



# Beijing Brussels

北京 布鲁塞尔

**Leveraging *Y*our *I*ntercultural *A*wareness**

Living Stone Centre

& Inspinazie Improtheater

*With the support of Flanders' Government*





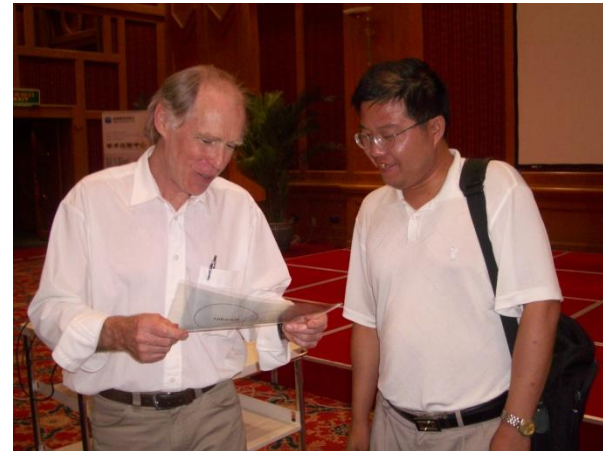
# Beijing Brussels Business Theatre: Leveraging your intercultural awareness

1. Context
2. Contemporary Chinese Business Culture
  - Perception
  - Culture mapping
  - How to make things work in China
3. Impro Theatre
  - What to look for in a scene
  - 5 scenes
4. Culture-general precedes culture-specific!



# 1. Context: A New Challenge for Flanders

- New world players are here to stay!
- Totally different culture and little experience
- Intercultural preparation 'to make it happen'





# Fostering Intercultural Competence

- Detecting when cultural differences cause a turn of events
- Deciphering what is going on
- Act and react appropriately



“A culturally sensitive mindset, motivation and skill set that enable an individual to generate appropriate and effective behaviour in a given, multicultural context”



## Living and Working with Diversity

- **Feeling of ambivalence**
  - Fascination?
  - Enrichment?
  - Uncertainty?
  - Threat?



## 2. Contemporary Chinese Culture

- **Your perception of today's China**  
Like this?



Parade at 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary PRChina, October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009  
[www.lscoop.com](http://www.lscoop.com)

Or like this?



China's internet godfather Ma Yun in Karaoke



- **Cross-cultural mis-perception may happen because:**
  - Perception is selective
  - Perception is culturally determined
  - Perception is consistent
  - Perception is inaccurate



- **What is culture?**

- Culture shapes our way of thinking and behaving.
- Culture is visible and invisible.
- Culture can be taught and learnt.
- Culture can be categorised in multiple ways: national culture, corporate culture, gender, generational etc.
- Cultures are dynamic and transforming based on economic and technological developments, social movements



- **An overview of Chinese culture**

- Pleskacheuskaya, Inesa (2007) Chinese customs and wisdoms.

- Foreign Language Press.

- Gao, G. & Ting-Toomey, S. (1998) Communicating effectively

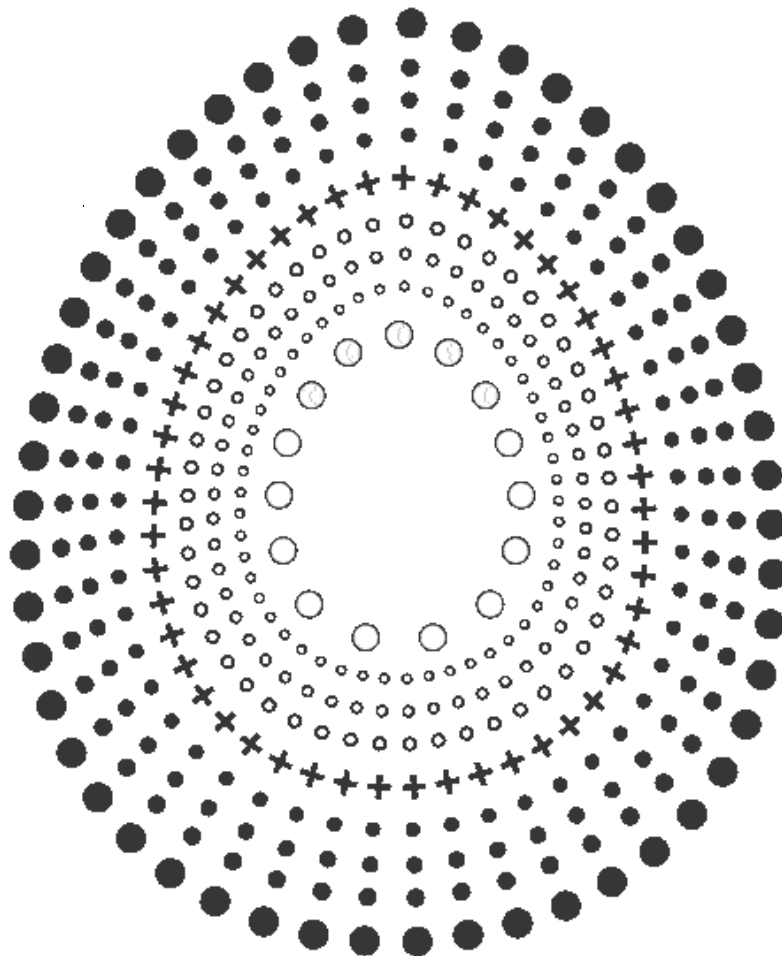
- with the Chinese. Thousand Oaks (Calif.): Sage.

- Tian, Xiaowen (2007) Managing international business in China.

- Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

# Living Stone Holistic Coconut Model To Map Cultures

*From the outside to the hidden dimensions:*



Expressions, manners,  
customs

Organization (family,  
state, company)

*+++between the  
observable and the  
hidden+++++*

Norms, values, beliefs,  
way of thinking

Universal value  
dimensions



- **Territory, administrative divisions, ethnics and languages**

- Land territory: 9,600,000 square kilometres (350 x Belgium). Inhabitants, 1,300.000.000
- China's borders extend for over 20,000 kilometres, joining it with 14 countries. (Korea, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, the People's Republic of Mongolia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam)
- China is divided into 23 provinces, 5 autonomous regions (Inner Mongolia, Guangxi Zhuang, Ningxia Hui, Xinjiang Uygur, Tibet) and 4 municipalities (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Chongqing), as well as 2 Special Administrative Regions (SAR Hong Kong & Macao).
- China is a country composed of 56 different ethnics. People of Han nationality constitute 92% of Chinese people.
- Mandarin is the official language in China. In the southern area, Cantonese is commonly used too.



- Gastronomy (cuisines, drinks and regional specialties)
- Chinese zodiac
- Cosmology (e.g. Wu Xing: metal, wood, water, fire, earth)
- Fengshui (emphasis on the unity of people and nature)
- Chinese numerology (e.g. lucky numbers and portents)
- Festivals (e.g. Chinese new year, spring festival)
- Affair with colours (e.g. red = all good)



- Greeting ceremonies
- Presenting your delegation
- Using business cards and company profiles
- Giving and receiving gifts
- Business attire
- Speeches and toasts
- Entertainment



## Family & Business

- Enterprise management based on the family code of ethics, reinforced by the moral values and obligations demonstrated by the paternalistic leader
- Challenge: as the organisation grows, how to maintain its entrepreneurship and flexibility while still being professionally managed





- **Confucianism**

- Five Constant Virtues (wuchang)

- benevolence (ren)

- righteousness (yi)

- propriety and rituals (li)

- wisdom (zhi)

- fidelity (xin)

- Family and interpersonal relationship

- Respect for age and hierarchy

- Harmony

- Face

- **Taoism**

- Yin-Yang principle



- Non-action (wuwei)

- soft tactics

- encourage personal potentiality and creativity

- Water-like leadership style

- altruistic

- modest and humble

- adaptable and flexible

- soft and gentle, but persistent and powerful



- **Sun Tzu's stratagems**

- The book "The Art of War"

- Thirty-six stratagems, e.g.

*Await leisurely the exhausted enemy (以逸待劳)*

*Make a feint to the east while attacking in the west*

*(声东击西)*

*Red-face and white-face stratagem*

*(红白脸计)*



- **Pictographic language and a holistic way of thinking**

From the whole frame to the details



- **Agrarian mentalities**

- Cultural Revolution: re-educated generalisation and their roles today as entrepreneurs

- The mentality of thrift and endurance: long-term orientation

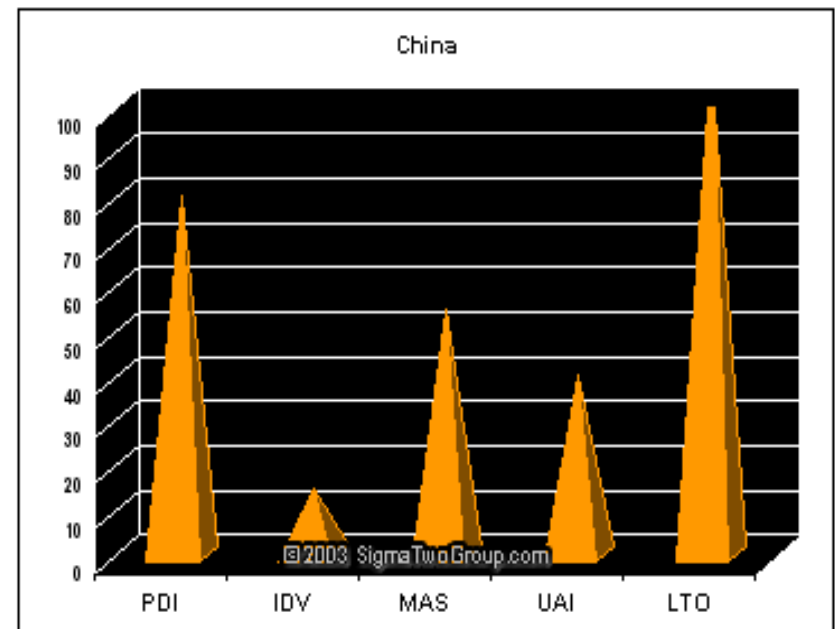
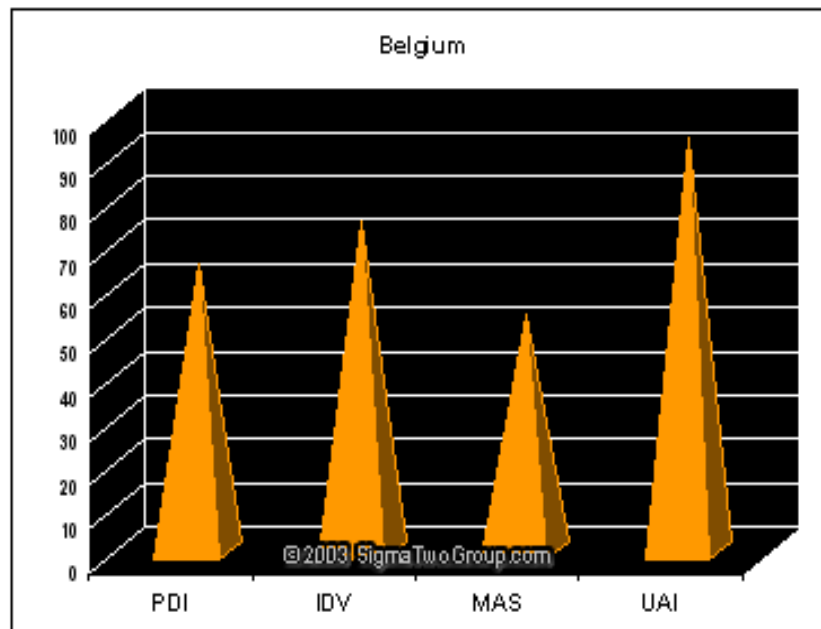


Identity: individualism-collectivism (IDV)

Power: small-large power distance (PDI)

Uncertainty: weak-strong uncertainty avoidance tendency (UAI)

Sex roles: feminine-masculine value patterns (MAS)





## How to make things work with China

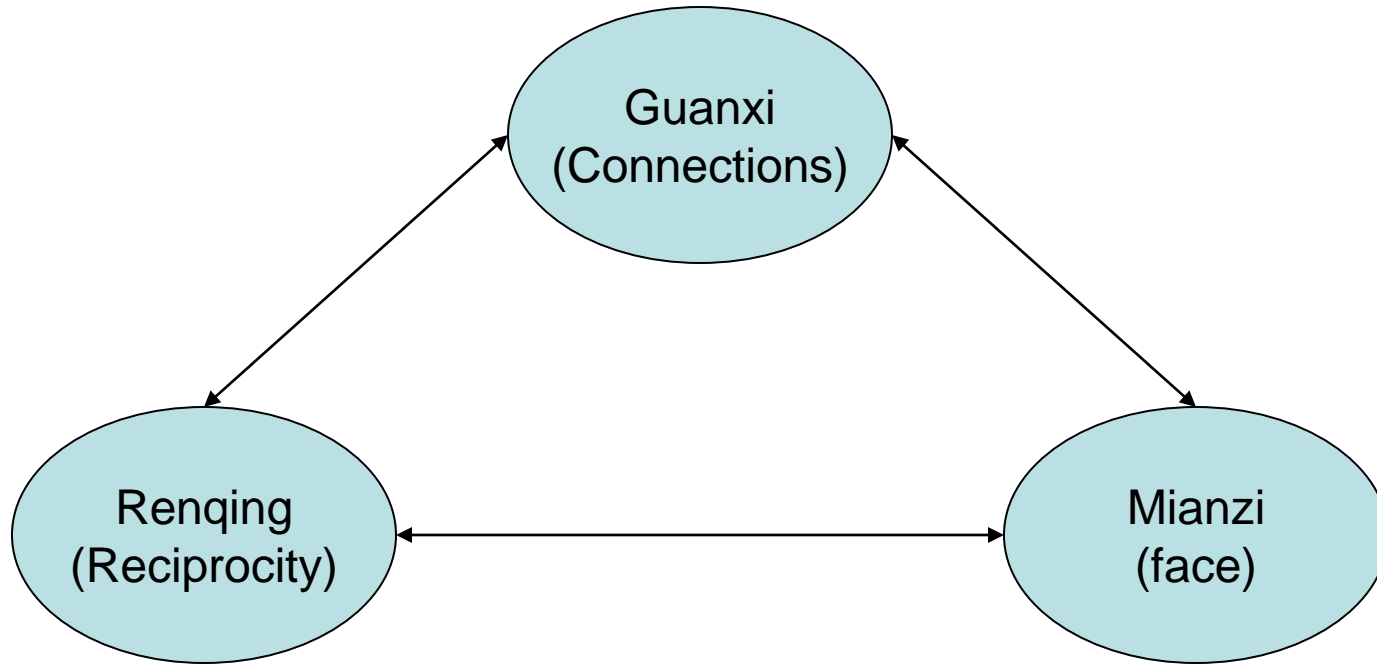
- **The Chinese 'Self'**

- Situated in relationships rather than in individual persons
- Act in accordance with external expectations or social norms, rather than with internal wishes, as an integral part of the social networks





- **Managing Guanxi strategically**





- **The concept of Guanxi**  
“a network of interpersonal relationships and exchanges of favours for the purpose of conducting business activities”
- **Why Guanxi is so pervasive in China today?**  
political, economic and socio-cultural factors
- **Key features of Guanxi**
  - Guanxi is personal
  - Guanxi is transferable
  - Guanxi is reciprocal
  - Guanxi involves emotions and long-term considerations
  - Guanxi tends to be conducted in secrecy
- **Guanxi practice in China**
  - The case of Sino-Singaporean Suzhou industry park
  - The case of Carrefour and Wal-Mart



- **Communication strategies between the West and the East**

### **The West**

What is said

I

Polite

Direct

Assertive

Self-enhancing

Private questions

### **The East**

What is not said

We

Impolite

Indirect

Hesitate

Self-effacing

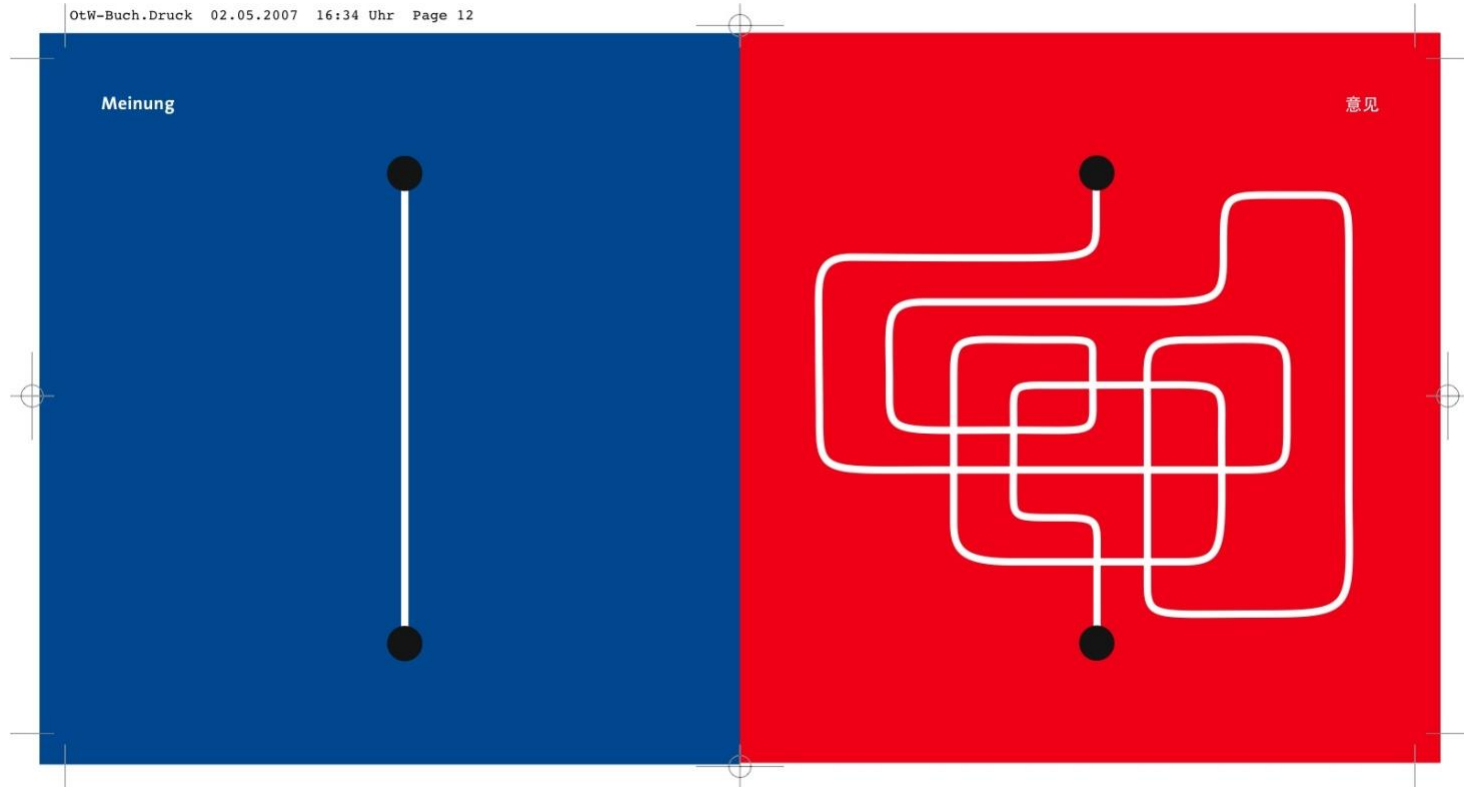
Public questions

### **Ref.**

*Gao, G. & Ting-Toomey, S. (1998) Communicating effectively with the Chinese. Thousand Oaks (Calif.): Sage.*



# How a meaning is stated in the West and the East ...





- **Characteristics of the Chinese negotiation style**
  - The emphasis on interpersonal trust rather than legal contract
  - Hospitality
  - General principles first, specific details later
  - Government behind the scenes
  - Having a large but indecisive negotiation team
  - Sudden changes from being stubborn to being flexible
  - Sensitivity to price
  - The use of tactics, tricks and ploys



- **Characteristics of today's Chinese business culture**
  - Localisation, customization and flexibility
  - The ability of innovation and creation - embracing change
  - Internal competition: outcome/ performance based evaluation (the best, promoted; the worst, out!)
  - Internal cooperation: teamwork spirit
  - Loyalty, integrity and commitment
  - Corporate harmony



### 3. Improvisation theatre

# Impro theatre

- Critical incidents depicting mis-perception, mis-interpretation, mis-evaluation of relationships, actions, motivation
- Scenarios address attitudes, beliefs and responses to different cultural expectations and communication styles
- Stimulate personal examination of assumptions, cultural stereotypes and behaviors





## What to look for in a scene

- **What did you see HAPPEN in this scene?**
- **Were there particular WORDS or ACTIONS that seem to have resulted in a character feeling misunderstood, devalued?**
- **What CAUSES and SUSTAINS cultural stereotypes and perceptions of unfair or incompetent treatment ?**
- **In situations where YOU have been excluded , misunderstood because of incorrect assumptions, what was the EFFECT on you, your relationships, your work?**
- **What have YOU LEARNED from this scene?**



## Impro Theatre Ground Rules

- Participation
- Respect
- Openness
- Confidentiality
- Experiment
- Speak for myself
- Sensitivity



## Improvisation theatre: 5 scenes

### 1. **Business etiquette and how to show hospitality**

*At the airport & welcoming dinner*

### 2. **Topics for conversation**

*Pocket scene: proper/improper to talk about*

### 3. **(Un)conscious exclusion**

*Language barrier, exclusion*

### 4. **Face management**

*Multicultural teams, project management*

### 5. **Guanxi, reciprocity**

*Revolving doors scene*



## 4. Leverage Your Intercultural Awareness

### **Culture-general precedes culture-specific!**

- You don't need to be a specialist in the target culture, history, language ... to operate effectively in intercultural situations
  - A little knowledge is a good thing
  - But more important is recognizing cultural differences between your own and other groups, and seeing how those differences are valuable to society and to yourself



## **Culture-general learning-to-learn frameworks**

- Nonverbal behavior
  - Meaning resides in unspoken messages, silence, verbal reticence
- Language use
  - Self enhancement vs. self effacement
  - Informal vs. formal verbal style
- Communication styles
  - Direct vs. indirect communication
  - Emotional expressive vs. emotional contained
- Cognitive styles
  - Linear vs. spiral way of thinking
- Cultural values
  - Individual (“I”) vs. Collectivistic (‘We’)
  - Egalitarian vs. Hierarchical



谢谢 *xiè xiè!*

*Dank u*