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Cultural Differences and Polish-Chinese Business Relations in Practice

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Abstract: The main aim of the article is to define practical recommendations for Polish employees and managers facilitating their multicultural cooperation with Chinese partners and contributing to intercultural management in organisations operating abroad. In order to achieve the aim of the paper, the following operational research questions have been formulated: (1) Which cultural factors have an impact on effectiveness and the quality of Polish-Chinese partnership? (2) What are the biggest difficulties for Poles in relations with Chinese partners? (3) Which aspects are the most significant in building and creating relations with Chinese partners? (4) Which guidelines about cooperation with Chinese partners are useful in practice and allow to succeed? Analysis is based on data collected from the qualitative study. Research methods are direct, in-depth structured interviews as well as partly structured observations conducted by the author.

Keywords: Polish-Chinese cooperation, multicultural dimensions, multicultural management.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, globalisation is one of the most characteristic phenomena. Searching attractive partners, locations, resources and forms of economic activity more and more often happens worldwide, not only in one country. China may be considered as a good example of a promising land for developing business relations but at the same time partners or investors from the West must be aware that they have to cooperate with people of completely different origin and culture. It also relates to Polish-Chinese relations which have a big chance to develop (Przytuła, 2011, pp. 86–89).

The main aim of the paper is to define practical recommendations for Polish employees and managers facilitating their multicultural cooperation with Chinese partners and contributing to intercultural management in organisations operating abroad. In order to achieve the aim of the paper, the following operational research questions have been formulated: (1) Which cultural factors have an impact on effectiveness and the quality of Polish-Chinese partnership? (2) What are the biggest difficulties for Poles in relations with Chinese partners? (3) Which aspects are the most significant in building and creating relations with Chinese partners? (4) Which guidelines about cooperation with Chinese partners are useful in practice and allow to succeed? The paper investigates the questions such as: which cultural problems and difficulties Poles may have, while working with Chinese partners, how do they look in practice, and last but not least how Polish people can prepare and react to them?

The analysis is based on data collected from qualitative research. Data collection methods included direct, in-depth structured interviews as well as partly structured observations. Observations have been conducted by the author, while living in China for two years. However, structured interviews and surveys using the same open-ended and close-ended questions were main data collection methods. The study was conducted between March and May 2017. The respondents for direct interviews and surveys were selected to represent various aspects of cooperation with Chinese partners. Thus, the informants were business owners, top, middle and low level managers, employees and interns. They come from manufacturing, commercial, service and educational companies, they are Polish, Polish-Chinese and

Chinese with residence in Poland and China as well. In total, 29 informants contributed to the study sharing their experience, lessons and insights in accordance with the interview questionnaire included in Annex 1.

The first section of the article includes comparison of Poland and China in the context of their specific cultural models. The second section presents results of the study and key aspects about Polish-Chinese relations. The next section gives practical tips for Polish business people, which are focused on building multicultural cooperation and succeeding in China. The last section provides the conclusion of the study.

2. Cultural differences between China and Poland

In times of economic globalisation and increased necessity to work in an international and a cross-cultural environment, it is not surprising that carrying out research studies and building descriptive models of cultural dimensions has become an area of interest for many scholars (Rozkwitalska, 2008, pp. 81–84). The accurate preparation and the use of acquired knowledge in practice can help to avoid these hazards and to achieve expected results (Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 2008, pp. 199–204).

One of the first and most likely one of the best known models, which describes these phenomena is the Hofstede's model. The first version of his model included four dimensions and was published in 1980. Currently, the Hofstede's model is expanded and includes the following six dimensions, which describe cultural differences between specific countries or regions: (1) power distance, (2) individualism, (3) masculinity, (4) uncertainty avoidance, (5) long term orientation, (6) indulgence (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2011, pp. 54–56).

The studies of Hofstede and associates on cultural dimensions (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2007; Hofstede et al., 2011) can be used to compare and contrast cultural characteristics of Poland and China, what is presented in Figure 1.

The comparison shows that in two cultural dimensions the difference between Poland and China is small (i.e. lower than 5%): 'masculinity' (2%) and 'indulgence' (5%). In three cultural dimensions, the differences are large or very large: 'individualism' (40%), 'long term

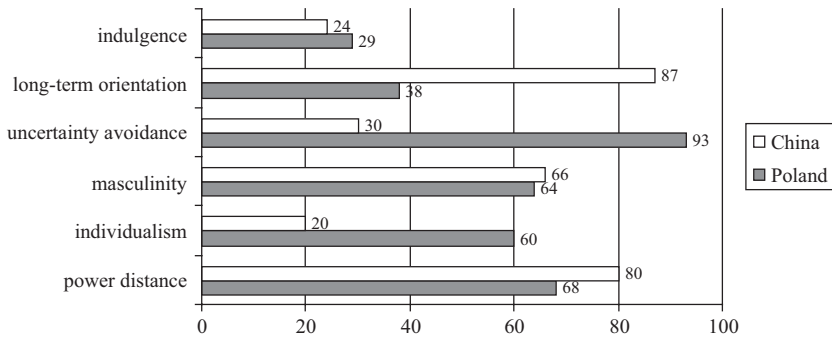


Figure 1. Cultural dimensions of Poland and China in the Hofstede Model [%]

Source: Own calculations based on: Hofstede et al. (2011).

orientation’ (49%) and ‘uncertainty avoidance’ (63%), in one cultural dimension – on the middle level: ‘power distance’ (28%). Referring to Hofstede’s results, China and Poland can be described by the following cultural dimensions:

Table 1. Cultural dimensions of Poland and China in the Hofstede’s Model

China	Poland
high power distance	middle power distance
collectivism	individualism
masculinity	masculinity
low level of uncertainty avoidance	high level of uncertainty avoidance
long-term orientation	short-term orientation
restrictiveness	restrictiveness

Source: Own calculations based on: Hofstede et al. (2011).

Considering the cultural dimension labelled as ‘masculinity’ it can be expected that both Polish and Chinese people have similar perception on the importance of a family and the roles of a man and women in society are specified and clearly different. They value personal achievements, career development and competition, they prefer money and material goods. For high-level positions, they more often hire men,

who should be assertive in managing and even aggressive if necessary (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2007, pp. 133–136).

Both cultures are characterized by restrictiveness, which is related to the belief that joy should be controlled and strictly regulated by social norms. Free time is seen as less important and savings and providence are really important. Being cynical and pessimistic is more likely to happen and smile can be seen as suspicious. There is also a lower percentage of people who feel healthy and happy (Hofstede et al., 2011, pp. 296–301).

When it comes to cooperation, dimensions in which the divergences are the greatest may seem to be more important. In the case of Poland and China, such a dimension is ‘uncertainty avoidance’. It describes the extent to which people accept unpredictable events. The Chinese, in contrast to the Poles, are characterized by a low level of this characteristic, which means that they claim that uncertainty is a natural part of life and therefore they have higher tolerance for changes. They believe that life is good in the way it is, in result Chinese people have a lower level of stress and anxiety (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2007, pp. 179–186). The Chinese are also more likely to make risky investment decisions, both in business and in private life (e.g. stock market decisions, gambling) (Jacoby, 2016, pp. 124–127).

In the light of Hofstede’s studies, the representatives of these two nations have also different attitudes to time. The long term horizon, characteristic for the Chinese people, makes them look further to the future, they are prepared to wait longer for the effects and important profits for them are those in 10 years time. It is common that they spend money on investments, and they often invest in real estate (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2007, pp. 220–225). They also build long-lasting and multi-annual networks, so-called ‘*guanxi*’, which play a key role in China. The Chinese exceptionally value perseverance and savings, the respect for tradition and ‘saving the face’ is important to them. They are ready to work hard to achieve a specific goal and to wait patiently for the expected results (Cardenal and Araujo, 2010, pp. 38–41).

Individualism vs. collectivism dimension reflects the individual’s approach to groups’ and individuals’ interests and their hierarchy. Poles are quite often individualists, in China there is a collectivist culture. Chinese people from an early age are embedded in collective systems such as a family, a school, a workplace, an organisation where they are expected to be subordinated to the group. It gives them a sense of care

and security in return for their loyalty. Private life is less important, the word ‘I’ is avoided, or they use ‘I’ as an interdependent word (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2007, pp. 87–92).

The next dimension proposed by Hofstede is the power distance which defines the relationship of an individual to power and the extent of his/her acceptance for the inequalities arising from the existing distribution of power. China is a country with a high power distance in which authorities and representatives are respected, citizens accept their decisions and the fact that there are inequalities between people. There is obedience to supervisors, the hierarchy is sanctioned, and people should not have aspirations beyond their positions (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2007, pp. 57–63).

Another model which analyses cultural differences among national cultures is the Gesteland model, covering the following dimensions (Gesteland, 2000, pp. 16–17):

- protransactional – pro-partnership;
- ceremonials – non-ceremonials;
- monochronic – polychronic;
- expressiveness – restraint.

Considering Poland and China in this context, the following table shows the differences between the nations in accordance with the Gesteland model.

Table 2. Cultural dimensions of Poland and China in the Gesteland Model

China	Poland
pro-partnership	moderate pro-partnership
ceremonial	ceremonial
monochronic	polichronic
reticence	unstable expressiveness

Source: Own calculations based on: Gesteland (2000).

The distinction between protransactional cultures and pro-partnership cultures is related to different approaches to business. In the Chinese culture of partnership, people focus more often on interpersonal relationships and in business they use networking (so-called ‘*guanxi*’), often complicated, and they may feel uncomfortable when surrounded by strangers. It is important to ‘save face’. Communication is highly

contextual, in which either the speaker spoke more than what the other heard, or did not say everything that he/she was feeling at the moment. Messages are quite often unclear (Gesteland, 2000, pp. 19–45).

Non-ceremonial cultures versus ceremonial cultures – the division relates to the importance for citizens of showing respect, etiquettes, forms of contact, status, etc. Chinese people belong to ceremonial cultures, hierarchically organized, they value differences in social or professional status. Their rituals and forms of showing and emphasising respect are really important to them. This way is shaped by centuries of Chinese tradition (Gesteland, 2000, pp. 46–57).

Monochronic cultures versus polychronic cultures – the division is due to attitudes to time. China is a monochromatic culture, where it is extremely important to follow the rules and to be punctual, the schedules are carefully planned, and the meetings are very rarely interrupted (Gesteland, 2000, pp. 58–60).

Expressive cultures versus restrained cultures – the distinction resulting from different ways of communication, depending on the factor that plays a more important role in communication: reason or emotion. China is a part of a restrained culture where people try to control their emotions more than to show them. They believe that avoiding showing joy, sadness or anger avoids imposing one's own feelings to others and helps to maintain harmony (Gesteland, 2000, pp. 68–80).

In brief, this is a comparison of Poland and China in accordance with two selected models of cultural dimensions. Further sections of the article deal with connecting the theoretical assumptions of the model with the practice and cooperation with Chinese partners

3. Chinese partners in the eyes of Poles – findings from the study

Cultural differences of the Chinese can be considered as interesting possibilities to get better understanding of others' behaviours, traditions and different point of views. On the other hand, it is a challenge, while having business cooperation with the Chinese.

As the basic, practical difficulty in relations with Chinese people, most of their partners say about a communication barrier. People who cooperate with the Chinese often do not speak their language. Chinese as a tonal language, based on signs, not on the alphabet, is extremely difficult to learn and be spoken by foreigners. They have to work

with interpreters as intermediaries, which can hinder and deform the message, and it creates an additional communication limit. Speaking English as an international language does not work well because not many Chinese can speak English and if they do, this is mainly in bigger cities, in the province it is not in use. In addition, their use of language is rather poor, often with a wrong pronunciation, keeping Chinese accent and Chinese syntax. It can make problems especially on telephone conversations.

Even for those who can speak Mandarin i.e. the official language in the People's Republic of China, communication still is a problem. It is related to two cultural factors. The first is because Chinese people communicate in a high-context, indirect way. Poles are relatively direct in communication, and it may be difficult for them to catch up on the understatements or nuances in Chinese. Secondly, the phenomenon of 'saving face' (*'mianzi'*) (Chong, 2011, pp. 55–57) makes the Chinese do not speak directly, especially in situations where they have to say something bad, unpleasant or they have to reject. To avoid this situation, they prefer to use a word 'maybe', 'must be checked' or 'confusing' and sometimes they are even ready to lie. They do not want to lose face so they do not occupy a particular position, they avoid declarations for 'yes' or 'no', say 'rather', 'maybe', 'probably' etc. Even if they know that someone is wrong or is missing truth – they will not point it out. It is because they do not want to lose relationship or to make their partner lose face. They also do not want to confirm that they themselves are wrong, even if it is obvious. This also includes answers to questions. The Chinese do not admit that they do not know something, they will always give a positive sign of the head.

Another aspect of communication is nonverbal communication. The Chinese can be noisy, they often can speak loudly, gesticulate, what is wrongly received by Poles as aggressive or argumentative. Despite their expressiveness they are restrained, they often have a reputation of 'impassive'. This is due to the different understanding of Chinese people's body language by Western people. They perceive such a body language as limited and lacking in emotion. The smile can be taken as an example: Europeans smile when they are satisfied and happy, while the Chinese smile when they are in an uncomfortable or embarrassing situation. They may avoid eye contact. They do not like being touched unless they are being greeted. In formal situations are restrained, more serious, in informal situations – they are relaxed.

During negotiations, the Chinese partners often behave in a formal way, they use adequate phrases and courteous assurances. They often use long introductions before shifting to a particular topic of meeting. Conversations can be really long and often unspecified. They often avoid problems. An interlocutor has to carefully select words so the Chinese partners do not feel embarrassed or hurt, because they cannot 'lose face'. They provide evasive answers. It is difficult to receive direct information from them, the meaning often has to be understood from the context. On the one hand, they would like to get as much information as possible, to gain the knowledge, but they do not disclose their intentions. They are open to various solutions. Chinese people often require detailed presentation of costs and how the price was built. They want to know all the details to make sure they are not overpaying for the service / goods. During price negotiations, the output value is overpriced (sale) or undervalued (purchase). Experts, older people, sometimes even lawyers are often involved in negotiations, and if so, they sit somewhere on the side. Small autonomy and lack of decision making lengthens the negotiation time and makes it difficult to close the topics. The final decision is often made by one person – the leader.

China is characterized by a high power distance, which is clearly reflected in business relations. Respect for superiors and absolute respect for the hierarchy. In the Chinese culture it is unacceptable to challenge the opinion of an elderly person even if the other person (younger) does not necessarily agree with the point of view of the person or even knows that it is wrong. The position in the organisation is regulated not only with the way a person speaks, but also how long he/she speaks. Only certain individuals are allowed to express their own opinions. In a Chinese company, the boss, a supervisor or an older person speaks the most often and the staff listens carefully and occasionally shares their suggestions. The hierarchy is also visible in less formal situations, such as meals, when the rules (ceremonials) decide who can give a toast, how to tap the glasses (the person in a lower position holds a glass lower than the person above), and the order of eating (the most important guest eats first, the best bites are personally served by the host).

The high power distance is also visible in the decision-making process. This process takes long time, often the project goes through many co-workers in the organisation. The final decision in a Chinese company is often taken by the boss, sometimes it happens while having

a dinner, in a restaurant. If a supervisor does not participate in a meeting, then the decisions must be consulted with him and cannot be made during the conversations. Poles are more likely to make quick decisions, the Chinese are slower in that. Sometimes, it is possible to get the impression that they are avoiding it. In the Polish culture, the decision is based mainly on an analysis of all collected facts, so that it is most beneficial for the company. In the Chinese culture, decisions are often taken by leaders who prefer personal relations ahead of the interest of their organisations, following the rules of '*guanxi*'. In addition, it also happens that the decision is made, but it does not mean that it cannot be changed, even repeatedly. It is important for the Chinese to 'save a face' while making decisions. An impatient Pole may find it difficult to accept such a long time of the decision making process.

Running business in China would be impossible without building relationships. This is connected with the phenomenon known as '*guanxi*', which is the most significant factor of the pro-partnership character of the Chinese culture. This is a key concept for conducting business with the Chinese. It means the personal contact network, both in the professional and the personal area. When you need to 'fix' something you can use networking (Chong, 2011, pp. 51–52). In brief, in China "No matter what you know, matters who you know". It involves establishing relationships with the right people, doing one another's favours and receiving them in return. Such a treatment is perceived as a debt to be repaid. If you do not do this, you can lose face. Building the right '*guanxi*' is a time-consuming and demanding process. It can be made in the form of formal meetings (e.g. negotiating meetings) as well as informal events (e.g. while having meals and drinks, karaoke, giving gifts or doing favours to each other). This is the way of building loyalty, therefore the Chinese are more dependent on what is set in '*guanxi*' rather than what is on the paper. All people live in smaller or larger '*guanxis*', which are behind many decisions, often incomprehensible for others (contract signing, promotion, scholarship, etc.). Building a relationship with a Chinese partner requires a right amount and quality of time. Without this, there is no chance of successful cooperation. Chinese excessive courtesy and praise can be tiring to Poles.

'*Guanxi*' is also a manifestation of the collectivist nature of Chinese culture. The network of relationships connects people to specific groups and determines their place in the society. The role of an individual is decreased. This is clearly visible in situations where the Chinese are

praised. Then they deprecate their role and praise the team. In negotiations, on the Chinese side there are always several people. They also go to delegations in smaller or larger groups consisting mainly of men (the male dimension of culture).

The Chinese have an innate talent for business, they are open to new opportunities. Besides '*guanxi*', they appreciate the opportunity to know and use Western knowledge, technology and foreign markets. They value the credibility of a business-backed partner from the customers (preferably the world leaders) they want to follow them. They are impressed by their extensive network and the high position in the industry. They like to feel pampered – have a sense that they are important and that they get the best at a good price. It is good to see when an individual is open for cooperation, discussion, and their comments and suggestions. They expect meeting complex promises, flexibility, and at the same time understanding delays on their part and their need for 'saving face'. They value professional competence – they like talking to professionals. They expect punctuality from the other side, not necessarily from one another. The more important the person, the less he/she cares.

The Chinese, although in general they are hard working and work is a sense of their life, have a much relaxed attitude to the duty than the Poles. Officially they always show full commitment, but unfortunately it is often without a real focus on the task. They are very creative in figuring out ways to avoid work. They often cannot point out where the real problem is and what is the reason. On the other hand, they listen and they want to learn. They observe and duplicate. They need a clear definition of the goal they are intended to achieve and the knowledge how to achieve it. They often do not meet deadlines. They promise to carry out tasks and later do not complete them. They take on tasks they do not understand, but they do not admit it. For Chinese people, different types of 'substitutes' (including, for example, employees who, in the European sense, obviously do not meet the employer's requirements) are absolutely equivalent to 'originals'. The Poles expect that everything will work properly and as expected (e.g. the contract), while for a typical Chinese it will suffice that it will 'somehow' function. Chinese interpretation of these rules is also very loose in principle. This may sometimes facilitate cooperation with Poles who understand the need to circumvent the rules, but at the same time the scope of the Chinese freedom of interpretation for someone raised in a European country can be shocking.

Due to cultural differences the Poles working with the Chinese can be sometimes surprised or even shocked. For example, the Chinese can seem to be a bit messy while eating, making weird sounds, spitting and throwing scraps under the table. Their culinary tastes, such as eating insects, snakes, rats or bones, may be amazing for Europeans. During a formal conversation the depravity may be an interpreter or a liaison advising that the question should be “better not asked” because it is out of place, even if it concerns the key issues. It surprises the in-depth belief that counsellors (elders) have unquestionable knowledge in the field. It is difficult to find yourself in a situation where the Chinese prefer to avoid telling truth. Another difficult situation is when ‘*guanxi*’ rather than company benefits affects the final decision. Surprising is the situation in which the Chinese people ask very direct questions, e.g. “how much do you weigh?” or: “how much do you make?”. The surprise is the greeting: “Have you eaten?”

4. Practical recommendations for doing business with the Chinese

While starting cooperation with the Chinese it is worth preparing properly for business relationships. This concerns both formal and cultural issues. Legal issues, customs, logistics and other regulations are so extensive and varied that it is worthwhile to use the professional help and advice of those who have been dealing with it for years. This can be, for example, a trusted agent or a liaison. It is reasonable to seek information about potential Chinese partners in professional advisory organisations before making a deal. A report requested for a particular query can save a lot of time and unnecessary costs.

Without linguistic competencies in Chinese, possible communication difficulties should be expected. In most cases it will be necessary to involve a good interpreter, although this does not always guarantee correct communication. In dealing with Chinese partners, it is wise to have a trusted Chinese or a trusted interpreter who will lead a European business partner through formal culture-specific meanders, faithfully conveying intentions and content from the other side. It is important to be patient, both in business negotiations and relationship building for ‘*guanxi*’. Chinese people appreciate their partners who are trying to adapt to the Chinese culture. It is therefore worth learning the art

of eating chopsticks and at least some useful phrases, know the basic principles of the Chinese etiquette.

Prior to establishing contacts with a Chinese partner, it is advisable to learn as much as possible about China. Time invested in reading books, tutorials or articles on the subject, watching documents, talking to someone who knows the Chinese, will surely pay off. Knowledge of the Chinese customs, history, art or culture is a sign of respect for Chinese people, which they can appreciate, and this facilitates the establishment and building of positive relationships. They also like when a partner shows an extra interest in these topics. It is also valuable to know the key principles of the Chinese business culture: seats at the table, making speeches, giving business cards, greetings, etc. The Chinese appreciate the external signs of wealth such as luxury cars, phones, brand watches, clothes, etc. It is therefore worth to take care of some details that will raise business position in the eyes of the Chinese partners.

Meetings need to be well-prepared, with appropriate information, arguments and references. It is important to respond to various, often very detailed questions. It is good to have a convincing explanation for why something is better and why it should be ordered or bought. It is worth remembering, however, not to broadcast strategic messages and control access to documents, as industrial espionage is still a challenge.

Closer business cooperation will require formal dinner parties with Chinese food and Chinese liquor called Baijiu (50–60% liqueur of specific taste and smell). During meetings, it is recommended to refrain from telling jokes. In Poland, jokes are used to relax the atmosphere, in China absolutely not. In addition, the Chinese sense of humour is different. Similarly, it is absolutely required to refrain from wondering how the Chinese behave (e.g. spitting, burping, etc.). In the Chinese culture it is impolite to show something with your index finger, use it with your whole hand. Gifts and business cards are handed and received with both hands.

In negotiations, a Chinese partner should not feel forced to take a firm stand on 'yes or no' because it violates his/her sense of harmony and exposes him/her to 'losing face'. It is worth remembering that when in response to a request the Chinese use the formulation that it is 'embarrassing' (*'butai fangebian'*), they do not intend to explain anything. For the Chinese, such a response is sufficient, but foreigners always want to know why. The 'embarrassment' may mean that there

are some political problems involved in fulfilling a request that the Chinese would prefer not to explain fully. 'Embarrassing' means 'no' and should not be re-addressed. In seeking excuses, the Chinese can lie or create a story that is complete false, if they can get them out of an awkward situation (such as explaining a decision or behaviour). In such a case, the explanation should be taken at face value. It is highly recommended to be polite, smiling and patient.

The topics of conversation during informal meetings should be 'safe' such as weather, food, hobbies, family, stock market, real estate, travel, Chinese economy, Chinese language. There should be avoided topics which may be considered as sensitive for Chinese people such as: Chinese politicians, Tibet, Taiwan, low quality products, comparing China to Japan and Korea, protests in Tiananmen Square.

Chinese people need to clearly define the purpose of work to be achieved and instructions on how to reach it. The tasks should be divided into simple and short steps. It is also important to show what the end result should be and what rewards they can receive if the goal is achieved. Unfortunately, especially in the case of manual workers, strict control of the quality and reliability of work is often required, because the Chinese have a different approach to it, they do not care about it, often they just have something 'done'. Consequently, they need to be controlled, both on a continuous basis, both by the manufacturing process itself and by the consistency of the end result with the requirements. The good thing is the piecework pay system, where clear and legible rules of remuneration for specific results are defined.

Chinese people have a different attitude to honesty. This is what Poles would call a fraud the Chinese treat as being clever. The way to protect yourself against such situations is to build a good relationship and a strong '*guanxi*', in which a Chinese partner will avoid activities leading to the 'loss of face'. On the other hand, it is also worthwhile to take care of careful preparation of the contract, in which the risk of such a situation is mitigated by unambiguous understanding of the records, for example the copper material is converted into brass because it is cheaper, so it is necessary to enter the official symbols from Mendeleev's table.

After signing the contract the stamps should be inspected. There can be no free space on the contract between the seal and the contract text so that nothing can be added. In addition, you need to put the stamp on the contract from the side to be on each sheet. In Poland, practically

everyone can make a stamp and keep it on the desk, and in China, the stamps have to be kept in an armoured cabin because they are very important.

Like everywhere, even in China, dishonest contractors can appear. It is therefore worth taking actions that work around the world such as: knowing the rules, checking partners, obtaining references, reading the documents carefully, checking the common understanding of the records. European business people entering to the Chinese market should be vigilant and keep up to date on the progress of work. The first transactions should be small and rather treated as lessons. So-called 'paving the way' is intended to enable Europeans to get better understanding of their Chinese partners.

5. Conclusions

China is an attractive intercultural business partner. To achieve planned effects, it is important to know partner's characteristics and to be flexible. When enough time and money are invested to make connections, and get intercultural knowledge and experience it can result in an advantage on the international market. Preparation to cooperate with Chinese partners should be well organised in advance and managing knowledge on inter-cultural differences in the international context should be its integral component.

Among cultural factors, which have an influence on effectiveness and quality of cooperation between Polish and Chinese partners, it is important to mention such aspects as high-context communication, 'saving face', the necessity of building '*guanxi*', traditionally shaped business etiquette, hierarchism and different attitudes to time. The main difficulties for Poles in relations with Chinese partners are: a completely different language, which makes communication problems, an indirect way of communication, excessive and time consuming ceremonials, differences in the value system, difficulties in understanding intentions, longer and quite often incomprehensible processes of making decisions.

Building cooperation with Chinese partners is a time consuming process and needs a lot of patience and investments. Such a cooperation includes the following factors: building '*guanxi*' networks, formal and informal meetings, going out for large dinners and drinks, giving gifts, giving favours, showing an understanding for cultural difference, the

knowledge of the Chinese culture, tradition and history, being sociable and kind.

Numerous recommendations, included in the article, relating to cooperation with Chinese partners are based on the author's observations and experiences shared by interviewees and are of practical significance in present Polish-Chinese realities. The author hopes that the findings of the study will help managers, co-workers and partners to get better understanding about effective communication with Chinese partners. Furthermore, such a knowledge will allow to make effective, profitable cooperation. The author believes that the paper will contribute to developing practical knowledge and helping Polish business people to succeed in China.

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Annex 1**Interview questionnaire**

1. What is your reason for being in contact with the Chinese? *(please put 'x' in brackets next to the answers of your choice)*
 - a. trading,
 - b. business cooperation,
 - c. temporary contacts as part of your work,
 - d. work in a Chinese or a Polish-Chinese company,
 - e. other reason *(please specify)*

2. Where does the contact take place?
(please put 'x' in brackets next to the answers of your choice)
 - a. in Poland,
 - b. in China,
 - c. both countries,
 - d. elsewhere *(please list relevant countries)*

3. How long have you been cooperating with Chinese partners?
(please put 'x' in brackets next to the answer of your choice)
 - a. less than 1 year,
 - b. more than 1 year and less than 5 years,
 - c. more than 5 years.

4. How often are your contacts with Chinese partners?
(please put 'x' in brackets next to the answer of your choice)
 - a. everyday,
 - b. once a week or more often,
 - c. less than monthly,
 - d. less than semiannually.

5. What is your level of Chinese language proficiency?
(please put 'x' in brackets next to the answer of your choice)
 - a. none / single words,
 - b. basic,
 - c. intermediate,
 - d. fluent.

6. What are your observations regarding negotiations with the Chinese?
(please provide a well-developed answer)

7. According to you, what are the biggest differences between the Poles and the Chinese that may hinder their effective mutual cooperation in the following areas?
(please put 'x' in brackets next to the answer of your choice)
 - a. verbal communication,
 - b. non-verbal communication,
 - c. decision making process,

- d. establishing and sustaining relationships,
 - e. conversations,
 - f. formal contacts,
 - g. social occasions,
 - h. attitude towards duties,
 - i. other areas (*please specify*).
8. According to you, what is important for the Chinese in business relations?
(*please provide a well-developed answer*)
9. What do the Chinese value the most in their cooperating partners?
(*please provide a well-developed answer*)
10. What shocked / surprised you in contacts with the Chinese?
(*please provide a well-developed answer*)
11. What are the biggest problems that you encounter while dealing with the Chinese?
(*please provide a well-developed answer*)
12. What practical advice would you provide for those who are planning to cooperate with Chinese partners?
(*please provide a well-developed answer*)
13. What to beware of when dealing with Chinese partners?
(*please provide a well-developed answer*)