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## THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

**Summary:** *In today's globalized business environment, understanding and respecting cultural differences has become essential for successful international business. This paper explores how culture influences various aspects of business activities between countries, including communication, negotiation, leadership style, decision-making, and organizational structure. Through the analysis of case studies and practical examples, the paper shows how a lack of understanding of cultural norms can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and even the failure of business ventures, while cultural competence can contribute to building trust, more effective cooperation, and long-term success in the international market.*

**Key words:** *international business, culture, multicultural environment*

**JEL classification:** *F, M*

### INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that, due to the development of information technologies that have enabled the overcoming of distance and time barriers, the modern world has become essentially interconnected. One area of human activity where these characteristics are particularly evident is business. In the current era of globalization, international business operates within a multilayered economic framework shaped by digital transformation, geopolitical dynamics, trade policies, and evolving market structures. Navigating this environment requires a nuanced understanding of how technological innovations, cultural factors, and global economic trends influence multinational activities. As globalization progresses, cooperation between different cultures becomes increasingly frequent and extensive, leading to changes in international business practices. Everyday business must be adapted to diverse cultures, and business partners need to be well acquainted with the cultural characteristics of the other party to avoid potential conflicts. If a certain behavior is acceptable in one country, it does not necessarily mean that it is desirable in another, which must be considered in business dealings. Culture can be defined as a set of values, beliefs, customs, behaviors, and communication patterns shared by a particular group of people. It is often invisible and taken for granted in daily life, but it becomes critically important when people from different cultural backgrounds interact. For example, while Western cultures often favor direct and open communication, many Eastern cultures, such as Chinese and Japanese, prefer subtle, indirect communication in which nonverbal cues play a key role. One of the crucial aspects of international business is

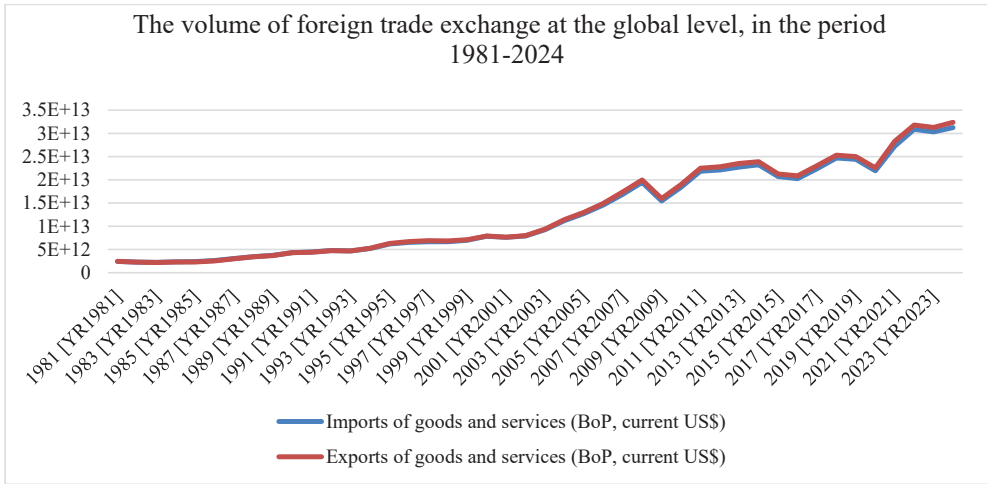
communication, as the success of cooperation negotiations largely depends on how information is transmitted, interpreted, and used to reach agreements.

## **1. INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS IN CONTEMPORARY ECONOMIC FRAMEWORKS**

The global economy in today's time frame is characterized by the growing interdependence of national economies (Jaćimović and Bjelić and Marković 2013, 1). Market globalization, as the increasing correlation among its individual segments, creates new assumptions for conducting business on an international level. Participants in the global market are required to meet new standards in terms of selecting modalities for integration into the globalized world market. Abandoning old paradigms, traditional concepts, and defining new approaches to international business implies the need for all actors to become involved in the global market in a more complex form in order to achieve fuller integration into international economic flows. The flows of goods, services, capital, information, and labor are surpassing national borders, making international exchange not only desirable but essential for economic development and competitiveness. In such an environment, international business is no longer just an option for large corporations—it has become a necessity for small and medium-sized enterprises that wish to remain relevant in the marketplace. The digital revolution has enabled companies to operate with partners and clients across the globe with minimal communication and logistics costs. E-commerce, digital marketing, electronic payments, and virtual conferences have become standard practice, allowing even the smallest businesses to access global markets. While international trade and investment policies were long considered part of “low” foreign policy (Cooper 1972, 18), the intensification of economic cooperation between countries, the emergence of a new global economic framework, and the strengthening of economic interdependence have pushed these areas into the realm of “high” foreign policy. Today, negotiations between major economic powers are primarily conducted regarding trade in specific markets or concerning specific goods, thus influencing the economic policies of the negotiating countries.

Changes in the global environment have led to greater freedom in conducting international business but also to altered conditions for achieving competitiveness. Economic, political, technological, cultural, demographic, environmental, and other trends in the environment have significant impacts on the development of macro markets. As a relatively new academic discipline, international business has emerged, driven by the development of a leading group of competitors who, through managerial approaches and entrepreneurial action, create distinct strategies for competitive positioning in the global market. International marketing and international trade activities are integral parts of international business.

Chart 1 illustrates the trend of international trade volume on a global level during the period from 1981 to 2024. From an initial level of USD 4.87E+12, foreign trade exchange has reached USD 6.35E+13, representing an increase of over 1500%, which highlights the crucial importance of international trade (and thereby international business) in the modern economic system.



Graph 1. The volume of foreign trade exchange at the global level, in the period 1981-2024 (author's calculation)

Chart 2 also shows a rapid increase in foreign direct investment during the period from 1975 to 2024. From an initial level of  $1.32\text{E}+10$  in 1975, foreign direct investment reached  $6.35\text{E}+13$ , representing an increase of over 6000%.

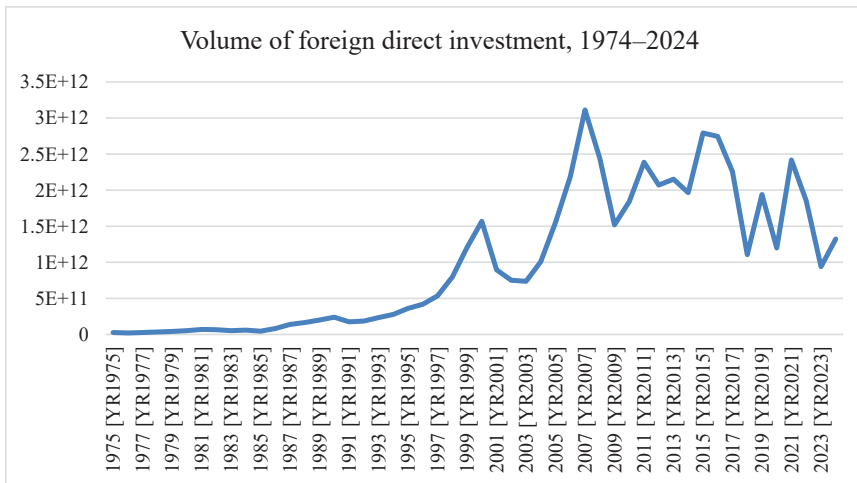


Chart 2. Volume of foreign direct investment, 1974–2024. (author's calculation)

In modern international business, success does not depend solely on the quality of a product or service, but also on a company's ability to adapt to local conditions. This includes understanding and respecting cultural differences, legislation, business practices, and consumer habits. Companies that invest in market research, intercultural training for employees, and the localization of their products have a significantly higher chance of success.

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE

Culture has many meanings, and its significance varies across the world and among different groups, which makes the concept of culture both unique and universally familiar. Culture consists of a set of patterns through which people perceive how they should behave and act, and what is considered right or wrong. According to some authors (Hofstede 2011), every individual possesses certain patterns of behavior, emotions, and even potential performances that have been acquired throughout life. These are mostly adopted in early childhood, as this is the period when a person is most sensitive to assimilation and learning. According to Hercigonja, culture represents one of the fundamental characteristics of every nation and influences the shaping of the identity of the individual, the group, and society as a whole (Hercigonja 2017). Emuze and James include elements such as language and religion in their definition of culture, which they describe as "...behaviors related to language, religion, values, norms, and customs shared by a group of people and learned from birth" (Emuze and James 2013). Cultural identity is the sense of self an individual derives from formal or informal membership in groups that transmit and instill knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, traditions, and ways of life.

## 3. CULTURE IN THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Today's market is characterized by strong interconnection between countries, companies, and individuals, and differences in language, customs, values, communication styles, and business practices can have a significant impact on the success of business activities. In this context, understanding and respecting cultural differences is no longer just a desirable skill—it has become a business necessity and a competitive advantage.

Multinational companies operate in markets shaped by various cultures, which requires adapting to each one. Insufficient knowledge of how business is conducted in different cultures often results in business failure and financial losses. The key to successful business in diverse cultural environments lies in being familiar with the habits, behavior, customs, and all other aspects of the cultural background of a foreign market.

Overcoming cultural differences plays a crucial role in effective communication; therefore, it is essential to have a solid understanding of cultural diversity and the ways in which it should be managed. Cultural differences can cause negotiators from different backgrounds to interpret and prioritize issues differently, making it harder to achieve integrative negotiations that maximize mutual benefits (Chai and Wilson and Drake 2000).

One of the most important aspects of cultural knowledge is the ability to communicate effectively with business partners from different backgrounds. For example, the direct communication style typical of Western countries may seem inappropriate in Eastern cultures, which prefer indirect and subtle forms of expression. Understanding these differences helps avoid misunderstandings and build trust among partners.

## 4. THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Business people from different cultural backgrounds, countries, and regions have varying understandings of culture. Cultural factors play an increasingly important role in international business negotiations (Huang 2023, 136).

Different values and ways of thinking also influence negotiation styles. Under the influence of diverse cultural environments, differences in values and thinking between the two parties in transnational business negotiations will have a direct impact on the final outcomes of those negotiations (Jiang and Houchun 2010).

Hofstede studied the tolerance for risk among different nations and concluded that cultures vary in how well they handle uncertainty and risky situations (Hofstede 2015). He gives the example of Greeks, who tend to dislike risk and uncertainty, in contrast to Anglo cultures, which are more open to accepting risk. Bibliometric analyses of leading international business journals reveal that Hofstede's cultural dimensions—such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and others—serve as foundational tools in modeling cultural influences on entry strategies, negotiations, and organizational behavior.

Stahl and Tung observe that international business research often emphasizes cultural risks over opportunities, advocating for a paradigm shift toward recognizing cultural differences as strategic advantages rather than obligations (Stahl and Tung 2015). Concepts such as cultural agility are gaining traction—this refers to the flexible, context-aware capabilities of global talent to navigate various cultural environments. According to Brett, modern business and negotiation in the global environment require negotiators to have a deep understanding of cultural differences and how those differences reflect on interests and the strategies applied during the negotiation process (Brett 2017).

In intercultural communication, it is important to be able to "read between the lines" and not interpret everything the speaker says literally, as the context is often much deeper than the verbal communication itself. What is implied by nonverbal signals does not only include facial expressions and body movements but also the setting, titles, and official status of the individual. In the context of nonverbal communication with an emphasis on emotions, authors Tracy, Randles, and Steckler particularly highlight that the expression of emotions is one of the key elements of social interaction and behavior (Tracy and Randles and Steckler 2015).

## 5. PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

Cultural differences significantly influence negotiation styles. While some cultures emphasize speed and efficiency (e.g., the USA), others value a long process of building relationships and reaching consensus (e.g., Japan, China). Understanding these differences enables better planning, strategy adjustment, and a higher chance of successful negotiation outcomes. In many cultures, especially high-context ones, personal relationships and trust are prerequisites for business cooperation. Business partners want to get to know the person first before engaging in specific business agreements. Understanding this dynamic helps build long-term and stable business relationships. Companies that are familiar with local cultural norms and values have a greater ability to adapt their products, services, and marketing messages to local consumers. This increases brand acceptance and sales success in foreign markets.

In low-context cultures, people primarily focus on each other's language, which is mostly literal in meaning; in high-context cultures, expressions, seating arrangements, location, mood, gestures, and other surrounding details convey much of the information and represent a primary source of communication for both parties (Chen 2023, 6). Some authors point out that in high-context cultures, the message itself contains minimal explicit information (Brett 2000, 101). Instead, the surrounding context activates the receiver's existing knowledge (Gupta and Sukamto 2020). In these cultures, meaning is derived from context rather than directly from the words used.

Individuals from low-context cultures convey almost all information explicitly through verbal means. That's why communication in low-context cultures is often called explicit communication in some studies (Usunier and Roulin 2010, 201). The effectiveness of communication in these cultures largely depends on clarity and the level of detail provided by the speaker. This type of communication is usually action-oriented, solution-focused (Brett 2000, 101), linear, well-structured, explicit, and easy to understand. Any implications are usually addressed in subsequent, detailed communication (Gupta and Sukamto 2020).

Although communication in low-context cultures may seem minimal and not always entirely satisfying, especially in intercultural contexts, it serves as the lowest common denominator. This approach provides a more efficient basis and easier path to mutual understanding compared to interpreting contextual signals in every encounter with partners from high-context cultures (Usunier and Roulin 2010, 192).

#### *United States*

The United States is one of the world's leading economic powers and an attractive market for international cooperation. To ensure successful communication and negotiation with American partners, it is important to understand the basic business customs and behavioral norms rooted in American business culture. In low-context cultures like the U.S., there is a tendency toward directness and efficiency (Sogancilar and Dereli 2025, 198), with a straightforward and open approach to issues (Metcalf 2006). Business conversations often go straight to the point without lengthy introductions or formalities. Strategies of direct information exchange are commonly used (Adair and Okumura and Brett 2001). In line with the saying "Time is money," time is considered a highly valuable resource in American business culture. Punctuality is expected and appreciated, while being late is often seen as unprofessional. Efficiency, quick decision-making, and meeting deadlines are key values. American negotiators emphasize economic interests and confrontation, reflecting a dignity culture focused on individual gains (Sogancilar and Dereli 2025 201). Negotiations with American partners should focus more on impersonal and technical aspects. These findings suggest that negotiator training programs should move beyond traditional American approaches and include content specific to different cultures. Effective training should incorporate not only negotiation skills but also emotional and cultural competencies necessary to overcome cultural differences and achieve successful outcomes (Sogancilar and Dereli 2025, 202). Compared to other cultures, the American approach is characterized as interest-based and problem-solving-oriented. American culture is highly individualistic. Business success is often associated with personal initiative, entrepreneurship, and self-confidence. Individuals are expected to take responsibility for their own tasks and outcomes, and credit is given to individuals, not groups.

#### *China*

China, as one of the world's most powerful economies, has a rich and complex business culture rooted in millennia of tradition, philosophy, and social norms. Understanding Chinese business customs is essential for successful operations and long-term partnerships with Chinese partners. Since China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), the pace of economic globalization has accelerated, and the scope of China's participation in international competition and cooperation has proportionally expanded (Huang 2023, 136).

In intercultural business communication and negotiation, the relationship-based thinking of the Chinese often conflicts with the contractual mindset of Westerners. When Chinese entrepreneurs and businesspeople travel to the West for business talks, they often subconsciously believe that the first step is to establish good relationships with partners. A good personal relationship is the foundation of cooperation, and they are skilled at building personal friendships before forming business partnerships, which they view as the anchor and guarantee of negotiations. In contrast, Westerners draw a clear distinction between personal and professional relationships (Huang 2023, 136). One of the most important concepts in Chinese business culture is *guanxi*<sup>1</sup>—a network of personal connections and relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> The word *guanxi* literally means "relationship" or "connection," but in the Chinese context, it carries a much deeper meaning. *Guanxi* is built through the mutual exchange of favors, trust, loyalty, and reciprocal assistance, often outside formal institutional frameworks. For foreign companies seeking to do business in China, understanding and respecting the *guanxi* system is crucial. Without local contacts and trust, entering the market can be significantly more difficult.



Chinese businesspeople often do not enter into cooperation until a certain level of personal trust has been established. Informal socializing, such as business dinners and shared outings, is often an essential part of the negotiation process. Under the influence of Confucian doctrine, Chinese people tend to be introverted and reserved in verbal expression, making their language naturally polite and indirect (Huang 2023, 138). During meetings, communication follows rank and position, and seating arrangements reflect the hierarchy among participants. The Chinese place great importance on social experience, have a strong sense of collectivism, and pay close attention to how personal relationships with partners influence negotiation outcomes. They strive to foster goodwill on both sides by learning the preferences of the other party in advance or discussing negotiation issues beforehand, contributing to a smoother negotiation process (Chen 2022, 76). In China, people are expected to look at each other but avoid prolonged eye contact, which may be seen as disrespectful (Chen 2022, 77). Unlike Western cultures, the Chinese prefer indirect and subtle communication. Openly expressing disagreement or criticism is considered impolite. Preserving face (*miànzi*), or personal dignity and reputation, is of key importance. Negative messages are often conveyed through suggestions, silence, or indirect responses. Business cards are exchanged with both hands and a slight bow. Gifts are a common sign of respect, but one should be mindful of cultural symbols (e.g., avoid giving clocks or gifts in white—symbols of death). Negotiations in China are often lengthy and require patience. Speed is not a priority; building a stable relationship and gradually reaching an agreement are more important. Chinese partners may seem indecisive, but this often indicates a need for internal consultations and thoughtful decision-making. In Western cultures, a contract represents the "end" of negotiations, while in China, it is often just the beginning. Even after contracts are signed, mutual trust is more important. Chinese partners may expect changes in terms if circumstances change, requiring additional flexibility.

### *Japan*

Japan, as one of the world's leading economic powers, has a unique and deeply rooted business culture based on values such as respect, discipline, collectivism, and harmony. Understanding Japanese business customs is essential for building successful and long-term partnerships with Japanese companies.

Japanese society and business culture are highly hierarchical. Senior and high-ranking employees have a special role, and their opinions are highly valued. During meetings, seating arrangements and modes of address reflect participants' status. Titles and surnames are used with the suffix *-san* (Mr./Ms.) to show respect. The exchange of business cards in Japan is an important ritual. Cards are offered and received with both hands and a slight bow. It is recommended that one side of the card be translated into Japanese. After receiving a card, it is customary to study it carefully; placing it immediately in a pocket or ignoring it is considered rude. Japanese people attach great importance to intuitive mutual understanding and are highly skilled in interpreting nonverbal behavior. They are often confused by how much Westerners rely on verbal communication and how they appear to contradict one another during negotiations. Japanese can convey a significant amount of information through a glance, gesture, or even silence (Herbig and Kramer 1992, 294). Open expression of emotions, disagreement, or criticism is avoided to maintain harmony (*wa*) and prevent loss of face (*kao*). Body language, tone of voice, and pauses in speech play an important role. Silence is not awkward—it is often used as a sign of reflection and respect. In the case of Japanese negotiators, delays often reflect a thorough consideration process that includes consultation with all relevant departments. Therefore, when negotiating with Japanese partners, it is advisable to schedule multiple sessions with significant intervals—weeks or even months—to allow for proper deliberation (Herbig and Kramer 1992, 292). Japanese negotiators use indirect

strategies of information exchange (Adair and Okumura and Brett 2001). Japanese business culture values long-term relationships over short-term gains. Trust building is the foundation of cooperation and often precedes formal agreements. Partners who show patience, reliability, and a willingness to understand Japanese values gain a clear advantage. In Japan, decisions are made collectively. Although an individual may present a position, key decisions are made by the team after consultation across multiple levels. As a result, negotiations may take longer, but the outcomes are more stable since the entire organization stands behind them.

#### *Russia*

Russia's business culture is shaped by its rich history, specific socio-political development, and strong influence of traditional values. Understanding Russian business customs is key to successful operations and establishing long-term, stable relationships with Russian partners. Foreign businesspeople seeking success in Russia must be aware of differences in communication, decision-making, and negotiation styles. The Russian business environment is highly hierarchical. Decisions are made "from the top," and the leader's authority is rarely questioned. Respect for hierarchy is important, and managers and company owners expect to be addressed with respect. Negotiations are usually conducted with high-ranking individuals, as they have the authority to make key decisions. Some authors note that Russian negotiators view hierarchy as a key cultural value, use distributive tactics commonly in negotiations, and see the role of the negotiator as a source of power in the negotiation process (Brett et al. 1998). Russians have a direct communication style and say what they mean. Excessive emotionality or insincere enthusiasm may be perceived as superficial. The business tone is serious, with a focus on concrete facts, numbers, and goals. At the same time, it is important to demonstrate firmness, as weakness or indecision may be interpreted as a lack of credibility. Formality is an important part of Russian business culture. Meetings involve the use of surnames with titles (e.g., Mr. Ivanov), and handshakes are a common greeting—often firm, with eye contact. Although not mandatory, gifts can be a nice gesture of goodwill. They should be symbolic and of good quality, but not overly expensive. Business dinners and informal activities often serve to strengthen relationships and build mutual trust. During negotiations, the Russian side will always try to reduce the proposed price—no matter how low it may already be (Huang 2010, 197). Negotiating with Russian partners can be challenging and demanding. The decision-making process is often slow and centralized but also very thorough. "Hard bargaining" tactics are not uncommon, and Russians respect partners who demonstrate a firm stance but are also willing to compromise when needed.

## **CONCLUSION**

International business within modern economic frameworks represents a key element of global economic growth, innovation, and the integration of various markets and cultures. Although it involves certain risks and challenges, it also opens numerous opportunities for development, competitiveness, and sustainability. Companies that recognize the importance of adapting to global trends, collaboration, and intercultural competence will have an advantage in the race for a place on the global business stage. In this context, international business is not merely an economic phenomenon, but also a kind of bridge between different peoples, cultures, and values. Establishing and maintaining successful international business relationships is not possible without understanding the culture one is engaging with. Culture influences all aspects of business—from communication styles and decision-making processes to building trust. In today's interconnected world, knowledge of and respect for cultural differences is no longer a luxury, but a necessity for any organization or individual striving to succeed in the global marketplace. Differences in religion, language, cultural context, nonverbal communication, humor, gift-giving, aesthetics, and many other areas are significant and can pose barriers to



international business if they are not explored, accepted, respected, and incorporated into foreign market entry strategies. Culture remains a crucial force in international business—impacting strategy, leadership, human capital, and market engagement. Future-oriented international business research must continuously shift its focus to treat culture not just as a challenge, but as a source of competitive advantage, innovation, and resilience in a rapidly globalizing and digitizing economy. It is essential to understand that in most cases, culture and cultural differences are the decisive factors in business success or failure. Encounters between different cultures in today's business world occur almost constantly and in various forms of communication, becoming a reality and a principle of modern business. Ultimately, before engaging in business with another culture, it is of crucial importance to become informed about the culture in question, learn its key characteristics and business practices, and know how to respect, adapt to, and accept cultural differences. Therefore, the key to successful business lies in appreciating cultural diversity. Culture is historical, social, developmental, and dynamic—it is not a fixed category, and it must be viewed in the light of temporal and spatial changes. Human society and culture are defined by the dynamism of their structures, and as such, are subject to small or significant changes over time.

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