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## Article

Capturing the cultural boundary among the members' interactions in a multinational workgroup: An evidence from System for the Multiple Level Observation of Groups analysis

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## MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Capturing the cultural boundary among the members' interactions in a multinational workgroup: An evidence from System for the Multiple Level Observation of Groups analysis

Ming-Yen Lee<sup>1</sup> and Quynh-Trang Nguyen<sup>2\*</sup>

**Abstract:** In order to capture the cultural boundary among international group members under the globalization context, this study conducted SYMLOG (A System for the Multiple Level Observation of Groups) approach through a case study on an international marine transport company. With questionnaire surveys, on-site observation, and individual and group interview, we adopted the field diagrams, interaction forms and thematic analysis to examine differences among members' interactions, which resulted from a cultural boundary. The findings clearly explained the cultural impacts on individual behaviors and indicated that cultural schema will lead group members with similar cultural backgrounds to create a boundary toward members from different backgrounds. It also provided valuable insights and management guidance for leaders of multicultural teams to handle differences and conflicts due to cultural forces.

**Subjects:** Globalization; Personnel Selection, Assessment, and Human Resource Management; Business, Management and Accounting

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ming Yen Lee is an associate professor at Department of Business Administration and the Director of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center at Chung Yuan Christian University, Taiwan. He is an organizational psychologist, and his main research field includes individual performance, leadership effectiveness, and organizational culture constructing. He has published articles, among others, in *International Journal of Psychology*, *Economic Management Journal*, *Cultural Studies Quarterly*.

Quynh Trang Nguyen is a PhD student at College of Business, Chung Yuan Christian University, Taiwan. Her research interests include organizational behaviors, employee motivations, behaviors and trust among them. She also focuses on studying Social Enterprises and factors for their success.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This work's findings confirm that under today's globalization context, differences between cultures still exist, create a boundary and show their influences to the behaviours of members in international workgroups. In this case, it was particularly illustrated by the differences between Western and Chinese cultures in various aspects. Practically, it provides useful insights for managers to handle cultural diversity from their team. The implications are also applicable to human resources practice in the sense that it is critical for both leaders and subordinates to be aware of potential conflicts and their underlying reasons between group members. By doing so, strategies can be designed to enable effective communication and interactions to reach high performance and organizational goals. Additionally, this work indicates strong differences in individual behaviours due to their different cultural backgrounds; thus, it is suggested to take such issue into consideration when dealing with any team that has multicultural factors.

**Keywords: cultural boundary; a system for the multiple level observation of groups; international workgroup; interactional patterns**

## 1. Introduction

In the age of globalization, it is now a common fact that numerous firms are operating with multicultural workgroups in which both leaders and subordinates need to cope with cultural diversity. In such situations, especially when members hold strong nationalistic attitudes that may involve conflicting values, the success of team building and goal achievement are unlikely to be achieved without proper strategies (Matthews, Reinerman-Jones, Burke, Teo, & Scribner, 2018). Particularly, conflicts in cultural diverse environment may cause negative emotions, subgroup formation, reduced communication and team cohesion that consequently affect the overall performance (Güver & Motschnig, 2017).

Comprehending communication and interactions within these multicultural groups is critically important as it reflects how members are achieving mutual understanding and cooperation to reach the organizational objectives. Particularly, the process and manners of how members interact with each other show how information and messages are interpreted and perceived (Adler & Gunderson, 2008), and whether cultural dissimilarities facilitate or impede their communication.

Hence, managers must recognize the dissimilar behavior patterns among different cultural groups to be aware of any boundary among team members. It is essential to figure out and soundly comprehend the root cause of their conflicting values and under what contextual conditions to creatively and flexibly formulate suitable strategies (Brewster, Houldsworth, Sparrow, & Vernon, 2016) that avoid and eliminate categorizations, encourage agreement among members (Chevrier, 2004), and exploit their coordination potential and richness (Marquardt & Horvath, 2001). As such, good communication would promote effective problem-solving and decision-making tasks of the workgroup, thus, result in high group and organizational performance (Gibbs & Gibson, 2006). Cultural diversity is also argued to be a critical team composition factor as it can be a rich resource pool (Güver & Motschnig, 2016). Therefore, how this phenomenon occurs, influences, and its desirable solutions in an international workgroup still deserve further research attention (Güver & Motschnig, 2017).

Prior research has indicated possible reasons for different behaviors of employees from different cultural backgrounds (Farh, Hackett, & Liang, 2007; Loi & Ngo, 2008; Triandis, 2004; Zhang, Song, Hackett, & Bycio, 2006) and concentrated on how to manage multicultural team members (Brett, Behfar, & Kern, 2006; Chevrier, 2004). Nonetheless, most of attention was put in explaining differences by typology rather than members' communicating and interacting patterns, especially neglected to explain the antecedents that might influence these communicating processes (Matveev & Nelson, 2004). They also overlooked the possible dynamic integration of international group members under the influence of globalization (Kozlowski & Bell, 2013). Therefore, concerning practical management guidance, a clearer understanding of members' basic behavioral differences is needed, which effectively helps managers in deciding whether to utilize or assimilate the differences to achieve performance goals.

In order to ideally examine the influences of international workgroup members' different cultural backgrounds on their behaviors, this study focuses on comparing coordinating interactions between members from a Chinese society and members from Western context. It is widely known that Chinese and Western cultures bear significant dissimilarities as they were rooted in different school of thoughts (Barkema, Chen, George, Luo, & Tsui, 2015). In this work, Taiwanese members are suitable for representing Chinese culture as past research has shown that Taiwanese people reflect typical Chinese cultural value orientations (Cheng, Jiang, Cheng, Riley, & Jen, 2015). We also adopt Thompson, Hickey, and Thompson (2019) concept of "Western context" which proposed that

Europe, the Americas (North and South), Australia, Israel and New Zealand are Western countries since their cultures are directly derived from Western European cultures.

A case study was conducted using data collected from 11 members (6 from Taiwan and 5 from Western Europe) from a workgroup in the London branch office of [E]—an international marine transport company. Based on SYMLOG (A System for the Multiple Level Observation of Groups), proposed by Bales, Cohen and Williamson in 1979, we observed members' interactive behaviors and depicted their daily behavioral patterns. We aimed to acquire confirmative authenticity and plausibility (Bauer & Aarts, 2000; Golafshani, 2003) and capture the precision of behavior depicted by SYMLOG. By doing so, this study contributes to the debate on cultural proximity and systematically enhances recognition in academia of social psychology and organizational behavior regarding the phenomena caused by cultural boundary. Particularly, it shows that cultural schema will lead group members with similar cultural backgrounds to create a boundary toward members from different backgrounds. Moreover, it also clearly explains the cultural impacts on individual behaviors, in this case, it was exhibited in the Western and Chinese cultures. Practically, the findings provide useful insights and management guidance for leaders of multicultural teams to cope with possible conflicts among members due to cultural forces under today's globalization context.

The two main research questions are: (1) Do cultural background differences create the cultural boundary among group members? (2) In what ways do cultural differences influence group members' behaviors and interactions?

In the second section, a theoretical background with relevant literatures is provided along with propositions concerning behavioral and interaction patterns of the group members. Case study background and further introduction of SYMLOG method regarding data collection and analysis are presented in the Methodology part. Next, we show our findings and how they respond to each proposition through sorting and providing relevant evidence. Further analysis in themes and suggestions for future research concerning cultural implications of the findings are discussed in the fifth part which is followed by a conclusion.

## 2. Theoretical background and research propositions

### 2.1. Different cultures lead to different behaviors

Cultural differences involve different values, norms, customs, viewpoints, communication procedures and behaviors (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Reich & Reich, 2006). Countries that have “a history of close ties because of proximity, trade, conquest or religion” are more likely to show similar cultural values due to institutional transmission than do countries lacking such ties (Peterson & Barreto, 2015, p. 26). Thus, due to dissimilarities in institutions, philosophies and contexts, Western and Eastern cultures have been studied and proved to be significantly and persistently different over time (Barkema et al., 2015; Barkema & Vermeulen, 1997).

The emergence of globalization phenomenon has brought significant impacts on cultures around the world (Hong & Cheon, 2017). Particularly, many scholars argue that it leads to a “convergence” which refers to reduced cross-cultural differences. For Ohmae (1985, 1990) suggested that characteristics of people in Japan, the U.S. and Europe were more similar to one another than they had been in the past. The similar characteristics were regarded to educational level, income, consumption patterns, lifestyle, entertainment, future careers and even basic demands. Likewise, Fukuyama (1989) emphasized that we could be witnessing the end of human history as the economic dimension of societies will lean towards capitalism, and the cultural dimension of societies will be increasingly based on Western beliefs and values. Some other works also show evidence that globalization reduces national borders and boost behavioral homogeneity across cultures, especially through increasingly connected economic activities and international markets (Agarwal, Malhotra, & Bolton, 2010; Cleveland & Laroche, 2007).

On the other hand, though effects of the globalization process are unavoidable and undeniable, no proof could be found that it leads to a total cultural convergence around the world (Ladhari, Souiden, & Choi, 2015). Interestingly, many researches even indicated that globalization has resulted in a rise in a phenomenon called “nationalism” or efforts in preservation of local cultures against the strong penetration of cultural values from outside (Hong & Cheon, 2017). According to (Huntington, 1997) and Hodos (2010), after connecting and communicating to other cultures, especially the modernization process, people’s awareness and confidence in their local culture will be enhanced. This leads to actions such as values selecting, digesting and adjusting so that local culture is re-identified, recovered and defended against conflicts with different cultural groups. In other words, globalization does not necessarily lead to the extinction of national cultures and the world would become unified (Ladhari et al., 2015).

Supporting this view, the work of Beugelsdijk, Maseland, and Van Hoorn (2015) on examining the stability of cultural dimensions in Hofstede’s framework (1980) showed that the differences between countries’ scores have not changed much, indicating their cultural distances were generally stable. Minkov and Hofstede (2014) also found evidence of assertion of national or regional clusters in terms of culture similarity when examining European countries. Differences between Western and Eastern cultures still appear to be apparent in different studies, for instance, in terms of individualism versus collectivism, Americans report higher scores on horizontal-individualism and lower on vertical-collectivism than Taiwanese (Chiou, 2001) and Singaporeans (Soh & Leong, 2002); Canadians score higher on horizontal-individualism but lower scores on vertical-collectivism than Chinese (Teng, Ye, Yu, & Wu, 2014), where horizontal-individualism means those want to be “unique and distinct from groups” (Ladhari et al., 2015, p. 238) while vertical-collectivism refers to those who emphasize hierarchy of power and willing to put the interest of their groups over individual interests (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995).

Therefore, based on this view, it is believed that under the strong impact of globalization, national or regional cultural differences yet still exist, especially between the West and the East. By studying a cross-cultural workgroup consisting of Taiwanese and Europeans, this study attempts to identify members’ behavioral differences due to their cultural backgrounds based on the main assumption stated as Proposition 1 as followed:

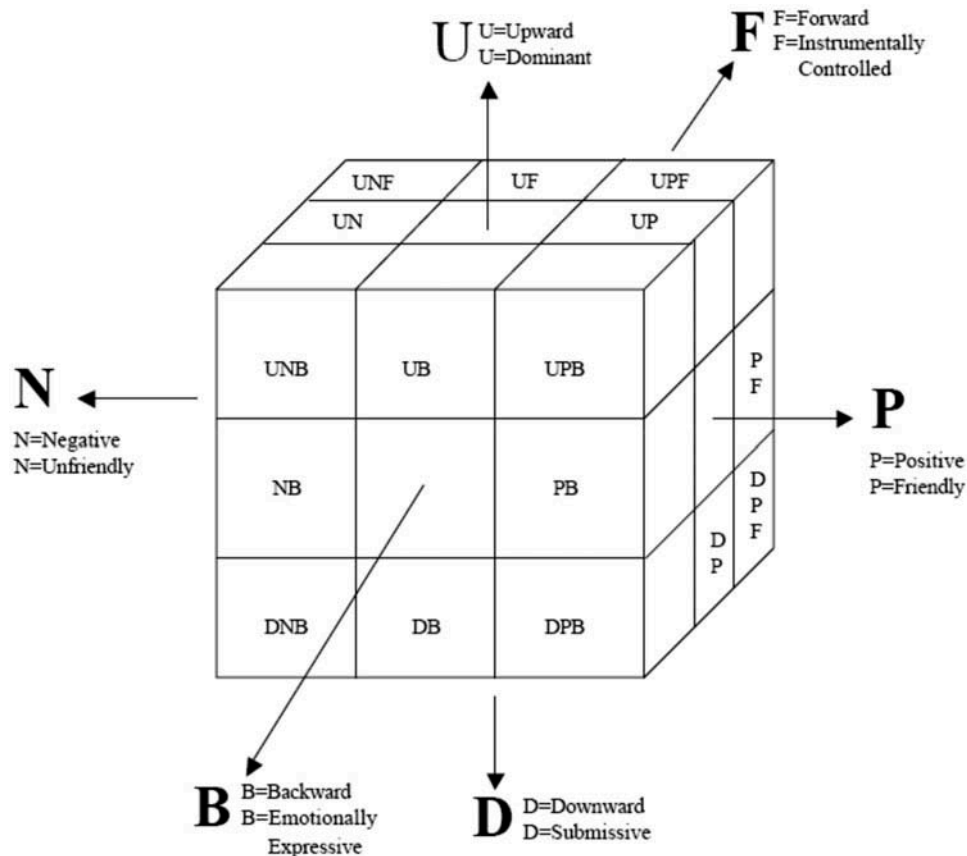
*Behaviors of the group members (Taiwanese and Europeans) are different because of their different cultural backgrounds.*

## **2.2. Differences in members’ behaviors**

In the attempt to measure cultural values, several frameworks have been developed by scholars over the last few decades (Hofstede, 1980; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Schwartz, 1994). Despite the fact that these frameworks apply different dimensions, power distance seems to be the most common dimension as it appears in most of them (i.e. Hofstede’ framework, Schwartz’s framework and the GLOBE framework). In general, the three mentioned above frameworks agree on the meaning of power distance which indicates the extent to which people in a society expect and accept the unequal distribution of power in organizations or institutions (Barkema et al., 2015; Hofstede, 1980). According to Schwartz (2012), power values justify the hierarchy in social arrangements. High power distance cultures are characterized by high levels of hierarchy, power centralization and vertical communication (Block & Walter, 2017). Such inequality is perceived as the basis for societal order among members and thus, people with higher positions are entitled to privileges, obedience and respect. Leaders in this cultural context are apt to exercise a high degree of control over subordinates and require their obedience (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008).

Accordingly, subordinates in such cultures tend to accept the power imbalance and respect authority by submissively following leaders’ decisions rather than exercise autonomy (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Conversely, low power distance cultures exhibit low levels of hierarchy, power

**Figure 1. SYMLOG Cube Diagram (Adapted from Bales et al., 1979, p. 23).**



decentralization and horizontal communication (Block & Walter, 2017). People with higher and lower ranks remain more equal, so that employees or subordinates are more likely to make independent decisions and initiate changes regardless of the hierarchical level (Naor, Linderman, & Schroeder, 2010). Furthermore, research has indicated that people from the East (e.g., Japan, China, India) regard unequal distribution of power as more acceptable than do people in the West (e.g., United States, Europe, Australia) (Barkema et al., 2015).

SYMLOG, the applied method in this study, also includes a specific dimension measuring this value, which is referred as the U-D dimension (Figure 1). The U (Upward) direction represents dominant trait with active, dominant and talkative behaviors while the D (Downward) direction implies submissive trait when the individual is passive, introverted and says little. As the meanings of these dimensions are comparable to implications of individual behaviors from the literature discussed above, they could be adapted to analyze the behaviors of the team members regarding power distance.

Previous studies (Brockner et al., 2001; Javidan, Dorfman, de Luque, & House, 2006; Li & Sun, 2014) also show evidence that individuals from high power distance context are more likely to obey orders or requirements from their leaders, reply on them in making decisions and avoid expressing viewpoints, as it is considered a challenge-oriented behavior (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2013), while the opposite is exhibited by those from low power distance culture. Thus, Proposition 2 is proposed:

*The European members will have more dominant/active behavior than the Taiwanese members (or the Taiwanese members will be more submissive/passive).*

### **2.3. Difference in interaction with different subjects**

Individuals from different cultures may exhibit different behaviors towards the same matter as they are taught differently by their cultural perspectives. Interpersonal communication reflects one of the most fundamental differences between Western and Chinese cultures due to their distinctive roots. The West values individualism which emphasizes that each individual human being is one “independent self”, an autonomous entity with unique internal attributes such as traits, emotions, motives, values and thus behaves primarily accordingly (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Therefore, one individual is viewed as an alone self against the world (Marsella, Devos, & Hsu, 1985) and “the ties binding people outside of one’s immediate family are fairly loose and shifting” (Richards, 2014, p. 679). This is in sharp contrast to the Chinese view, which is heavily influenced by Confucianism, which regards each individual as one “interdependent self” with the surrounding social context as there is no clear-cut boundary between oneself and others (Hwang, 2000; Tsui & Farh, 1997). Ho (1995) used the term “relationship dominance” to capture the essence of social behavior in Confucian societies since Confucianism advised that social behavior should base on an assessment of the role relationship between one and others (Hwang, 2000). For that reason, persons with different roles should demonstrate appropriate behavior accordingly, in other words, they are supposed to incorporate the “rule of proper conduct” (Richards, 2014).

Fei (1948), when comparing Western and Chinese societies, proposed the concept Differential Order to describe the Chinese traditional social structure. It resembles concentric circles in which the center is a person and the ripples or water rings represent that person’s social influence. The distances between ripples and the center reveal different degrees of intimacy. On the other hand, individuals in a Western society are similar to wooden sticks that may be bound together in a bundle by their social organization.

Based on the above literature, it is expected that Taiwanese members of the team would have more variations in the way they interact with different people. Depending on the intimacy or the role in the relationship with the subject, one would adjust his behavior or interaction accordingly. In contrast, members from the Western context are expected to exhibit more stable or consistent communication patterns towards different people as they tend to focus more on the job or performance rather than on individual relationship. Thus, Proposition 3 is developed:

*When interacting with different subjects, Taiwanese’ behavior is more varied than Europeans’ behavior (or Europeans’ behavior is more consistent than Taiwanese’ behavior).*

### **2.4. Difference in top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top interactions**

Different cultures shape different effective leadership styles because the meaning and evaluation of leader behaviors and characteristics may vary significantly (Spreitzer, Perttula, & Xin, 2005). Likewise, in response, subordinates also form different expectations about their leaders and exhibit particular interactions accordingly.

Originating from the Confucian thought, Paternalistic leadership was found as the most common leadership style in Chinese societies such as China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore (Arvey, Dhanaraj, Javidan, & Zhang, 2015). According to the model of paternalistic leadership proposed by Westwood (1997) regarding Chinese family management, all power and resources are centralized in one entrepreneur or supervisor. Particularly, leader-subordinate relationship is regarded as the cardinal loving father and faithful son relationship. It embraces authoritarianism, benevolence and moral integrity elements that are considered as Confucian core values (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). A leader (or father) has the absolute authority and control over his subordinates (or his children and other family members) and requires their unquestionable obedience (Cheng, Chou, & Farh, 2000). Benevolence is depicted in a way that the superior should be kind and show concerns for his inferiors’ personal well-being like a father being kind and taking



care of his children. Additionally, the leader needs to provide a moral role model who is self-discipline and self-less (Cheng et al., 2004). By having such behaviors, he generates indebtedness on the part of the inferiors, who try to reciprocate earnestly. Based on Confucian ideas, similar to how the children should respond to their father, subordinates are supposed to show respect to the leader's authority by loyally complying with his orders (Yang, 1957).

As rooted in the Chinese context which has high power distance and Confucian-based, we expect that supervisor from Taiwan would exhibit behavior similar to paternalistic style namely giving limited empowerment, belittling employees' opinions and exercising significant autonomy. For followers, we expect that it is a virtue for them to obey their leaders and show respect (Zhang, Tsui, & Wang, 2011).

Instead of having downward communications due to parenting-oriented relationship like paternalistic leadership, Western's vertical interactions are based on an exchange process. Most of Western leadership theories are originated from the social exchange theory (Tse, Huang, & Lam, 2013) which suggests that a relationship between two parties is based on the costs and rewards analysis that each one pay or receive through a reciprocal process (Blau, 1964) and the stability of the relationship depends on mutual trust and benefits. For example, Leader-Member Exchange theory (Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen & Scandura, 1987) though also describes the quality of relationship of leader and subordinates, assumes that employees' attitudinal outcomes are influenced by how leaders treat them (Rockstuhl, Dulebohn, Ang, & Shore, 2012). It means that employee or supervisor's decision on how they want to give or involve in the exchange process is based on their trust on the other party and on the potential benefits that they expect to get from it (Ballinger, Lehman, & Schoorman, 2010; Tse & Mitchell, 2010). It displays an equal view that each party has the same autonomy and power in determining the degree of their devotion to the relationship. This is in contrast with the Chinese leadership style in which the position/role is the key factor that initially decides or guides each party's behavior.

In the West, leadership with authoritarianism dimension such as paternalistic leadership is undesired and counterproductive (Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco, 2010) and considered as a negative one and is criticized for an unquestioned power inequality (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). Meanwhile, some leadership styles namely Transformational, Charismatic, Participative leadership are more popular in Western cultures. They share some common features such as leaders maintain a shorter distance; are more accessible and less dominant; allow more voices from subordinates in discussion and decision-making process compared to Eastern leaders. Also, employees from Western cultures tend to view everyone more equal in terms of rights and opportunities, therefore, are more active in expressing their opinions as well as more unwilling to accept things outside of rules instead of unquestionably showing commitment. Based on the above, regarding differences in vertical (top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top) interactive behavior between the two cultural contexts, Proposition 4A and 4B are developed:

*Proposition 4A: When interacting with subordinates, the Taiwanese supervisor will have more dominant behavior than do the European supervisor.*

*Proposition 4B: When interacting with supervisors, the Taiwanese subordinates will have more submissive behavior than do the European subordinates.*

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research design and case selection**

This study aims to probe into cultural influences on subtle interactive behavior among members in an international workgroup. It emphasizes that in a globalized world Chinese traditional culture is

**Table 1. Group members' information**

Code	Position	Years (years of dispatch)	Nationality
TS1	Deputy Manager (Supervisor)	15(7)	Taiwanese
T2	Assistant Manager	11(2)	Taiwanese
T3	Assistant Manager	10(2)	Taiwanese
T4	Assistant Manager	13(3)	Taiwanese
T5	Assistant Manager	11(2)	Taiwanese
T6	Assistant Manager	14(4)	Taiwanese
BS1	Deputy Manager (Supervisor)	7	British
B2	Assistant Manager	5	British
B3	Assistant Manager	5	British
P	Assistant Manager	6	Polish
G	Assistant Manager	3	Greek

still considerably influential in business organizations. Since the focus is related to cultural influence on group interaction, we observed how group members interacted with each other to make decisions, do their jobs and solve problems. We conducted a case study on [E] International Marine Transport Company, it satisfies two major principles in the selection of one case for study: unique and revelatory (Yin, 1994).

First, [E] was founded in Taiwan in 1986 and after a few decades, it became a world-class container ship company. The Taiwanese founder assigned several family members to be key decision-makers. Thus, the company has functioned according to Chinese tradition from its inception. An employee's promotion depends on his/her number of working years through a junior-senior hierarchical system. The Operating Group in the London branch office of [E], which was observed in this study, consists of 11 members from Taiwan and Europe (see Table 1). The unique design of this workgroup lies in the fact that it is composed of managers and employees from both home and host countries, instead of using a third party (agency) or sending an expatriate as manager to handle the operation in the foreign country. All the Taiwanese members were dispatched to London after having at least nine years' work experience in the headquarter in Taiwan. The group was culturally designed in a way that the number of people for a similar assigned position is almost equally distributed (1 Taiwanese supervisor –1 British supervisor, 5 Taiwanese subordinates—4 European subordinates). This allows us to clearly see any existing boundary or sub-group formation in members' interaction and behaviors, which is quite difficult to observe in most previous researches where an international team only consists of one or two foreign leaders while subordinates are from the same background.

Second, marine transport is a traditional Taiwanese industry with corporate culture based on a stable, conservative operational model. Therefore, these companies generally do not allow outsiders to observe their business. However, after much communication and negotiation, the London branch of [E] finally granted us the permission to collect data for research purpose in their office. Thus, this case uniquely reveals the interaction of multicultural employees working within a European-based branch office as they carry out the operation of a traditional Taiwanese industry. Based on the two reasons above, case study [E], with its uniqueness and relevance, meets the principle of one-case selection and, as such, it enhances the validity of this research.

### 3.2. Data collection and analysis

This study applied SYMLOG, as proposed by Bales, Cohen and Williamson in 1979, in group interaction observation and analysis. In recent years, SYMLOG has been used to conduct much research to re-discuss different dimensions and analyze different national/cultural samples since it

enhanced the reliability of the research results (Hare, 2005; Kajikawa, Noriyuki, & Tamami, 2005). The major concept of SYMLOG is based on three different dimensions. The model evaluates and measures characteristics of interpersonal interaction behavior in groups. Each defined dimension consists of two opposing characteristics. Positions in the group are divided into U-Dominant and D-Submissive; members' attraction is divided into P-Friendly and N-Unfriendly; and role orientation is divided into F-Instrumentally Controlled/Task Oriented and B-Emotionally expressive (see Figure 1).

A cube is constructed of these three dimensions, which include zones of 26 different behavioral traits. SYMLOG assesses group members' behavior and recognizes each member's position in the cube as well as their positions in the group (Forsyth, 1990). The 26 SYMLOG behavioral traits are introduced in Table 2.

Regarding the data source, this study adopted multiple sources of evidence and a Triangulation Test according to the data collection principle of case study proposed by Yin (1994). It suggests that cross-checking different data sources can confirm if data collected precisely reflects case background knowledge and phenomena for observation. Thus, to enhance our research quality, we attempt to validate the convergence of multiple data by following the three steps below.

First, the Rating Questionnaire consisting of the 26 items of SYMLOG was distributed among 11 members. We adopted pair measurement of self-evaluation and others' evaluation and judged if there was a difference among members regarding overall position distribution in SYMLOG by means of two types of scores. Second, members' daily interaction (10:00–17:00, except for one-hour lunch break) was recorded by the Interaction Recording Form in SYMLOG for 10 working days. Every 5 minutes were considered as an interval. According to the behavioural traits of SYMLOG, we observed the frequency of each member's behavioural performance and recorded interaction between him/her and other members (direction). On average, each member was observed at least once every hour. Furthermore, to avoid the observer-expectancy effect that may cause bias in the way observers select and interpret the information, we invited two observers who were skilled in using SYMLOG traits for recording interaction yet not fully aware of how we intended to conduct the comparisons and analysis later.

Third, after reorganizing the questionnaire results, which include both peer and self-evaluated results of the level of members' agreements on behavioural description and observation records, we depicted each member's position in the Field Diagram of SYMLOG. The level of agreement and the frequency of group members' behavioural description of each dimension would come out a relative position on the Field Diagram of SYMLOG. For example, if a member shows that he or she performs more friendly behaviours than unfriendly ones, he or she would be shown on the right part of the diagram, and the opposite ways would be shown on the left part of the diagram. The instrumental/emotional behaviours would be shown on the upper or lower part of the diagram. The dominant/submissive behaviours would be shown as the size of the circle (bigger circle refers more dominant behaviours).

Forth, we conducted semi-structured interviews with subordinates and supervisors separately to ensure each party could freely express their opinions. Results of the Field Diagrams are also presented to members to confirm the precision of our findings.

By comparing results from different collected data sets, in the next section, we identify how our findings respond to the four propositions. Regarding discussion part, Thematic Analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006) is adopted based on cultural implications through analyzing similarities and differences in members' interaction patterns. Lastly, suggestions for future research of international workgroups are proposed.

**Table 2. The 26 SYMLOG behavioral traits**

No.	Code	Simple Interpretations of Behaviors
1	U	Active, dominant, talks a lot
2	UP	Extroverted, outgoing, positive
3	UPF	A purposeful, democratic task leader
4	UF	An assertive business-like manager
5	UNF	Authoritarian, controlling, disapproving
6	UN	Domineering, tough-minded, powerful
7	UNB	Provocative, egocentric, shows off
8	UB	Jokes around, expressive, dramatic
9	UPB	Entertaining, sociable, smiling, warm
10	P	Friendly, equalitarian
11	PF	Works cooperatively with others
12	F	Analytical, task-oriented, problem-solving
13	NF	Legalistic, has to be right
14	N	Unfriendly, negativistic
15	NB	Irritable, cynical, won't cooperate
16	B	Shows feelings and emotions
17	PB	Affectionate, likeable, fun to be with
18	DP	Looks up to others, appreciative, trustful
19	DPF	Gentle, willing to accept responsibility
20	DF	Obedient, works submissively
21	DNF	Self-punishing, works too hard
22	DN	Depressed, sad, resentful, rejecting
23	DNB	Alienated, quits, withdraws
24	DB	Afraid to try, doubts own ability
25	DPB	Quietly happy just to be with others
26	D	Passive, introverted, says little

Note: Adapted from Bales, Stephen, and Stephen (1979), p. 21.

#### 4. Findings and analysis

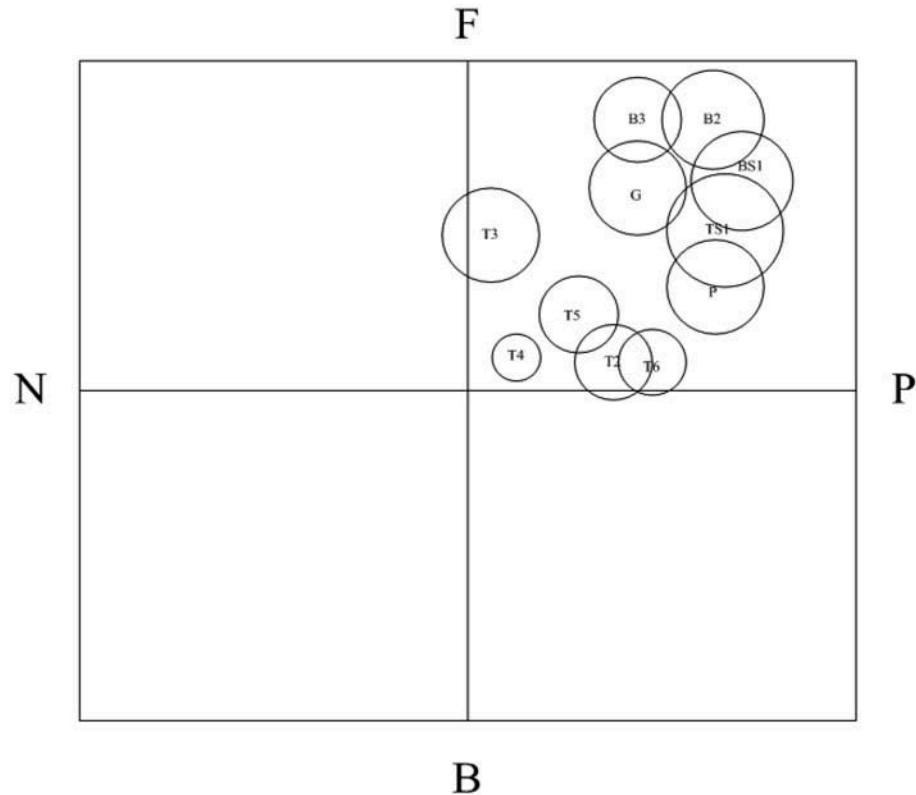
##### 4.1. General behavioral patterns among group members

According to the Field Diagram in Figure 2, which is based on data acquired from the rating questionnaire, it shows that Taiwanese and European members commonly exhibit a cooperative attitude when working together, as their circles are all located in the up-right area which refers to the characteristics of PF (working cooperatively with others).

However, the Europeans' positions are mostly in the upper right corner, and except the supervisors (TS1), the other five Taiwanese members are located closer to the center. This result implies that the Europeans might be friendlier, more equalitarian as well as more task-oriented than those from Taiwan. As the other dimension U-D is represented by the size of circles, it can be seen that the Taiwanese circles (except for TS1 and T3) are relatively smaller than the Europeans'. This suggests that they tend to have more submissive behavior than their European counterparts.

Interviews with the group members also reveal some clues of subtle difference that cannot be effectively measured by the SYMLOG questionnaire. Regarding the impression of their European colleagues, some Taiwanese explained:

Figure 2. Field diagram of the rating questionnaire.



*Unlike Taiwanese people, they are more realistic. We might be educated to work as cattle. We do not separate our jobs very clearly from each other. However, the Europeans are different, maybe because of individualism. They emphasize personal performance, and they will not care about other colleagues' business. They stand up at one minute before five o'clock to go off duty. (T3)*

*Foreigners can say that it is time to get off work and they will leave. Taiwanese are less likely to act in that way. (T4)*

*As in Europe, they do not have intention to overwork, Taiwanese are not like that. (T2)*

We found that European members also describe this issue as the most impressive difference between them and Taiwanese counterparts:

*Taiwanese people make their working plan and do everything together. This is very surprising for me; like, I could never do that because I like to be flexible and I don't like others to tell me when I should be at the office or go out with friends ... That was the first time I actually experienced the strong collectivism of Taiwanese people, like holding together as a group. (BS1)*

*The Taiwanese usually do not go off duty when the supervisor is still working. They also often deal with things unrelated to their jobs. It is really incredible. (P)*

It could be seen that the group members' most direct reactions concerning the difference between their cultures is stated out as Individualism and Collectivism. Interestingly, they named it out very straightforwardly and explicitly in their answers, emphasizing that the difference is felt strongly among them. In short, the Taiwanese value group action and expect to accomplish jobs using team work; however, their European colleagues consider group action as having an invisible

pressure, and they expect to have more autonomic space. Generally, the diagram drawn from rating questionnaire and interview records show relevant insights to Proposition 1 that there are some differences between behavior of the Taiwanese and Europeans. We will have further analysis and discussion about these differences later.

#### 4.2. Different interaction patterns among group members

##### 4.2.1. Proposition 2

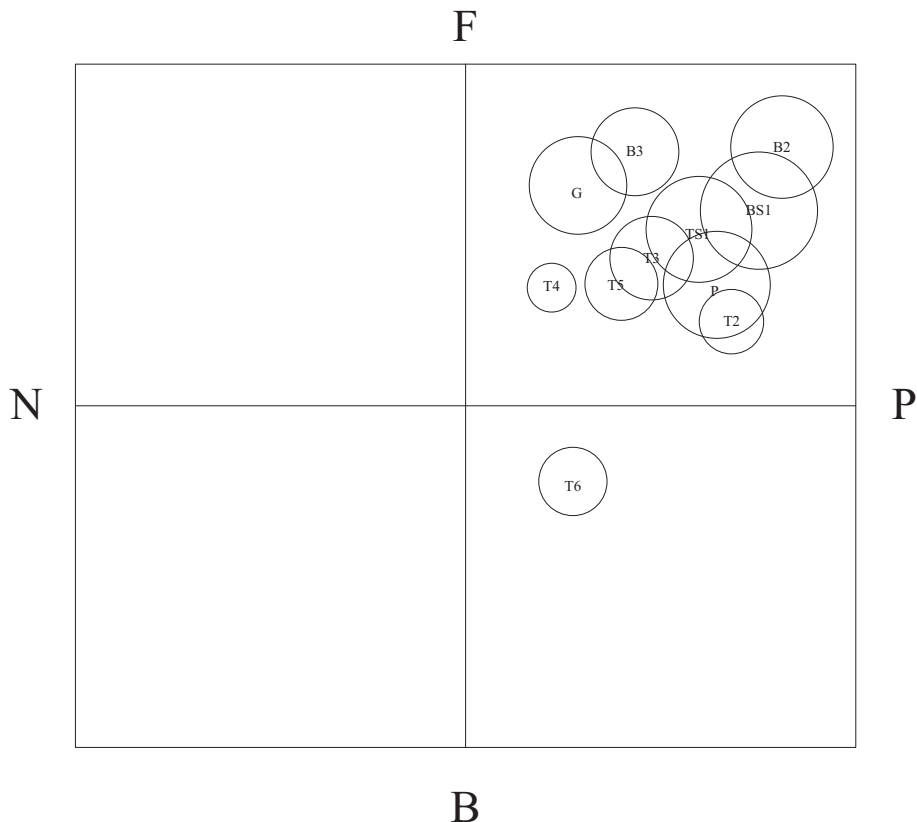
The data in the questionnaire survey did not indicate a difference between dominant/submissive or active/passive behaviors. However, according to Figure 3 which is based on the Interaction Patterns Recording Form, the Field Diagram shows that apart from the supervisor (TS1), other Taiwanese members (T2~ T6) have smaller circles than the Europeans. As described earlier about U-D dimension, large circles mean the work attitude is more active, talkative and self-confident while small circles mean the members are more silent, passive in interacting and decision-making.

Evidence from interviews with individual members also presents this result. It could be found that the Taiwanese are mostly taught to be submissive to arrangements existing within a workplace or when interacting with colleagues or clients.

*In fact, the communication with the people of the harbor is the best example. When I worked in Taiwan, I mostly negotiated with colleagues of harbors in China and South-East Asia. Asians or the Taiwanese can directly accept the change of containers on board; however, in Europe, the European co-workers will usually fight for the clients (T5).*

*The Taiwanese are interesting and submissive. It seems that they never consider the logic of decision making (G).*

Figure 3. Field diagram of over-all interaction records.



To further confirm what we found from our observations, we separately presented the Field Diagram (Figure 3) to the team members and asked for their opinions. Without any hesitations or confusions, both Europeans and Taiwanese groups agreed with the results.

*It seems to be true that my circle is very small. I am more obedient. (T4)*

*T4 really is especially obedient, but compared with foreigners, we are all overly obedient. (T5)*

*Yeah, it shows some different patterns of different people with different backgrounds, these patterns do make sense, Taiwanese are always more submissive than European, interesting. (BS1)*

Overall, findings from the Interaction Form (illustrated by the SYMLOG Diagram) and interviews supported Proposition 2 which proposed that European members have more dominant/active behaviors (or Taiwanese have more submissive/passive behaviors).

#### 4.2.2. Proposition 3

According to the Field Diagram shown in Figure 4, regarding interaction between all members and the Taiwanese, all the Taiwanese are positioned on or below the horizon. This indicates that Taiwanese exhibit more emotional concern in their interaction with one another.

This difference is also illustrated by looking at Table 3 which shows interaction records of a Taiwanese member (T6) with his colleagues. When interacting with European members, T6 displays more F (task-oriented) behavior whereas he shows more D (submissive) when interacting with Taiwanese supervisor (TS1) and more B (emotion-oriented) with other Taiwanese members.

An opposite behavioral pattern can be seen from the records of a European member (B3) as an example (see Table 4). Observation reveals that the most significant traits are U (active, talkative, dominant) and F (task-oriented, problem-solving, analytical); and those are exhibited towards both supervisors and colleagues whether they are Taiwanese or European.

Figure 5 shows the interactive behavior observed between all members and the Europeans. Comparing with Figure 4, the Europeans' positions still remain in the up-right corner which indicates that they do not have much change in their behavior when interacting with different people. Regarding this matter, the British supervisor explained:

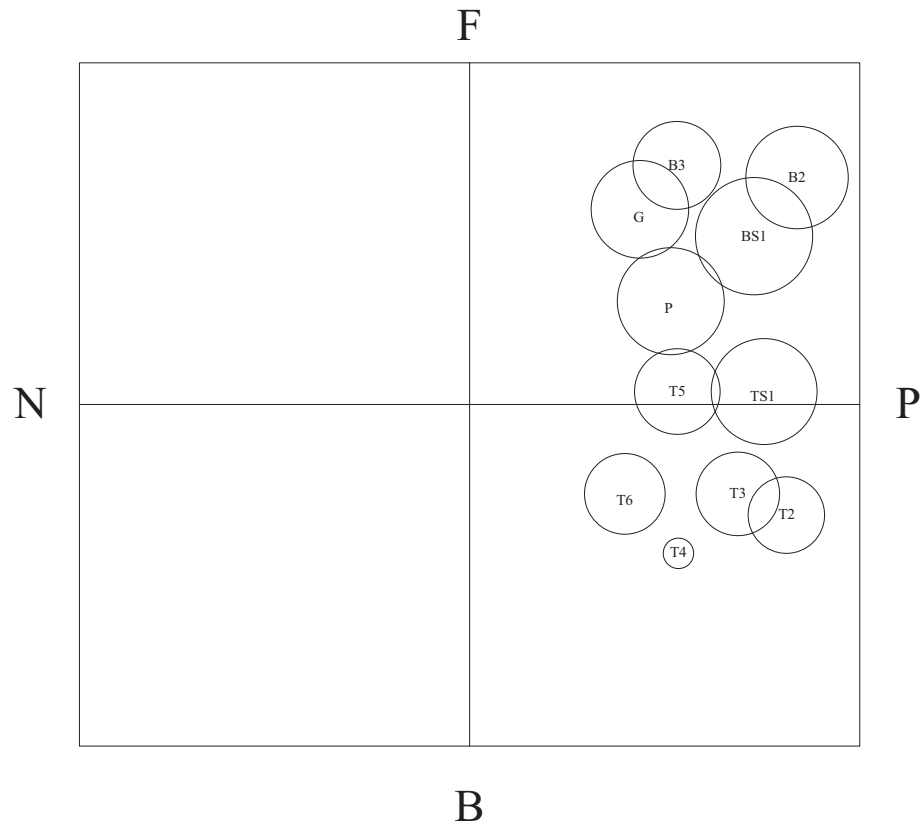
*Yes, I have to admit that with me someone has better relationship than others, but I don't think this relationship should effect on the formal work in the office. (BS1)*

On the other hand, Taiwanese members are all positioned higher than in Figure 4, indicating more task-oriented behavior. Hence, we can say that the Taiwanese members' relationship with non-Taiwanese is more distant, meaning they show less emotional expression and have less job-

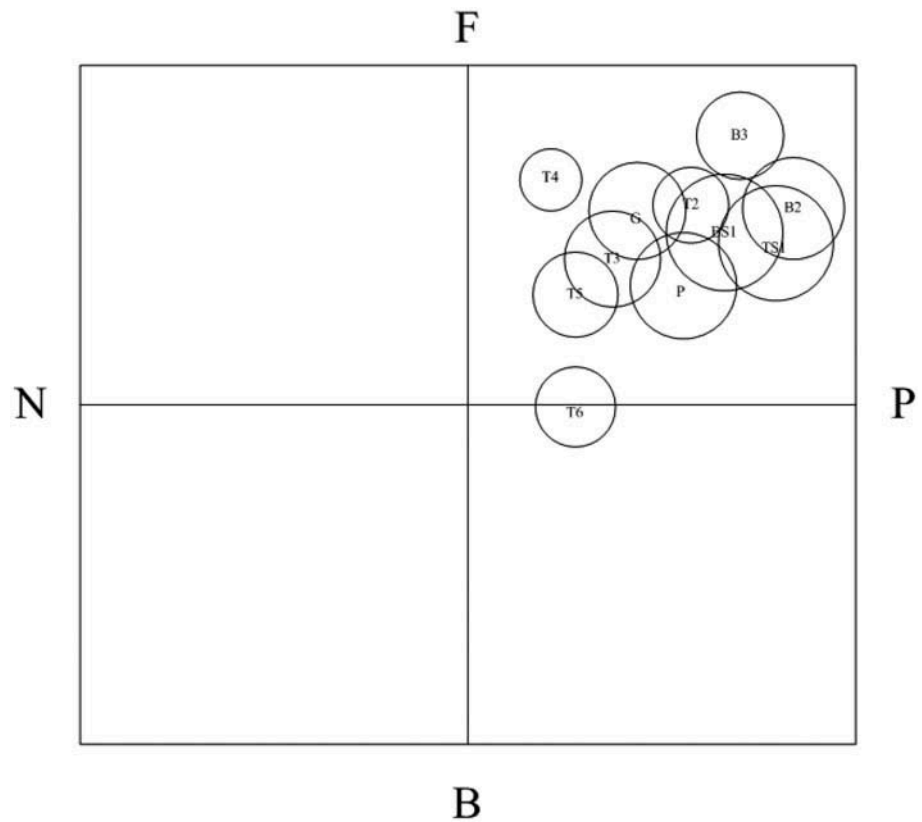
**Table 3. Interaction form of T6 (Taiwanese member)**

Time	Who Acts	Toward Whom	Act/ Non	Time	Who Acts	Toward Whom	Act/ Non
1028	T6	TS1	DD,DF	1131	T6	T2	UPB,F,P
1029	T6	T3	DB,PB	1131	T6	T4	F,P
1029	T6	TS1	DD,DP	1133	T6	TS1	DF,DP
1030	T6	T5	DUB,UPB,D	1134	T6	G	PF, UP
1032	T6	B2	DPF,F	1135	T6	P	F, DPF

**Figure 4. Field diagram of all members' interaction with Taiwanese members.**



**Figure 5. Field diagram of all members' interaction with European members.**





**Table 4. Interaction form of B3 (European member)**

Time	Who Acts	Toward Whom	Act/ Non	Time	Who Acts	Toward Whom	Act/ Non
1045	B3	TS1	UF,UPF,NF	1145	B3	T2	UPF, PB
1047	B3	BS1	UF,UB,UPF	1146	B3	BS1	F,UB,UPF
1049	B3	T3	UF,NF	1149	B3	G	F,NF
1049	B3	P	UNF,F	1150	B3	P	UB,F,DPF
1152	B3	B1	UPF,F	1150	B3	TS1	UPB,PF

unrelated interaction with European colleagues. The Europeans also perceived the difference in Taiwanese' interactions:

*According to my observation, the Taiwanese helped each other. It might be due to language problems or a cultural gap ... but they did not actively assist non-Taiwanese members. (BS1)*

*Taiwanese colleagues would actively care about my family and job; however, they did not go further ... They might be clear that we were not used to being asked about too many things unrelated to jobs. (B2)*

This could be explained by the response of T3 when explaining how Taiwanese adapting and managing relationships in the UK:

*If you talk about life, there are many different things here so Taiwanese people still gather together more than with foreigner; unless you are very fond of foreigners, and like clubbing or chatting with them, otherwise there must be a gap. (T3)*

The Taiwanese supervisor also agreed with the point that compared with the European members, the Taiwanese tend to put more emotion in their behaviors:

*In fact, the Taiwanese definitely do not separate public life from private as the Europeans do. Some members might work with personal emotion and feelings. However, since they are in the office, they will try to accomplish the job. (TS1)*

In general, Proposition 3 is reflected by different sets of data, indicating that the Taiwanese members have more adjustments in their behavior when facing different subjects compared to the European members.

#### 4.2.3. Proposition 4A

Based on the Interaction Form recorded from the observation, the Taiwanese supervisor's (TS1) behavior towards subordinates is clearly different from that of the British supervisor though they are of equal position. TS1 exhibited U together with some other traits such as UF and NF several times which indicated dominant and controlling behavior (see Table 5). As we observed during the session, TS1 sometimes even showed negative and degrading behavior towards some Taiwanese employees. One Taiwanese subordinate's opinion showed a concurrence:

*The Taiwanese supervisor would have less control among European members, I believe that is because he wants to be friendly toward local(London) employees. But toward Taiwanese members he would still be very authoritative (T2)*

This partly supports the argument of Proposition 3 that Taiwanese show more emotional behaviors when interacting with Taiwanese rather than with Europeans.

**Table 5. Interaction form of TS1 (Taiwanese supervisor)**

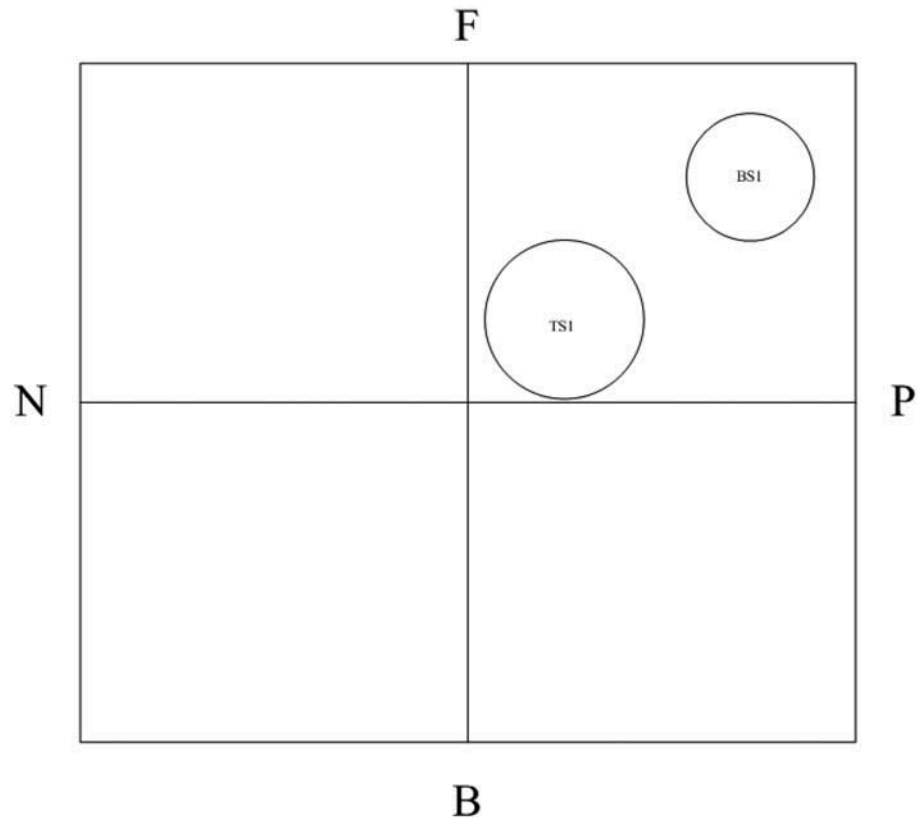
Time	Who Acts	Towards Whom	Action	Time	Who Acts	Towards Whom	Action
1001	TS1	T2	U,UPB	1059	TS1	B3	P,PF,U
1001	TS1	T4	UF,U	1101	TS1	BS1	DP,F
1002	TS1	T4	N,F,UF	1101	TS1	T4	U,NF
1003	TS1	T6	UN,NF	1103	TS1	T5	PB,UPB
1005	TS1	BS1	DPF,F	1104	TS1	P	F,UPF

According to the Interaction Form (see Table 6) of the British supervisor (BS1), in terms of leadership, he displayed purposeful and democratic leader traits (through UPF), which is quite different from that of the Taiwanese supervisor. Additionally, besides showing most recognized traits F and PF (which indicate task-oriented and cooperative behaviors), he also displayed PB trait

**Table 6. Interaction form of BS1 (British supervisor)**

Time	Who Acts	Toward Whom	Act/ Non	Time	Who Acts	Toward Whom	Act/ Non
□1034	□BS1	□G	□F,UPF	1136	□BS1	TS1	P,PF
□1034	□BS1	□T5	□F, PF	1137	□BS1	G	F, UPB
□1035	□BS1	□T3	□PF,UF	1137	□BS1	T2	UPF
□1037	□BS1	□P	□UPF,F	1138	□BS1	B3	PB
□1039	□BS1	□B2	□PF,F	1138	□BS1	T6	PB

**Figure 6. Field diagram of the two supervisors' interaction with all subordinates.**



(which indicates affectionate, likeable, fun to be with behaviors). This can be considered as a significant dissimilarity between him and the Taiwanese supervisor.

Regarding analysis of supervisor behavior in the Field Diagram, Figure 6 only shows the two supervisors' reactions towards employees and not towards each other. Only supervisors' behavioral traits during interaction with subordinates is calculated and compared to Figure 3 of general patterns.

It demonstrates that the Taiwanese supervisor's circle is significantly enlarged and is close to the central vertical line. This suggests that the Taiwanese supervisor has more dominant and less friendly behavior towards subordinates. However, the British supervisor's circle's size and position remain the same as in Figure 3; therefore, his interactions with other members are quite consistent. These two supervisors' perspective regarding their role is also consistent with the results from our observations. As the Taiwanese supervisor has worked for the company for over 14 years and also was significantly influenced by Chinese traditional culture, it is not surprising to see why he would exhibit such a dominant behavior:

*In fact, dispatch is the necessary experience of career promotion. I was dispatched here to integrate the jobs and maintain the stability of organizational operation. If our past method was effective, we should continue the model. I should retain my authority to subordinates for the stability of the company. (TS1)*

The British supervisor has a different way to view his position. He only values job performance and does not necessarily concern himself with subordinates' respectful attitude.

*In fact, I did not perceive any difference. I am clear about relationship with subordinates. As long as they work well, I will not concern [myself] about other things. We have equal interaction. They are my subordinates as well as my friends. (BS1)*

We received confirmation of this matter from interviews with the subordinates as many of them agreed that the two supervisors are very different in the way they communicate with subordinates. Similar to what we found, the European supervisor is friendlier and more approachable than the Taiwanese supervisor is, especially after work.

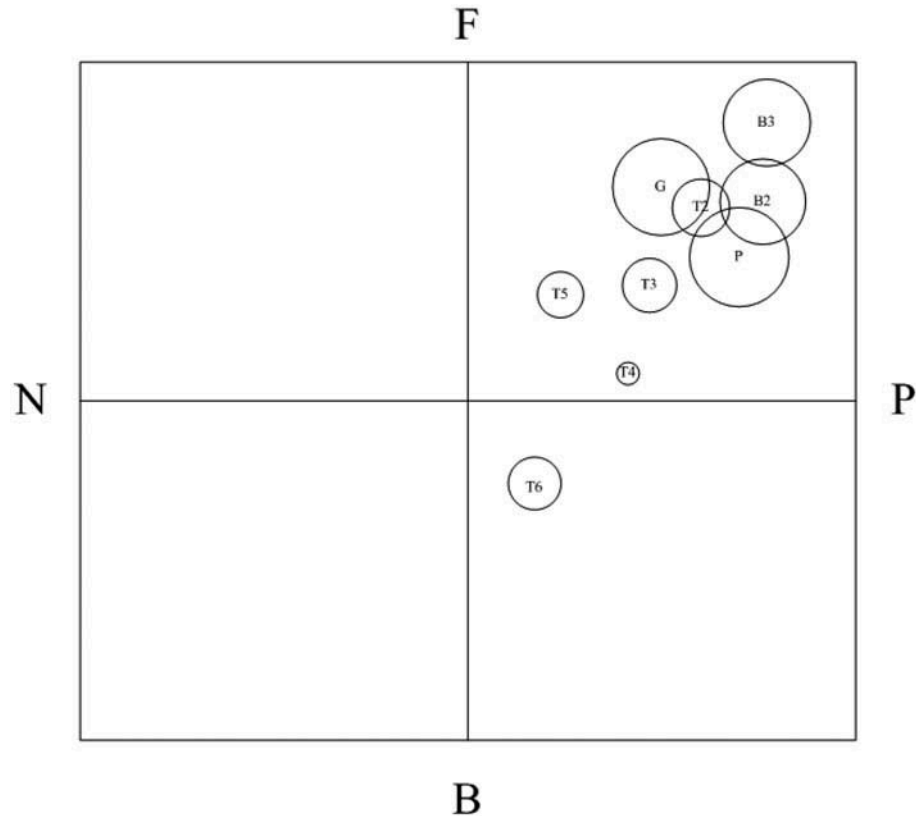
*The European supervisor would act as a normal friend; we may freely have the conversations after work, concerning the duty, he only focuses on the job performance, won't take things personally. In contrary, the Taiwanese supervisor would be very authoritative, even in the informal place, all the Taiwanese members would still keep a distance and show the basic respect. (T4)*

*I can directly call the European supervisor by name. However, I must call the Taiwanese 'manager'. After work, the European plays ball as my brother. The Taiwanese is different and he is still very serious. (T2)*

#### 4.2.4. Proposition 4B

The change of subordinates' behavioral patterns in the Field Diagram is shown in Figure 7. In this case, the supervisors' circles are eliminated and only behavioral traits during interaction with the two supervisors is calculated and compared to Figure 3 of general patterns. This analysis shows that the Taiwanese subordinates' circles are significantly smaller than those of the European subordinates. In other words, when interacting with the supervisors, the Taiwanese subordinates are more submissive compared to their Europeans counterparts. Furthermore, the size and location of the European members' circles are mostly similar to Figure 3 while those of the Taiwanese members are smaller and a little bit lower. It implies that the European subordinates' interaction patterns are quite consistent regardless the hierarchical positions of the other party, yet oppositely; the Taiwanese subordinates tend to be less active and more submissive when responding to supervisors.

**Figure 7. Field diagram of all subordinates' interaction with the two supervisors.**



Interview results provide a consistency with the SYMLOG analysis. We can see an obvious difference in the answers of Taiwanese and European subordinates regarding their perception of the leader-subordinate relationship. While the Taiwanese are more likely to accept authority and orders from the supervisors, the European counterparts tend to fight for what they perceive as fair and reasonable regardless the structural positions.

*It was still the rule in Taiwan. I did what the supervisors asked me to do. They had more experience and would make fewer mistakes; they mainly undertook the responsibility and it was better to listen to them. (T3)*

*I am clear about my position, and I follow the contract. I will directly refuse unreasonable demands. Even though the supervisor has a good relationship with me, I will still have to defend my rights. (G)*

*I hate others' commands out of no reasons. He must have the power and thus I will respect him at work. (P)*

Confirmation from the supervisor and other colleague's opinions regarding the same issue helps us triangulate what we found from the other party's responses, it strongly validates the difference between the two cultural groups:

*When interacting with new European subordinates here, I must clearly show my position. Then they will accept that I have the authority to distribute some jobs and resources; Taiwanese subordinates know I am the supervisor and they will be submissive even they are newcomers. (BS1)*

*I think that the European colleagues are very concerned about your professional ability. They will not give you more respect because of your seniority. (T2)*

According to the results from our collected data, interaction between supervisors and subordinates demonstrates that supervisors and subordinates of different nationalities have different views towards their roles. The Taiwanese supervisors and subordinates tend to restrain their behavior by certain role cognition; however, the European supervisors and subordinates do not actively have narrow “role” expectation. As such, the Taiwanese supervisor exhibits more dominant behavior when interacting with subordinates than do the European supervisor; and the Taiwanese subordinates display more submissive behavior when interacting with supervisors than do the European subordinates. Thus, Proposition 4A and 4B are well reflected by our findings.

## 5. Discussion

In this section, we first elaborate the implications of the findings in order to demonstrate if they can precisely respond to the research questions. Second, we propose some suggestions for future studies with the expectation that future researchers of international workgroups may further recognize the influence of national culture on individuals and even organizations by constantly probing into this issue. By analyzing pattern changes in the Field Diagram, interaction forms together with supporting evidence from the interviews, we find that most of the propositions are demonstrated. The findings effectively respond to the research questions (Proposition 1 to Question 1, Propositions 2, 3, 4 to Question 2) and indicate cultural influences on individual behavior, and they can be divided into three themes: Individualism vs. Collectivism, Power Distance and Role Perception, and Intimacy Treatment.

### 5.1. Implications of the research findings

#### 5.1.1. Individualism vs. collectivism

Though “Individualism—Collectivism” cultural dimension was not included in the issues that we attempted to examine initially, it was shown to be an important cultural factor that influences and explains the difference in the behavior of Taiwanese and European team members. It refers to the “extent to which people are autonomous individuals or embedded in their groups” (Triandis & Gelfand, 2012, p. 499). As mentioned in the literature, in individualist cultures, the self is regarded as an independent entity with a set of unique characteristics (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Hence, people are highly competitive, prioritizing personal interests and performance over that of the group and they rather get their own work done than maintain group harmony (Barkema et al., 2015). In other words, individualism puts a low emphasis on obedience and conformity and high tolerance for conflicts (Richards, 2014).

For collectivists, on the contrary, they view themselves as closely related to each other, therefore, are motivated by the collective welfare—the group interests and goals (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1993). Additionally, interpersonal harmony and fitting in the group are of paramount importance, thus, collectivists’ behaviors are guided by the group or social norms and duties (Beugelsdijk et al., 2015). Previous researches have provided robust evidence that people from the East (e.g., China, Japan, Korea, India) are more collectivistic than are people in the West (e.g., United States, Canada, United Kingdom) (Chen, Chen, & Meindl, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Findings in our study also confirm these differences between two cultural groups through interviews data in Proposition 1. Moreover, taking a further step to look into the interview data to examine this issue, we found some more supporting evidence. Responses from T2 and T5 below indicated that even staying in an individualistic society (the UK) and working in an international group, Taiwanese still refer other Taiwanese as their own group members, and therefore, were concerned and acted in order to protect them.

*Normally, the Taiwanese members would take care of each other even while someone makes mistakes; it is too bad to see that one being cursed by the supervisor. (T5)*

*It is not that easy to assimilate into the European group, it is difficult to get familiar with them. Under this situation, the only thing that we may do is to follow “business is business” rule. However, it is pretty different to treat Taiwanese, no matter who that one is, still treat that person as one in “in -group”, intend to help and cover each other. (T2)*

Not only through the findings of Proposition 1, the differences between two groups' behavior regarding Individualism versus Collectivism are supported by Proposition 2 as well. The fact that Taiwanese members are apt to exhibit less active and more submissive behavior than do European may imply that they hesitate in arguing and making changes to remain the harmony and conformity of the whole group. Though when reasoning to suggest Proposition 2 in the literature, we used Power Distance dimension to explain such behavior, now it is found that Individualism—Collectivism dimension is applicable to unfold this also.

The significance of Individualism—Collectivism concept in clarifying differences in behavior as well as interaction patterns between Taiwanese and European members suggests that there still exists a cultural boundary in the group. In particular, sub-groups are formed by Taiwanese as they perceive clear dissimilarities between themselves and their Western counterparts. Some of the Taiwanese members have stated:

*Taiwanese being expatriated to London still need to follow the traditional working values, we need to work like a “cow”, pay as much as possible efforts to concentrate on job duty, always work overtime. But the European members will not share that value, they are normally working overtime, also won't pay too much extra efforts on the job. (T2)*

This probably hints that the Taiwanese sometimes may perceive unfairness when they take the job more seriously and put more efforts into it while their European colleagues are not likely to do so if the job needs working overtime. Though through our observation and analysis, we did not find any other obvious evidence proving this resulted in negative impact on the whole group interaction, it should be noticed by managers to have further attention and consideration for avoiding any conflicts in time to maintain high group performance.

Furthermore, the thought of regarding oneself as an integral part of a bigger group and acting for group's interest are in line with the “relational self” and “family culture” concepts from Confucianism, respectively. Thus, the existence and strong influence of the Individualism vs. Collectivism dimension are not also supplementary to Confucian thought in reasoning differences between the East and West.

#### *5.1.2. Power distance and role perception*

The fact that our findings demonstrated Proposition 2, 4A and 4B undoubtedly indicates that power distance and role perception significantly influence the behavior and interaction patterns of the group members. Particularly, evidence from this study confirms the difference in two cultural groups' behaviors which shows that the Europeans are not strongly influenced by hierarchical positions (subordinates are more active and participative; supervisor is more approachable and friendly) while both the Taiwanese employees (more compliant) and supervisor (more dominant and distant) have their own perspectives regarding their and others' roles and act according to that perception. This is consistent with Hofstede's theory (1991) which provides a potential explanation that most European countries have high masculine culture and low power distance, thus, they emphasize individual performance and treat all men equally. In contrast, Taiwan has low masculinity and high power distance that lead to the encouragement of a stable quality of life instead of competition and appreciation of absolute obedience to authority. This distinction is also supported by the study by Redding and Casey (1976) when they conducted a comparative study of beliefs about management behavior between Chinese and Westerners.

Our finding, furthermore, implies that the Taiwanese behavior, despite working with other European colleagues in an international business environment, is still restricted to their national culture. Supporting this point, Fu, Wu, Yang, and Ye (2007, p. 892) suggested that “the reforms have changed people’s behaviors on the surface, but deep inside, their values, which were formed at an early stage in life, are still there”. In other words, their “mother” culture’s impact proves strong and hard to be diluted or replaced even when they are living or working in a different cultural context. It might be true for the European members in this case as well since they did not show any changes in their behavior and interaction regarding this matter though working with Taiwanese people in a Taiwanese company [E].

### 5.1.3. *Intimacy treatment*

Proposition 3 is well recognized by our findings which proved that Taiwanese adjusted their behavior when interacting with different people more than do Europeans. In fact, they expressed more emotional behavioral traits when communicating with Taiwanese (mostly with friendlier and warmer attitude) than with non-Taiwanese members. As we found that they stayed together as a group even after work and developed closer relationships with each other, therefore, the intimacy level among them is significantly higher than between them and their European counterparts.

Besides Differential Order (Fei, 1948), the way Taiwanese treat people based on the quality of the relationship between them can be reasoned by the “Guanxi” concept also. Rooted in the Confucian ideology, Guanxi refers to “the existence of direct particularistic ties between two or more individuals” (Tsui & Farh, 1997, p. 60). The strength of such relationships is determined by those ties. Several scholars have suggested that compared with Westerners, Chinese people have a much stronger tendency to divide people into categories based on their Guanxi and treat them accordingly (Butterfield, 1983; Parsons, 1949). Some other findings also noted that people from the West and East give different precedence between justice and social relations. Particularly, to Westerners, the application of justice should be equal to all (except self) regardless of social relations. On the contrary, people from the Chinese contexts prioritize social relations over justice; thus, justice may need to consider relationship in its application (Tsui & Farh, 1997). Similarly, Schwartz (1992) suggested that under collectivist cultures, people are likely to assign people into in-group and out-group members. Therefore, those from such societies accept the idea that we can treat people differently regarding the strength of our relationship with them while those from individualistic cultures believe that we need to treat everyone equally based on the same set of rules to ensure fairness (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1993).

Supportively, our findings show that the European members had more consistent interaction patterns when facing different people than did Taiwanese. Even in the case that they had greater intimacy with some others, they tried not to let it affect the public work and performance. Yet, Taiwanese did not separate life and work, thus, displayed more emotions and varied interactions.

Even though this difference regarding intimacy treatment is clearly seen from our findings, it does not seem to create any conflicts between the two cultural groups. Both the Taiwanese and European members, though aware of this disparity, did not claim that it makes them feel uncomfortable in any way. As European members such as BS1 and B2 explained, they preferred having more flexibility and autonomy at work and were not used to being asked about too many things unrelated to jobs; therefore, they may have no problem when seeing Taiwanese work in group or have closer ties with each other rather than with them. Likewise, probably aware of their counterparts’ different cultural views and habits, the Taiwanese members displayed more task-oriented traits and keep more distance when interacting with the Europeans, meanwhile did not long for more intimate relationship with them. As such, from the observation of [E], we assume that as long as both groups are aware of and accept the differences, they adjust their behaviors and expectations so that each party can stay in their comfort zones while maintaining good cooperation. Set aside all of the cultural differences, it is noticeable that all the group members are located in the PF area—up right area in all the diagrams. This suggests that they all still share a common

behavioral trait: willing to cooperate with others. According to Hare (2005), this SYMLOG pattern represents high performance.

In this specific case, the cultural differences evidently exist and influence individual behavior, yet no significant negative impact was found (except the potential of unfairness perception previously mentioned). Similar to our assumption above, it might be due to the common awareness and acceptance from both cultural subgroups of their different behavioral patterns. As the Taiwanese still interacted with other Taiwanese in their original way which was shaped by Chinese culture, they remained a balance or harmony inside their subgroup because their expectation about each other's behavior is met. They, however, interact with European counterparts differently in the way that suits European notions and habits. In responding, the Europeans also got used to the fact that the Taiwanese colleagues tend to work in groups and be more submissive, hence, they did not complain or demand their counterparts to change. Another possible explanation for this phenomenon is that the group members are acknowledged of their responsibilities: to enhance the corporate operational performance by together accomplishing specific missions, therefore, the ambition to accomplish the tasks helps decrease some possible cultural influence (Saffold, 1988).

### **5.2. Limitations and suggestions for future research**

This work re-demonstrates that although globalization pursues similar international political and economic order, different national cultures still lead to differences in individual behavior. Thus, we suggest that cultural influence should not be neglected, especially in international business. Based on this study, future research can further probe into the process of internal dynamic adjustment in groups with different cultural backgrounds.

Though our case study [E] showed that despite of cultural boundary, the group still reached high performance with no serious conflicts and we have proposed potential reasons for it, future work may continue analyzing such multicultural workgroup to validate our findings or to provide new insights. For instance, as the team has been formed with multicultural members for just a few years (2–3 years), we are not able to see if there are any potential conflicts in the group in a longer term. Thus, examining other cases with longer years of operation may enable us to compare similarities as well as differences between them in order to gain valuable practical lessons for managing multicultural teams. Since the purpose of this study was to investigate the cultural boundary, we did not collect more data and interviews regarding their management methods and strategies applied to handle it. However, deeper analysis regarding this issue may be a fruitful research direction.

Also, as we found that members in our case study did not considerably change their behaviors, instead, they adjust their expectation and accept the other subgroup's cultural habit and consequently achieve high performance altogether, we assume that it probably might not be better if the Taiwanese changed to treat everyone more equally with less intimacy or the European changed to work collectively or act more submissively. Doing so may create conflicts in their own cultural subgroup and reduce individual performance since they are out of their most comfortable zone and against their own original values. Future studies may take this into consideration when examining how members from different cultural contexts find a balance in group interaction and cooperation.

Another potential topic for future research is in terms of conditions or environmental factors that affect individual behavioral changes. The Taiwanese or Europeans members in our case study did not substantially alter their behavior maybe because they were not culturally alone in the group. Expressly, there were other members who came from the same cultural background with them, thus, instead of mostly or wholly changing their behavior, they can form a subgroup and support each other. More work can be done to unfold environmental or contextual factors that influence an individual's decision and process of changing their cultural view and behavior.



Besides, although SYMLOG has some limitations, an analytical model that systematically divides different members on Field Diagrams will allow clear recognition of members' differences. Therefore, future research can combine social psychology and cultural theory in detail and re-examine each dimension of SYMLOG in order to more accurately divide members on Field Diagrams for more effective observation of interaction.

Lastly, as this study is an exploratory qualitative research, though propositions are effectively recognized by the findings, it is challenging to make generalizations. Therefore, future research may use the quantitative approach with a diversified set of data from different cultures, with relevant variables and hypothesis based on our assumptions or findings to provide more numerical and firm evidence supporting the results of this work.

## 6. Conclusion

By using different data sets (rating questionnaire, interviews, observations) and utilizing SYMLOG as the main analysis method, we examined behavioral and interaction traits and patterns among members in an international business workgroup of the case study [E]—the London branch of an international marine transport corporation originated from Taiwan. In brief, our case study provides several important insights: first, under the nowadays globalization context, the cultural boundary still exists in international business workgroups. Different cultures still show their influences on individual behavior in multicultural business workgroups. The most obvious differences between the two national groups' behavior under this study (Europeans and Taiwanese) are demonstrated in different cultural dimensions and are explained as well as supported by previous studies. Second, differences in behavioral and interaction patterns do not necessarily result in negative impact on the group performance, our case study [E] shows that task-oriented ambition together with awareness and acceptance of the other sub-group's culture, members may maintain good cooperation.

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### Correction

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