four themes, *a desire for relations*, *competitive acts*, *exerting power over others*, and *historical conflict* from the data, we can examine the study's research questions in even more depth. In this section, we turn our focus to how the themes of this study confirm, challenge, or extend existing research about the relationship between culture and conflict. To do so, I discuss...

A Discussion of Conflict Styles

The use of conflict styles was evident throughout interactions between the United States and the People's Republic of China in the 1970s and 1980s. The five conflict styles of *avoiding*, *accommodating*, *compromising*, *competing*, and *collaborating* were used by Americans and Chinese alike when communicating with one another (Folger et al., 2018; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978). Based on the analysis, we can see that when interacting with one another, both the Chinese and Americans chose a conflict style that was most appropriate to the current situation, based on their current level of concern for self (assertiveness) and/or the concern of the other party (cooperativeness) (Folger et al., 1993; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978). Understanding this became essential to answering RQ1 and RQ2.

Answering RQ1: What conflict styles are significant in American and Chinese government interaction during the 1970s and 1980s?

While all conflict styles are present in the data, based on the findings, competing and collaborating were found to be the most utilized and therefore carried the most significance. The

United States and China both used competing and collaborating styles to their advantage, depending on the situation. Both sides used competing to great success when negotiating trade agreements. The Chinese and Americans also used collaborating style on matters of mutual interest such, as those to develop and modernize the Chinese oil industry (Leuck, 1983 August 18). A collaborating style of conflict was also used in matters of diplomacy, but to a lesser extent, especially in the later years of the study period.

Competing Styles

Conflict takes place between individuals (or even groups) that are interdependent on one another. Folger et al. (1993) note that conflict is colored by the interdependence of the parties” involved (p.5). By the mid-to-late-1970s the United States and China were becoming increasingly interdependent through matters of trade. While discussing the theme of competitive acts, the data showed that conflict between the United States and Chinese over trade issues resulted in a few instances where China canceled the importation of American commodities (Maidenberg, 1975 January 28; Wren, 1983 January 20). The Chinese took this route not so much as a reprisal against the United States, but to force the Americans into a better deal or compromise on matters of trade. The Chinese also took competitive steps when negotiating on diplomatic issues such as Taiwan to gain a more agreeable outcome for themselves (Directorate of Intelligence, 1982 March 19). The United States also engaged in its own competitive acts during the 1980s.

Arguably the most significant use of the competing style of conflict in the data was by the Americans over China’s alleged missile sales to Iran. The Americans effectively exerted power over China in their relationship by threatening to withhold resources (access to high technology) to force the Chinese to stop the sale of Silkworm missiles to Iran (Farnsworth, 1987

October 23; Gargan, 1987 October 24; Gargan, 1987 November 4; Shipler, 1988 March 10). The United States, realizing the desire of the Chinese to acquire more tech, used the threat of withholding access to their benefit, as they had correctly surmised that the Chinese were not willing to sacrifice this important relationship over the alleged sale of missiles. As noted in existing literature, an individual, or as in this example, an entire nation, “can exert more influence than others because he or she holds greater power resources or is more willing to employ his or her resources, the odds against reaching a mutually satisfying solution increase” (Folger et al., 1993, p.117). In this case, the Americans certainly held the most resources in the relationship and they were more than willing to use it as a competitive advantage over the Chinese.

Collaborating Style

There was a great deal of collaboration between both the Chinese and the Americas during the 1970s and 1980s. Based on the data, I would argue that the most significant use is between China and American businesses during the period. Examples of this were observed in deals negotiated for developing and modernizing China such as those for oil tech, importation of American commodities, and the travel industry (Butterfield, 1978 November 23; King, 1980 October 25; Luek, 1983 August 18; Wren, 1982 March 24). Conflict can be productive, and we saw that in many of the documents collected (Folger et al., 1993). Productive conflict in the form of a desire for relations led to great economic collaboration. For example, news reports on negotiations between China and American oil companies illustrated the benefits of a collaborative approach to conflict (Lueck, 1983 August 18). In some instances, it took years of back and forth between groups to make a deal; in the end, the collaborative efforts between the Chinese and Americans proved mutually beneficial for both parties involved (Lueck, 1983

August 18). Early diplomatic efforts also yielded some significant collaborations.

The desire for relations between the Chinese and the Americans led to some early collaborative acts taking place in the relationship. I believe a significant instance of a collaborating style of conflict was the issuing of the joint statement referred to as *The Shanghai Communique of 1972*. Both countries agreed that they were better off together than apart and that taking a collaborative approach to their conflicts would benefit them far more. The statement highlighted specific areas where collaboration could be possible in such “fields as science, technology, culture, sports, and journalism (The Shanghai Communique, 1972, p.132). Both the United States and China recognized that differences existed and that they didn’t agree on everything, but at the same time could work together in areas of mutual significance. They didn’t have to agree on everything the other did to still have a meaningful relationship and engage in healthy productive conflict. That is significant.

Answering RQ2:How do conflict interactions between the Americans and Chinese during the 1970s and 1980s support or challenge our understanding of conflict style?

Based on the data, I concluded that interactions between Americans and the Chinese during this period both supported and challenged our understanding of conflict styles. The differences were very nuanced and there was evidence to support some of what the existing literature says about the use of conflict styles. With a desire for relations, we saw each side engage in the use of collaborating conflict styles in areas of economic collaboration. When engaged in competitive acts or exerting power over the other, the data displayed excessive uses of competing styles of conflict.

The theme of historical conflict saw much more use of accommodating and avoiding than I expected, with some of these interactions challenging what conflict styles I would have

viewed as appropriate. The influence of culture was not as heavy as I thought it would be, though it was present when the Americans took an individualistic approach against the Chinese to impose their will upon them. The influence of culture was present when the Chinese used criticism tactically against the United States. However, they did not display the number of collectivist traits that I had previously expected them to. It was interesting to see how conflict styles used by both the Americans and Chinese were effectively adapted to each situation and to each group's individual needs.

Supporting Our Understanding

There was a great deal of evidence to support our current understanding of the nature of conflict. Conflict styles fall along two axes of behaviors that satisfy an individual's concerns for themselves (assertiveness) and as well as their concerns for others (cooperativeness) (Folger et al., 2018; Rahim, 1983; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978). Throughout the data analysis, we see evidence of both the Chinese and Americans situationally using conflict styles that best serve their concern for themselves and/or concern for others. This was important in that it shows that neither side was committed to a singular communication strategy. Each side, based on their needs and view of the situation, was making conscious decisions on what steps to take when conflict occurred. They were not fixed to one style. Furthermore, it was previously noted that conflict is "an endemic aspect of social life that pervades social interactions across all domains of society, from interpersonal quarrels to organizational disagreements to extreme forms of intergroup conflict" (Cohen-Chen et al., 2022, p.1). The analysis of the documents collected for this study suggests this to be the case across all aspects of communication viewed. There were examples of productive conflict, where each side engaged in economic collaboration, where the negotiated outcome proved mutually beneficial to American and Chinese interests. There were

examples of destructive conflict, where contracts were broken and power was used in such a fashion that it damaged the relationships between the two. Seldom, if ever, was there an interaction that did not involve either productive or destructive conflict.

Most of the data collected supported that conflict styles being used fell along the lines of either assertiveness and/or cooperativeness (Folger et al., 1993). For instance, out of a desire for relations, the Nixon Administration was willing to accommodate the Chinese viewpoint that Taiwan was part of mainland China and as such recognized that the People's Republic of China was the legitimate government of China (The Shanghai Communique, 1972; The White House, 1971 July 29; The White House, 1971 August 19). Actions by the United States supported our understanding of competing conflict styles by acting very assertively with China over the issue of missiles being sold to Iran (Farnsworth, 1987 October 23; Gargan, 1987 October 24; Gargan, 1987 November 4; Shipler, 1988 March 10). In this instance, the United States engaged in a conflict style (competing) that was appropriate to an individual acting out a concern for themselves, due to American oil interest being threatened by the missiles China had allegedly sold to Iran (Farnsworth, 1987 October 23; Gargan, 1987 October 24; Gargan, 1987 November 4; Shipler, 1988 March 10). Other styles were represented as well.

At various times, the Chinese utilized accommodating, compromising, or avoiding conflict, especially in matters concerning Taiwan. Having likely viewed the issue as somewhat settled early in the relationship, the data suggested that the Chinese would often take an avoiding style when it came to conflict over the mixed messaging by the United States concerning the status of Taiwan (Smith, 1978 December 16, p.8). It is most likely that the Chinese took this step to ensure their continued unimpeded access to modern technology that was being acquired through trade with the United States. Furthermore, the Chinese engaged in

competitive acts that would support our understanding of conflict styles and challenge views held by collectivist cultures. Protecting one's own interest and using conflict styles to support that approach are generally associated with individualistic societies (Triandis, 1989). Yet, the Chinese, a culture strongly associated with collectivism did just that.

A competing style of conflict in this case took the form of direct criticism by the Chinese as in the case of referring to the United States and the Soviet Union as “double hegemonism” (Gelbs, 1983 February 2). The Chinese acted out of a great deal of concern for themselves with little concern for America to protect itself from the more influential United States. Conflict interactions between the two did not always support our understanding of conflict styles.

Challenging our Understanding

Just as the data supported our understanding of conflict styles, so too did it challenge some of our understanding, especially when it comes to cultural influences on conflict style. The literature notes that “the meaning of four of the five styles was understood differently by individualists and collectivists; dominating was the only style interpreted similarly by both groups” (Cai & Fink, 2002, p.81). Given the existing research, I would have expected the influence of culture to be represented more in the data. Yet, in the communication and conflict that took place during the 1970s and 1980s between China and the United States, there seems to be little to no difference between their approaches to conflict. When engaged in conflict, both Chinese and American cultures engaged in the use of conflict styles that would be more closely associated with individualistic societies, based on the research that was examined during the literature review.

This could be the result of a few variables that were not previously considered. First, by

1970, the People's Republic of China and the United States were planning their 135th, albeit unofficial, diplomatic meeting (United States Department of State, 1970 January 8; United States Embassy Poland, 1970 January 8). There was an established history of interactions. Secondly, the Chinese had done their research on the United States and acquired information through unofficial channels such as *New York Times* correspondent Tad Szulc, American writer Edgar Snow, magazines from the United States such as *Life*, and interactions with countries that the United States had formally established relations (The White House, 1971 July 29; The White House, 1971 August 19). A third possible reason why the Chinese and Americans exhibited similar conflict styles was their interactions with the Soviet Union. Even with its contentious relationship, the United States maintains diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union. Likewise, the Chinese had up until their falling out in the 1960s, a strong relationship with the Soviet Union. It is conceivable, that the Chinese, through interactions with the Soviets, had adapted or educated themselves on how the West interacted during conflict communications. A fourth consideration would be the history of the United States and its support of the Nationalist government during World War II. It is quite possible that the interactions during that period had carried over into memory during the era post-1947.

Culture certainly had an influence on conflict interactions observed in this study. However, it was difficult to identify any overt role that culture may have played in specific interactions between the United States and China during the 1970s and 1980s. On paper, there exist great differences in many aspects of culture between the United States and China. However, as the two cultures intermingle, the lines between cultures become blurred. As previously stated, culture exists “among those who speak a particular language dialect, during a specific historical period, and in a definable geographical region” (Triandis, 2000, p.146). Given

that a group's culture can be defined by a specific historical period, it is understandable that culture can evolve over time. I would make the argument that the Chinese, by interacting with the West, specifically the United States, were not only redefining their national identity but their culture as well. This new culture was global and its primary language was business. This new culture would continue to define and redefine interactions between China and the United States for years to come.

Answering RQ3: What opportunities and limitations do cultural differences of conflict pose upon government and business interactions between Americans and Chinese?

This was the most difficult of the research questions to answer. Based on my analysis, I would argue that some of the existing research into how collectivists engage in conflict is not representative of how the Chinese engage in conflict. While the Chinese may indeed be considered a collectivist society, I would argue that when interacting with the United States, they act as one cohesive nation and acts much like an individual. In doing so, China demonstrates many of the traits of an individualistic society when engaged in conflict. The United States also exhibited some collectivist traits during their interactions, especially early on in the relationship. This was something that I found surprising, given that the United States seemingly held the most power and could have driven a very hard bargain in some cases with the Chinese during negotiations. Instead, they chose to take collaborative steps to protect and grow the relationship at times. While this seemingly collaborative attitude did survive as long as one would hope, it was surprising, albeit encouraging that at least at some point it did exist.

Our Cultural Understandings of Collectivists May Not Fit Modern Relations

Through detailed data analysis of the documents from the 1970s and 1980s, a few understandings about how collectivists engage in the conflict were challenged. One common

theme is that “Chinese people avoid conflict to maintain harmony is central to Western thinking about China” (Tjosvold et al., 2001, p.179). Tjosvold et al. (2001) argued that the “West should break away from outworn assumptions about China as we ask the Chinese to adopt international aspirations and methods” (p.179). Through continued interactions with the West, the Chinese may have adapted to Western conflict modes to better compete with them. This could explain why Chinese communication in the early 1970s was more collaborative when compared to communication in the later 1980s.

Triandis (2004), argues that when “countries become more affluent, their populations become more individualistic” (p.91). Certainly, through economic collaboration with the United States, China was becoming more affluent than at any previous time existing as the People’s Republic of China. While Triandis (2004) argued that this change would “require several generations, my position is that through continuous interactions the Chinese found it necessary to adapt much sooner. (p.91). Essentially, the Chinese were forced into adapting to a more individualistic approach to conflict to better compete, or better yet survive, engaging with Western societies.

Just like their American counterparts, the Chinese were willing to engage in conflict when it suited their interests. The Chinese were willing to engage in competing far more than some of the existing literature on collectivism led me to believe. The Chinese were very competitive in trade talks with the United States, especially when there was a perceived inequality/imbalance between them (Butterfield, 1981 February 8; Maidenberg, 1975 January 28; Wren, 1983 January 20; Wren, 1983 January 17; Wren, 1983 February 3). Brett (2000) wrote that “[r]esearch has shown that there are fundamental differences between cultures with respect to norms for negotiations and behavior in negotiations” (p.103). In the case of this study,

the data analysis of the documents collected did not support this argument.

For its part, the United States, in most instances, matched up with how the current research views individualistic societies. Triandis (1989) states that “[I]ndividualist give priority to personal goals over the goals of the collectives; collectivists either make no distinctions between personal and collective goals or if they do make such distinctions, they subordinate their personal goals to the collective goals” (p.509). I felt that this was represented in the data, specifically when the United States changed Presidents. With every new American administration came a new set of priorities for the American government. The Chinese were not necessarily burdened with these issues of government but certainly were burdened with the ramifications of dealing with such a system of government.

It was interesting to see some Administrations attempt to work past some issues commonly associated with individualistic societies. Specifically, the data suggested that the administrations of Richard Nixon and George H.W. Bush did attempt to work through conflicts with the Chinese collectively. While it is true that President Nixon had specific goals in mind when establishing relations with China, he does seem to want to work collectively with the Chinese to achieve them. Likewise, President Bush appears to have gone out of his way to maintain relations with the Chinese. Even during the Tiananmen incident of June 1989 and the outrage in the United States, President Bush was attempting to preserve the relationship with the Chinese even at the risk of his own political career (New York Times, 1989 June 24). We have discussed previously that collectivists conform to the “goals” of the collective (Gelfand et al., 1996, p.399). While I am by no means suggesting that President Bush is a collectivist at heart, I do think that it is interesting that he went with a measured response to the Chinese when his own political party was calling for even more action to be taken against China (New York

Times, 1989 June 24). In this case, President Bush's desire to preserve the relationship at the moment went against what I would have expected of the leader of an individualistic society based on the literature.

The Usefulness of Conflict Styles to Explore Cross-Cultural Conflict

It is clear that effectively using and understanding conflict styles is important to managing conflict. An individual's use of conflict styles has bearing on not only the conflict in the moment, but for future conflicts between the same individuals or even individuals who are witnesses to the conflict. Understanding the use of conflict styles is important to researchers who seek more efficient and beneficial ways of managing conflict.

An individual's use of conflict styles helps determine the value that they place upon a relationship in a given situation. Conflict styles help provide greater context to human interactions. The old cliché “actions speak louder than words” is appropriate here. One may say they value a relationship with another individual or group, yet when conflict arises that same individual may employ a conflict strategy that is counterintuitive to that statement. Folger et.al. (1993) says that “the five styles have been an enormously useful tool for understanding conflict” (p.32). This is true as conflict styles offer a way to see past rhetoric and see a situation for what it really is.

Awareness of conflict styles offers us insight into how to defuse conflict. Taking a competing approach in conflict may only escalate a situation. Similarly, taking avoiding conflict may only prolong a conflict rather than manage it effectively. When we better understand these behaviors and why they take place, we can then begin to interpret the underlying motivations of individuals and groups engaging in conflict. This has huge implications for not only interpersonal conflicts but international conflicts as well. Conflict styles give meaning and

context to human interactions.

I find the study of conflict styles extremely useful for understanding cross-cultural conflict. International conflict and cross-cultural conflict are similar in the fact that “how you see the world depends on where you sit. People tend to see what they want to see” (p.25). Conflict styles provide a framework for understanding cross-cultural conflict. Research into culture noted that there exist many differences between individualistic and collectivist cultures. Yet, my analysis of the data suggested that both Chinese and Americans, two dissimilar cultures, engaged in the same styles of conflict when presented with a similar situation. They both competed and collaborated when it served their interest. Both Chinese and Americans engaged in accommodating and avoiding instances where they desired to preserve relations. While the compromise was not often observed, it stands to reason that the two would engage in this style of conflict should it be suited to the occasion.

I must note that in some cases the use of conflict styles could be a limiting factor in the study of cross-cultural conflict. One must consider that not all researchers may agree on the style of conflict being employed in a given situation. If the actions surrounding the use of a particular conflict style are not overt, it could potentially lead to discussions between researchers on what is taking place. A conflict interaction that I identify as accommodating another researcher may potentially identify as avoiding or compromising. A thorough understanding of the use of conflict styles and the context of the situation should limit these conflicting identifications. It is important to note that research of this type is interpretive, and therefore not everyone may agree on what has taken place. However, this should not deter researchers from using conflict styles to examine cross-cultural communication

The fact of the matter is conflict styles give us a basis to understand human interaction

no matter how different the culture may be. Therefore knowledge of conflict styles is useful for understanding each other. As cross-cultural interactions continue to grow with the rise of a truly interdependent global community, the opportunities for conflict will increase as well. Based on this study, I argue that the usefulness of conflict styles is that it gives individuals a starting point to understand one another. Humans have needs and concerns that are largely satisfied through our use of conflict styles. Therefore if we understand conflict styles, then we can better understand each other no matter where we come from.

Limitations and Conclusion

While the data collection process for this study was exhaustive and yielded a considerable amount of usable data, there were some limitations. As expected, there were little to no documents available to give a true behind-the-scenes look into the thought process of Chinese officials. While I was able to locate details on private interactions between Americans and Chinese, in the end, those documents, especially news and government reports, still originated from American sources. Due to the secretive nature of the Chinese government and the current politic climate which exists between the Peoples' Republic of China and the United States of America, obtaining that perspective was impossible at this time. It would have been interesting, and I believe insightful, to see the communication which took place in private between Chinese officials and see how they viewed conflicts taking place during negotiations with the Americans. That being said, this study could only answer its research questions and make inferences about conflict and culture based on the currently available data.

Limitations aside, this has proved to be a very rewarding interdisciplinary study of conflict styles, culture, cross-cultural communication, and communication and conflict in general. While culture certainly influences conflict, it did not have the impact that I had

expected based on some of the existing literature. It could be that conflict styles and their use are more similarly understood by cultures than previously considered. Another argument could be that interactions between the two cultures in the years prior to 1947 and continued talks in the years leading up to the reestablishment of relations had a profound effect on how each side engaged in conflict. It would be interesting to see consideration given to future research on the subject by looking at interactions that took place at the turn of the twentieth century between the United States and China. Would cultural differences have had a greater influence on the use of conflict styles and cross-cultural negotiation during this time? This is a question that future research should ask.

The study of culture and conflict styles offers a lens through which researchers can examine human communication. Examining the use of conflict styles can be an interdisciplinary tool to better understand past human interactions and conflicts that have shaped world events and influenced the present day. Through historical analysis, historians seek to understand the contributing factors that led to the occurrence of a specific event. Researchers looking through historical archives, such as those containing records of communication, would be wise to consider the implications that the use of conflict styles has upon interactions between individuals and how they can influence outcomes in conflict.

It would be prudent to understand their influence in cross-cultural negotiations. As cross-cultural interactions continue to grow with the rise of a truly interdependent global community, the opportunities for conflict will increase as well. As we have seen in this study communication research can provide insight into historical interactions. As the field of interdisciplinary scholarship continues, it will be interesting to see how communication research can enhance our understanding of history, and how understanding those same events can better

inform us about the future.

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Education

08/2021-

05/2023 **Master of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies**

Indiana University Southeast, New Albany IN

Thesis Title: “Culture, Conflict Styles, and Understanding: Cultural Impacts on the Use of Conflict Styles in Cross-Cultural Communication.”

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Alexandra N. Sousa

01/2020 –

08/2021 **Bachelor of Science in History**

Indiana University Southeast, New Albany, IN

Thesis Title: “Knights of the Switch: A Study of the White Caps and Their Violent Resistance to Social and Moral Change in the United States.”

Awards: Chancellor’s List 2020 and 2021, Outstanding History Student of the Year 2021

08/1996 –

08/1998 **Associates of Science in Law Enforcement**

Vincennes University Jasper Campus, Jasper, IN

Teaching and Research Experience

12/2022-

04/2023 **Student Editor – IUS Graduate Research Journal**

Indiana University Southeast New Albany, IN

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Sara Walsh

08/2021-
12/2021

Graduate Teaching Assistant

Indiana University Southeast, New Albany Indiana

Course: American History II – H-106

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Yu Shen

10/2020-
12/2021

Student Research Fellowship

Indiana University Southeast, New Albany IN

Research Conducted: Original research into the Indiana Poor Farm System in the 19th century

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Yu Shen

Publications and Conferences

04/2023 **IUS Graduate Research Journal Vol. 13**

Title of Paper: “Employee Training: A Study of Theories and Practices.”

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Yang Zhang

10/2021 **Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs 2021 Annual Conference**

Research Presented: “Knights of the Switch: A Study of the White Caps and Their Violent Resistance to Social and Moral Change in the United States.”

04/2021 **Indiana University Southeast Student Conference 2021**

Research Presented: “Knights of the Switch: A Study of the White Caps and Their Violent Resistance to Social and Moral Change in the United States.”

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Elizabeth Gritter

04/2021 **Indiana University Southeast Student Conference 2021**

Research Presented: The Poor Farm: Public Assistance in Crawford County, Indiana

in the late 19th and early 20th century
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Yu Shen

Grants and Fellowships Awarded

09/2022 **Indiana University Southeast Student Research Grant**

Grant Details: Awarded to Students at Indiana University Southeast to cover expenses while conducting research.

08/2022 **Indiana University Regional Campus Graduate Fellowship**

Fellowship Details: Fellowship was created to support graduate study at Indiana University for students that attend regional campuses.

01/2022. **2022 Voices of Change Speech Contest Grant Winner**

Grant Details: Created to celebrate the vision and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., reinforcing King's advocacy of change through civil dialogue and encouraging viewers to take personal action for the betterment of themselves and/or society.

08/2021 **Indiana University Regional Campus Graduate Fellowship**

Fellowship Details: Fellowship was created to support graduate study at Indiana University for students that attend regional campuses.

10/2020 **Indiana University Southeast Student Research Fellowship**

Fellowship Details: Awarded to undergraduate students at Indiana University Southeast for the purpose of conducting original research.