

# Intercultural Communication of American, Japanese and Thai Employees Working in International Organizations in Thailand

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## Abstract

Many American, Japanese, and Thai employees are currently working in international organizations in Thailand, and the problems of different working cultures of American, Japanese and Thai employees are unavoidable. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate and compare how American, Japanese and Thai employees differ in perceiving factors that affect intercultural communication success, how they face intercultural communication barriers, and how they adapt to people from different cultures. After conducting the survey, it was found that Thai employees seemed to be more successful than American and Japanese employees in terms of perceiving factors that affect intercultural communication success. American employees seemed to face fewer problems in intercultural communication than Japanese and Thai employees and seemed to feel more comfortable in adapting themselves to people from different cultures than Japanese and Thai employees.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Many Americans and Japanese are currently working in many international organizations in Thailand<sup>1</sup>. Of course, the problems of different working cultures of American, Japanese and Thai employees are unavoidable. Therefore, to study the working cultures of American, Japanese and Thai employees working in international organizations in Thailand is very important. This study will be useful not only for Americans, Japanese and Thai employees but also for all people who are working in an environment of different cultures

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<sup>1</sup> International organizations in Thailand refer to the organizations where people from various cultures are working together including American, Japanese and Thai employees.

in order for them to learn and adapt themselves to one another in order to be able to work together effectively (Chaney & Martin, 2000; Dunung, 1995; Kriengsak Niratpattanasai, 2005).

Several studies have been done on the intercultural communication of foreigners working in Thailand in several aspects. The cultural training of international corporations in Thailand was conducted by Mingkwan Sinthuwong (มิ่งขวัญ สินธุวงศ์, 2543). The communication behavior and adaptation of foreigners who worked in Thailand was investigated by Suwannee Taechawiratchon (วรรณิ์ เตชะวิรัชชน, 2541) and Thanit Kongkaew (ธานีษฐ์ กองแก้ว, 2544). The comparison of communication behaviors of American, Japanese and Thai employees in American and Japanese companies in Thailand was studied by Vanida Pornpirun (วนิดา พรพิรุฬห์, 2547). However, no research has been conducted regarding the comparison of Americans, Japanese and Thais in terms of intercultural communication.

Thus, this research will focus specifically on how differently American, Japanese and Thai employees perceive factors that affect intercultural communication success, face intercultural communication barriers and adapt to people from different cultures.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

1. How differently do American, Japanese, and Thai employees perceive factors that affect intercultural communication success?
2. How differently do American, Japanese, and Thai employees face problems of intercultural communication?
3. How differently do American, Japanese, and Thai employees adapt to people from different cultures?

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

1. To investigate how differently American, Japanese, and Thai employees perceive factors that affect intercultural communication success.
2. To identify how differently American, Japanese, and Thai employees face the problems of intercultural communication.
3. To compare how differently American, Japanese, and Thai employees adapt to people from different cultures.

## **1.4 Scope of the Study**

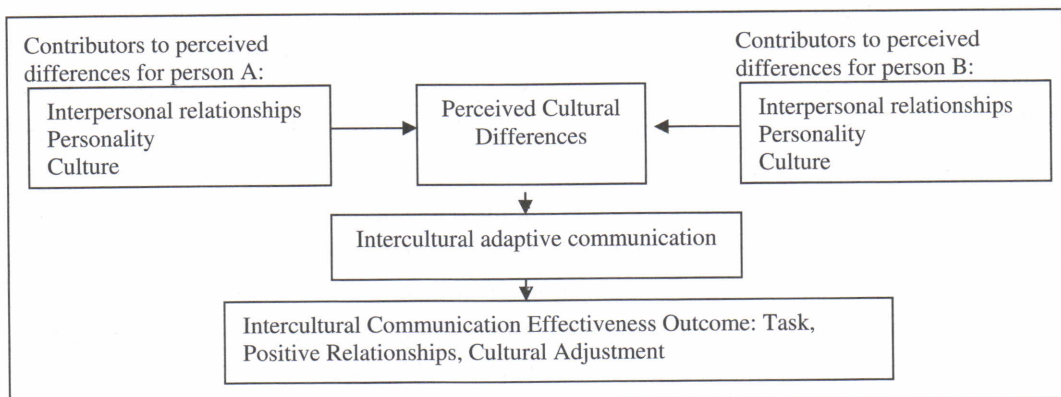
The research explored communication behaviors of American, Japanese, and Thai employees working in international organizations in Thailand in order to establish factors that affect intercultural communication success, to investigate intercultural communication barriers, and to compare intercultural adaptation of people from different cultures.

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1 Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is described as the interaction of face-to-face communication through sharing and exchanging meaning in messages, thoughts, ideas, and feelings in commonly understandable ways between people who have different cultural backgrounds (Conaway, Easton, Schmidt, & Wardrope, 2007; Dodd, 1998; Porter, Samovar, & Stefani, 1998).

Figure 1 shows how people from different cultures perceive cultural differences. The figure illustrates the influence of interpersonal relationships, personality and culture on perceived cultural differences. The outcome of perceived cultural differences contributes to intercultural adaptive communication, which determines intercultural communication effectiveness.



**Figure 1** A Model of Intercultural Communication

From: *Dynamics of Intercultural Communication* (5<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 6-7) by C.H. Dodd, 1998, Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

### 2.2 Factors that Affect Intercultural Communication Success

Relationships, communication climates and time are factors that affect intercultural communication success.

#### 2.2.1 Relationships

Collectivism and individualism are used to explain the relationships between people in different cultures in order to show how people from different cultures have different perceptions of the roles of relationships from each other. Collectivism is “a society in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetimes continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 76). In a collectivist culture, a group’s initiative and



achievement are promoted rather than an individual's function and responsibility. Therefore, people in collectivist cultures tend to place an emphasis on harmony and cooperation within the group. On the other hand, individualism is "a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family" (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 76). People in individualist cultures tend to place an emphasis on the individuals' goals and achievement, in contrast with people in collectivist cultures. Therefore, the ties between individuals of members in an organization are loose because everyone expects to look after him/herself only (Conaway, Easton, Schmidt, & Wardrobe, 2007; Gudykunst, 1994; Gudykunst, Nishida, & Ting-Toomey, 1996).

### **2.2.2 Communication Climates**

Communication climates can be classified into supportive and defensive climates. A supportive climate is created when members in the organization see themselves as valuable and perceive that other members think that they are important. Therefore, when members in the organizations are open and honest, they feel supported and feel comfortable to communicate, present and discuss ideas with others. As a result, members in the organization will communicate and interact with other members positively. On the contrary, a defensive climate is created when members in the organization feel that they are unimportant and are abused by other members. Therefore, when members in the organization feel that other members in the organization lack openness and lack honesty, they become cautious and ignore the value of communication with others and their behaviors. As a result, they will react to each other negatively (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Towne, 1995; Beck, 1999; Gaut & Perrigo, 1998; Neher, 1997; Wood, 1999).

### **2.2.3 Time**

Monochronic time or M-Time culture and Polychronic time or P-Time culture refer to the use of time by people in various cultures. People in M-time cultures generally emphasize punctuality and promptness. They are likely to do things one at a time, concentrate on the job at hand, and schedule things with time expectation, so people in M-time culture consider time as very important and important not to waste. On the other hand, people in P-Time cultures deal with time holistically. They are likely to do many things at the same time without planning deadlines, so the jobs have the urgency of the moment. Moreover, as people in P-time cultures consider relationships as an important part of social interactions, they tend to focus on their relationship requirements (Beamer & Varner, 1995; Fatehi, 1996; Hall & Hall, 1987).

## **2.3 Intercultural Communication Barriers**

Communication skills and attitudes are explored in this study in order to determine the problems of intercultural communication.



### **2.3.1 Communication Skills**

Communication skills are important factors in communicating with other people successfully, especially those using other languages and coming from other cultures. All the four skills of communication—speaking, writing, listening, and reading—are very important in the communication process. Therefore, the ability to use them not only helps communication with other people become more effective but also helps us to integrate into other cultures more smoothly (Berlo, 1960; Jeffrey & Walton, 1995; Johnson, Mott, & Quible, 1996).

### **2.3.2 Attitudes**

The attitude towards self and the attitude towards the receiver are explored as intercultural communication barriers. Attitude towards self is very important because it can affect the source's attitude; when the source has a positive attitude towards him/herself, the source would have a highly favorable attitude towards him/herself. As a result, the source will have high self-esteem. In contrast, if the source has a negative attitude towards him/herself, his/her self-evaluation would cause a less favorable attitude towards him/herself. As a result, the source will have low self-esteem. Similarly, the attitude towards the receiver is also important because it can affect how a sender responds to the messages of a receiver because when the sender has a positive attitude towards the receiver, the sender is much less critical and more likely to accept the ideas of the receiver. However, if the sender has a negative attitude towards the receiver, the sender may denigrate or be more critical about the ideas of the receiver (Berlo, 1960; Eyre, 1979; กิติมา สุรสุนธิ, 2541).

## **2.4 Intercultural Adaptation**

There are four techniques of intercultural adaptation which help improve empathy, encourage feedback, acquire social and cultural knowledge, and increase contact.

### **2.4.1 Improving Empathy**

Empathy—the ability to experience, respond and understand other people's feelings, thoughts and actions—is very important for intercultural adaptation. When empathizing with others, people try to understand others' feelings, needs, and points of view. Improving the ability to empathize helps better understand others' communication, behaviors and cultures, and helps maintain personal relationships with other people. However, as it requires more effort to learn to empathize with other people, especially those who have a different cultural background, people should pay more attention to others' emotional expressions, become sensitive to the values and customs of other cultures, and improve their recognition of the similarities between their own and others' cultural backgrounds (Dodd, 1998; Gudykunst, 1994; Porter, Samovar, & Stefani, 1998; Verderber, & Verderber, 2001; Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 2005).

### **2.4.2 Encouraging Feedback**

Encouraging feedback is very important for intercultural adaptation because feedback from other people will reveal how people's behavior affects others and recognize which actions can produce positive or negative reactions from other people. Moreover, feedback from other people will also reflect how well other people are able to understand the message that is being conveyed. As a result, people can adjust their communication behaviors to meet others' needs more appropriately (Devito, 2004; Fatehi, 1996; Gudykunst, 1994; Porter, Samovar, & Stefani, 1998; Weaver, 1996; กิติมา สุรสนธิ, 2535).

### **2.4.3 Acquiring Social and Cultural Knowledge**

Acquiring social and cultural knowledge is another important means of intercultural adaptation because learning about different social and cultural norms facilitates the understanding of other cultures, in particular values and behaviors of people in those cultures. Moreover, understanding other people's social and cultural norms can contribute to more effective interaction with them (Guirdham, 2005; Hargie, 1997; Porter, Samovar, & Stefani, 1998).

### **2.4.4 Increasing Contact**

Increasing contact is also crucial for intercultural adaptation. Increasing the frequency with which people communicate with others can help them better understand others' feelings, thoughts and actions. As a result, communication barriers will be overcome, and personal relationships will be developed and maintained. However, some people think that avoiding increased contact with other people or ignoring problems would be better because they think that they will become more anxious and get stressed when communication is not successful. Moreover, if they still leave a line of communication open afterwards, the problems will be more serious (Dodd, 1998; Gudykunst, 1994; Porter, Samovar, & Stefani, 1998).

## **3. Procedures**

### **3.1 Subjects**

The population for this study consisted of American, Japanese and Thai employees who are working in international organizations in Thailand. According to the Ministry of Labor (2007), at the end of 2006, 7,234 American and 22,976 Japanese employees received work permits in Thailand. However, since there is no record for Thai employees working in international organizations in Thailand, a sample population of Thai employees is unavailable for this study.

To determine the size of the sample in this research, the method of determining the sample size is that used by Taro Yamane. The precision level used in this research

is  $\pm 5\%$ , so the whole population to be sampled for this research should be at least 400 people (ชานินทร์ คิลจารุ, 2548). Therefore, the entire sample of 402 people was divided into 134 American employees, 134 Japanese employees, and 134 Thai employees.

### **3.2 Materials**

Questionnaire and personal interviews were used as the primary methods of data collection in this study. As the subjects consisted of American, Japanese and Thai employees, the questionnaires used were in English, Japanese, and Thai. Interviews conducted with the American and Japanese subjects were in English, and those conducted with Thai subjects were in Thai.

Documentary research was used to find out information as secondary data in order to satisfy the objectives of this study.

### **3.3 Procedures**

Quota sampling was used for obtaining samples in this study. 776 questionnaires in English, Japanese and Thai were distributed to American, Japanese and Thai employees who are working in 69 international organizations in Thailand. Then, three respondents (an American journalist, a Japanese employee from a travel agency, and a Thai employee working at a foreign embassy) were interviewed.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Quantitative and qualitative data were used for data analysis.

#### **3.4.1 Quantitative Analysis**

The findings of this study were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Science program (SPSS) version 12. Frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) both between groups and multiple comparisons (Tukey HSD) are presented in order to analyze the findings of the research.

A five-point Likert scale was used to analyze the questionnaire in terms of factors that affect intercultural communication success, intercultural communication barriers, and intercultural adaptation. The scores of the five-point rating scales for the positive questions range from 5-1 and the scores for negative questions range from 1-5.

#### **3.4.2 Qualitative Analysis**

Personal interviews were conducted in order to verify and support the findings of this study.



## 4. Results

The results of this study are divided into four parts: demographic characteristics, factors that affect intercultural communication success, intercultural communication barriers, and intercultural adaptations.

### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics

1. The majority of American and Japanese respondents are male, while that of Thai respondents are female.
2. Most American and Thai respondents are 21-30 years old, while Japanese respondents are 31-40 years old with a Bachelor's degree.
3. The majority of the foreign colleagues of American and Japanese respondents are Thai while most of the foreign colleagues of Thai respondents are Japanese.
4. As most of the foreign colleagues of Japanese respondents are Thai, one third of them used the Thai language to communicate at work. Meanwhile, the majority of American and Thai respondents used English to communicate with their foreign colleagues.
5. Most American, Japanese and Thai respondents have taken language courses in order to communicate with their foreign colleagues more efficiently.
6. The majority of American, Japanese and Thai respondents have worked with foreigners before working in their current organizations and have foreign friends.

### 4.2 Factors that Affect Intercultural Communication Success

The results of relationships, communication climates and time are as follows:

Table 1 presents the perception of relationships of American, Japanese and Thai respondents. It was found that even though American, Japanese and Thai respondents have neutral relationships with their colleagues receiving 2.94, 2.66 and 3.00, respectively, Thai respondents seem to have better relationships. Moreover, the findings of the F-test at 11.085 and *p-value* at .000 reveal that the perception of American, Japanese and Thai respondent in terms of relationships differs significantly.

**Table 1 Relationships**

Factors that Affect Intercultural Communication Success	$\bar{X}$			F-test	p- value
	American	Japanese	Thai		
Relationships	2.94	2.66	3.00	11.085	.000*
1. You avoid showing your disagreement with your colleagues in order to maintain your relationship with them.	2.82	2.36	2.96	13.723	.000*
2. You pay attention to preserving a relationship with your colleagues rather than getting a job done.	2.56	3.04	2.84	8.668	.000*
3. To get a job done, you strictly follow the policy of the organization without considering your colleagues' feelings.	3.37	2.90	3.57	19.101	.000*
4. In your organization, confrontation is considered beneficial in dealing with any problems at work.	3.00	3.24	2.62	12.083	.000*

\* significance level of .05 (p=0.05)

Table 2 presents the perception of communication climates of American, Japanese and Thai respondents. It was found that even though American, Japanese and Thai respondents feel that communication climates in their organizations are neutral (3.28, 2.89 and 2.96, respectively), American respondents seem to perceive better communication climates in their organizations than Thai and Japanese respondents. Moreover, the results of the F-test at 15.720 and *p-value* at .000 reveal that the perception of American, Japanese and Thai respondents in terms of communication climates differs significantly.

**Table 2 Communication Climates**

Factors that Affect Intercultural Communication Success	$\bar{X}$			F-test	p- value
	American	Japanese	Thai		
Communication climates	3.28	2.89	2.96	15.720	.000*
1. You prefer not to show your feelings if they are going to affect the working atmosphere.	3.31	3.18	3.66	8.340	.000*
2. Most of your colleagues are likely to hide their feelings in order to keep an appropriate working environment.	3.57	3.22	2.99	12.863	.000*
3. Most of your colleagues are likely to show their feelings explicitly.	3.49	2.76	2.86	25.948	.000*
4. In your organization, being direct and straightforward is considered more beneficial than speaking indirectly	2.77	2.39	2.35	7.292	.001*

\* significance level of .05 (p=0.05)

Table 3 describes the results of time perception of American, Japanese and Thai respondents. It was found that even though American, Japanese and Thai respondents are good at dealing with time (3.50, 3.88 and 3.96, respectively), Thai respondents seem to be the best at dealing with time of the three groups. Moreover, the findings of the F-test at 22.110 and *p-value* at .000 reveal that the perception of American, Japanese and Thai respondents in terms of time perception differs significantly.



**Table 3 Time**

Factors that Affect Intercultural Communication Success	$\bar{X}$			F-test	p- value
	American	Japanese	Thai		
Time	3.50	3.88	3.96	22.110	.000*
1. You are always punctual for work and stick to deadlines for your assignments.	4.19	3.83	4.17	8.70	.000*
2. You think being late is one of the main problems at work.	3.36	3.78	4.29	27.298	.000*
3. You think the time factor plays only a minor part in job achievement.	3.13	4.10	3.92	42.178	.000*
4. Focusing on time is the barrier of creative thinking at work.	3.34	3.81	3.46	9.018	.000*

\* significance level of .05 (p=0.05)

Table 4 explains the significance of perceptions of factors that affect the intercultural communication success of American, Japanese and Thai respondents in terms of relationships, communication climates and time. It was found that even though American, Japanese and Thai respondents perceive factors that affect intercultural communication success differently at a significance level of .001, Thai respondents seem to be more successful than American and Japanese employees.

**Table 4 Factors that Affect Intercultural Communication Success**

Factors that Affect Intercultural Communication Success	$\bar{X}$	SD	F-Test	p-value
Nationalities			6.680	.001*
American	3.24	.42		
Japanese	3.14	.29		
Thai	3.31	.38		

\* significance level of .05 (p=0.05)

Table 5 illustrates the results of multiple comparisons among American, Japanese and Thai respondents in terms of factors that affect intercultural communication success. It was found that Japanese respondents perceive relationships with their colleagues differently from American and Thai respondents at a significance level of .05, and American respondents perceive communication climates and time differently from Japanese and Thai respondents at a significance level of .05.

**Table 5 Factors that Affect Intercultural Communication Success (Multiple Comparisons)**

Factors that Affect Intercultural Communication Success	$\bar{X}$	Mean Difference		
		American	Japanese	Thai
Relationships				
American	2.94		.277*	
Japanese	2.66			
Thai	3.00	.059	.337*	
Communication climates				
American	3.28		.395*	.319*
Japanese	2.89			
Thai	2.96		.076	
Time				
American	3.50			
Japanese	3.88	.376*		
Thai	3.96	.455*	.078	

\* significance level of .05 ( $p=0.05$ )

### 4.3 Intercultural Communication Barriers

The findings of communication skills and attitudes are presented as follows:

Table 6 presents the results of American, Japanese and Thai respondents in terms of communication skills. It was found that even though American, Japanese and Thai respondents are good at communication skills (3.86, 3.45 and 3.49, respectively), American respondents seem to have better overall communication skills. However, the results of the F-test at 22.433 and *p-value* at .000 reveal that American, Japanese and Thai respondents differ significantly in facing problems of communication skills.

**Table 6 Communication Skills**

Intercultural Communication Barriers	$\bar{X}$			F-test	p- value
	American	Japanese	Thai		
Communication skills	3.86	3.45	3.49	22.433	.000*
1. You are confident to talk with your foreign colleagues.	4.35	3.30	3.69	64.813	.000*
2. You understand what your foreign colleagues want to communicate with you.	4.14	3.51	3.73	26.845	.000*
3. You can explain to your foreign colleagues to understand what you want.	4.08	3.49	3.72	20.426	.000*
4. You find writing more effective than speaking in communicating with your foreign colleagues.	3.33	3.52	3.12	5.497	.004*
5. You have problems interpreting what your foreign colleagues want to communicate with you.	3.41	3.43	3.20	2.335	.098

\* significance level of .05 (p=0.05)

Table 7 illustrates the results of attitudes towards self and others of American, Japanese and Thai respondents. It was found that even though American, Japanese and Thai respondents have good attitudes (3.97, 3.53 and 3.42, respectively), American respondents seem to have the best attitudes of the three groups. However, the results of the F-test at 74.793 and *p-value* at .000 reveal that American, Japanese and Thai respondents differ in their attitudes significantly.



**Table 7 Attitudes**

Intercultural Communication Barriers	$\bar{X}$			F-test	p- value
	American	Japanese	Thai		
Attitudes	3.97	3.53	3.42	74.793	.000*
1. You are open to different cultures.	4.63	4.21	4.13	31.672	.000*
2. You like to adapt yourself and try to understand people with different cultures.	4.58	3.93	4.06	41.960	.000*
3. You think understanding other cultures can help you to communicate with people who come from different cultures more effectively.	4.70	4.07	4.26	41.596	.000*
4. You think your foreign colleagues should learn your culture so that they can communicate with you more effectively.	2.51	2.07	1.71	34.117	.000*
5. You think people who are in the minor cultures should adapt themselves to people who are in the major cultures.	3.45	3.37	2.96	9.230	.000*

\* significance level of .05 (p=0.05)

Table 8 reveals the significance of facing problems of intercultural communication for American, Japanese and Thai respondents in terms of communication skills and attitudes. It was found that even though American, Japanese and Thai respondents face problems of intercultural communication differently at a significance level of .000, American employees seem to face fewer problems in intercultural communication than Japanese and Thai respondents.

**Table 8 Intercultural Communication Barriers**

<b>Intercultural Communication Barriers</b>	$\bar{X}$	<b>SD</b>	<b>F-Test</b>	<i>p-value</i>
Nationalities			64.489	.000*
American	3.92	.36		
Japanese	3.49	.40		
Thai	3.46	.35		

\* significance level of .05 (p=0.05)

Table 9 illustrates the results of multiple comparisons among American, Japanese and Thai respondents in terms of intercultural communication barriers. It was found that American respondents have different problems in terms of communication skills and have differing attitudes from Japanese and Thai respondents at a significance level of .05.

**Table 9 Intercultural Communication Barriers (Multiple Comparisons)**

<b>Intercultural Communication Barriers</b>	$\bar{X}$	<b>Mean Difference</b>		
		<b>American</b>	<b>Japanese</b>	<b>Thai</b>
Communication skills				
American	3.86		.414*	.368*
Japanese	3.45			
Thai	3.49		.046	
Attitudes				
American	3.97		.443*	.550*
Japanese	3.53			.107
Thai	3.42			

\* significance level of .05 (p=0.05)

4.4 Intercultural Adaptation

The four techniques of intercultural adaptation: improving empathy, encouraging feedback, acquiring social and cultural knowledge, and increasing contact result in the following:

Table 10 shows the results of empathy improvement of American, Japanese and Thai respondents. It was found that even though American, Japanese and Thai respondents are good at improving their ability to empathize (4.05, 3.74 and 3.92, respectively), American respondents seem to be the best among the three groups. Moreover, the results of the F-test at 17.326 and *p-value* at .000 reveal that American, Japanese and Thai respondents differ in improving empathy significantly.

Table 10 Improving Empathy

Intercultural Adaptation	$\bar{X}$			F-test	<i>p- value</i>
	American	Japanese	Thai		
Improving empathy	4.05	3.74	3.92	17.326	.000*
1. When your foreign colleagues have problems at work, you are always willing to listen to and assist them.	4.39	3.87	4.18	31.033	.000*
2. When you have problems in communicating with your foreign colleagues, you always try to figure out what your weakness is and how to improve yourself.	4.01	3.74	4.09	11.552	.000*
3. When you have problems in communicating with your foreign colleagues, you always think that those problems arise from your foreign colleagues.	3.87	3.66	3.72	2.758	.065
4. In multi-cultural organizations, you assume that a person who has a lower status should adapt him/herself to a person who has a higher status.	3.95	3.69	3.67	4.067	.018*

\* significance level of .05 (p=0.05)



Table 11 presents the results of feedback encouragement of American, Japanese and Thai respondents. It was found that American and Thai respondents are better at encouraging feedback (4.32 and 4.21, respectively), while Japanese respondents are slightly worse at encouraging feedback (4.10). However, the results show that American respondents seem to be better at encouraging feedback than Japanese and Thai respondents. Moreover, the results of the F-test at 5.053 and *p-value* at .007 reveal that American, Japanese and Thai respondents differ significantly in encouraging feedback.

**Table 11 Encouraging Feedback**

Intercultural Adaptation	$\bar{X}$			F-test	<i>p- value</i>
	American	Japanese	Thai		
Encouraging feedback	4.32	4.10	4.21	5.053	.007*
1. When there are some problems in communication, you think that giving a chance to communicate, exchanging ideas, or asking about those problems will help improve understanding.	4.40	3.99	4.36	19.961	.000*
2. You think giving a chance in communicating and exchanging ideas in a work place may weaken the dominant power and waste time.	4.25	4.22	4.06	2.480	.085

\* significance level of .05 ( $p=0.05$ )

Table 12 shows the results of acquiring social and cultural knowledge of American, Japanese and Thai respondents. It was found that American and Thai respondents are good at acquiring social and cultural knowledge (3.79 and 3.42, respectively) while Japanese respondents are neutral (3.37). However, the results showed that American respondents seem to be better at acquiring social and cultural knowledge than Japanese and Thai respondents. Moreover, the results of the F-test at 25.130 and *p-value* at .000 reveal that American, Japanese and Thai respondents differ in acquiring social and cultural knowledge significantly.

**Table 12 Acquiring Social and Cultural Knowledge**

Intercultural Adaptation	$\bar{X}$			F-test	p- value
	American	Japanese	Thai		
Acquiring social and cultural knowledge	3.79	3.37	3.42	25.130	.000*
1. You think learning cultures of your foreign colleagues can help you to communicate with them more effectively.	4.48	3.99	4.16	2.337	.000*
2. You think it takes a long time to learn and adapt yourself to make friends with your foreign colleagues.	3.11	2.75	2.68	7.365	.001*

\* significance level of .05 (p=0.05)

Table 13 illustrates the results of increasing contact of American, Japanese and Thai respondents. It was found that even though American, Japanese and Thai respondents are good at increasing contact (3.97, 3.78 and 3.93, respectively), American respondents seem to be somewhat better than the other two groups. However, the results of the F-test at 3.833 and *p-value* at .022 reveal that American, Japanese and Thai respondents differ significantly in increasing contact.

**Table 13 Increasing Contact**

Intercultural Adaptation	$\bar{X}$			F-test	p- value
	American	Japanese	Thai		
Increasing contact	3.97	3.78	3.93	3.833	.022*
1. You think socializing more with your foreign colleagues improves your knowledge and leads to better communication.	4.21	3.92	4.22	8.221	.000*
2. In communicating with your foreign colleagues, you think avoiding conversation but using more writing will promote the most successful communication.	3.72	3.64	3.63	.397	.673

\* significance level of .05 (p=0.05)

Table 14 shows the significance of adapting to people from different cultures for American, Japanese and Thai respondents in terms of improving empathy, encouraging feedback, acquiring social and cultural knowledge and increasing contact. It was found that even though American, Japanese and Thai respondents adapt to people from different cultures differently at a significance level of .000, American respondents seem to feel more comfortable to adapt themselves to people from different cultures than Japanese and Thai respondents.

**Table 14 Intercultural Adaptation**

Intercultural Adaptation	$\bar{X}$	SD	F-Test	<i>p-value</i>
Nationalities			20.332	.000*
American	4.03	.38		
Japanese	3.75	.36		
Thai	3.87	.37		

\* significance level of .05 ( $p=0.05$ )

Table 15 illustrates the results of multiple comparisons among American, Japanese and Thai respondents in terms of intercultural adaptation. It was found that American, Japanese and Thai respondents improve empathy differently at the significance level of .05. American respondents encourage feedback differently from Japanese respondents at the significance level of .05, while both American and Japanese respondents are not significantly different from Thai respondents. American respondents acquire social and cultural knowledge differently from Japanese and Thai respondents at the significance level of .05. The American respondents increase contact differently from Japanese respondents at the significance level of .05, while neither American nor Japanese respondents are significantly different from Thai respondents.

**Table 15 Intercultural Adaptation (Multiple Comparisons)**

Intercultural Adaptation	$\bar{X}$	Mean Difference		
		American	Japanese	Thai
Improving empathy				
American	4.05		.315*	.136*
Japanese	3.74			
Thai	3.92		.179*	
Encouraging feedback				
American	4.32		.220*	.115
Japanese	4.10			
Thai	4.21		.104	
Acquiring social and cultural knowledge				
American	3.79		.425*	.373*
Japanese	3.37			
Thai	3.42		.052	
Increasing contact				
American	3.97		.186*	.037
Japanese	3.78			
Thai	3.93		.149	

\* significance level of .05 ( $p=0.05$ )

## 5. Discussions and Conclusions

### 5.1 Discussions

Three main areas are discussed in this part: factors that affect intercultural communication success, intercultural communication barriers, and intercultural adaptation.

For relationships, the findings show that American, Japanese and Thai respondents perceive relationships in their organizations differently. It was found that American respondents consider work-orientation more important than preserving relationships with their colleagues. As a result, American respondents perceive relationships in their organizations as individualistic. Meanwhile, even though the Japanese prefer group-orientation and greater hierarchy in their society (Dunung, 1995; Fatehi, 1996; Gudykunst, Nishida, & Ting-Toomey, 1996), most Japanese respondents have more experience with foreigners, so they seem to have absorbed Western values in terms of independence of thought and action; as a result, Japanese respondents seem to be concerned about both job performance and developing relationships with their colleagues. Therefore, Japanese respondents seem to place the importance of relationships in between collectivist and



individualistic orientations. On the other hand, as Thai respondents consider relationship-orientation more important than professionalism at work, when there are problems at work, Thai respondents are likely to compromise and avoid confrontation in order to maintain relationships with their colleagues. As a result, Thai respondents perceive relationships in their organizations as collectivist.

According to communication climates, the results indicate that American respondents perceive communication climates in their organization differently from Japanese and Thai respondents. For American respondents, it was found that American respondents consider being direct and straightforward beneficial at work; they tend to show their feeling explicitly and go to the point directly so that they seemed to feel more comfortable to show their disagreement with their colleagues. However, it was found that since most of the American respondents' foreign colleagues are Thais who consider showing strong emotions to be inappropriate behavior, American respondents sometimes avoid showing their feelings in a straightforward manner in order to keep the working atmosphere pleasant. Therefore, American respondents perceive communication climates in their organizations in between a supportive and a defensive one. On the contrary, it was found that Japanese and Thai respondents consider harmony and face-saving more important in working with other people. They tend to speak indirectly and avoid showing disagreement in order to relieve tension in some situations so that they seem to lack openness and become suspicious about whether they can trust others' communication or not. Therefore, Japanese and Thai respondents perceive communication climates in their organizations as a defensive climate.

Regarding the concept of time, the results illustrate that American respondents tend to deal with time differently from Japanese and Thai respondents. It was found that American respondents perceive time as important in job achievement. They are likely to finish whatever they do as soon as possible, so they tend to be irritated with colleagues who are late for work appointments. Therefore, American respondents perceive time as Monochronic. Conversely, it was found that Japanese and Thai respondents think that time is not an important factor in job achievement. They tend to deal with time flexibly, so they do not feel pressured to finish a job immediately. As a result, Japanese and Thai respondents perceive time as Polychronic.

For communication skills, the results indicate that Japanese respondents seem to use communication skills differently from American and Thai respondents. For American respondents, it was found that as the majority of American respondents use English to communicate with their foreign colleagues, they are more confident to talk with their colleagues. Therefore, they consider speaking more effective than writing because speaking not only helps to get feedback immediately but also helps to observe the body language of one another. Meanwhile, Japanese respondents tend to use a minimum of words as much as possible. Moreover, only one-third of Japanese respondents use Japanese to communicate at work, so they consider writing as more effective than speaking. As a result, nonverbal communication is more effective in communicating with Japanese respondents. On the other hand, though Thais are afraid of not being able to speak second languages

(Holmes, Suchada Tangtongtavee, & Tomizawa, 1995; McGregor & Toews, 1998; Kriengsak Nirapattanasai, 2005), the majority of Thai respondents have taken language courses, have worked with foreigners before working in their current organizations and have foreign friends so they are more confident to communicate with their foreign colleagues. Therefore, Thai respondents consider speaking more effective than writing in communicating at the workplace.

Concerning attitudes, the findings illustrate that American respondents seem to have different attitudes from Japanese and Thai respondents. It was found that American respondents think that everyone should be open and treated equally with each other rather than submitting to each other. However, because American respondents are a minority of those working in Thailand, they tend to think that they should adapt themselves to Thai people who are the majority even if they have to make a greater effort. Meanwhile, though the Japanese and Thais are careful to build relationships with people with whom they are not familiar (Dunung, 1995; Leppert, 1992; McGregor & Toews, 1998; Mente, 1981), the majority of Japanese and Thai respondents have more experience with foreigners, so they have gradually adapted to foreign cultures. Therefore, Japanese and Thai respondents seem to be open and adapt to those cultural differences and feel more appreciative if their foreign colleagues try to learn and adapt to their cultures.

Regarding empathy, the findings show that American, Japanese and Thai respondents differ in their ability to empathize with other people. It was found that since Americans value equality and individualism (Beamer & Varner, 1995; Chaney & Martin, 2000; Fatehi, 1996; Ferraro, 1990), American respondents are not likely to expect others to “come up or down” to their level. So, American respondents tend to give their support to their colleagues whether they are considered “lower” or “higher” status. Nevertheless, the Japanese consider seniority very important in their society (The Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Japan, 1994; Hall & Hall, 1987), so Japanese respondents tend to give priority to their seniors and people of their own culture rather than their foreign colleagues who are considered as outsiders. On the contrary, since Thais are collectivist (Holmes, Suchada Tangtongtavy, & Tomizawa, 1995; McGregor & Toews, 1998; Kriengsak Nirapattanasai, 2005), Thai respondents tend to pay attention not only towards maintaining relationships with other people but also to superior relationships. Therefore, when there are problems at work, Thai respondents seem to feel uncomfortable in showing their opinions to these with their seniority because this not only shows that they do not respect the superiors’ opinions but also shows that they do not know who are in subordinate or superior positions.

Regarding encouraging feedback, the results indicate that Japanese respondents seem to encourage feedback differently from American and Thai respondents. It was found that American respondents consider discussing problems immediately to be very important. Meanwhile, Japanese respondents value seniority and tend to keep quiet and listen, so they are likely to think that showing their opinions weakens the seniority system and is a waste of time. On the contrary, it was found that even though Thai people consider showing ideas or disagreement as a negative trait (Holmes, Suchada Tangtongtavy, & Tomizawa, 1995;



McGregor & Toews, 1998; Sinha, 2000), most Thai respondents have more experience with foreigners, so they are more familiar with the assertiveness of Western culture. Therefore, Thai respondents seem to feel more confident to discuss and exchange ideas with each other.

In addition, the results show that American respondents seemed to acquire social and cultural knowledge differently from Japanese and Thai respondents. It was found that even though the Americans are not likely to develop close relationships with other people (Copeland & Schuster, 2006; Hodge, 2000), American respondents are likely to spend time learning the lifestyles of their foreign colleagues. As a result, American respondents seem to get along with their foreign colleagues more easily. According to the Japanese respondents, even though the Japanese consider socializing very important in working with other people (Hall & Hall, 1987; Mente, 1981), Japanese respondents tend to socialize with people in their own group rather than with their foreign colleagues. As a result, Japanese respondents seem to spend more time adapting themselves to their foreign colleagues. Also, as Thais consider relationships very important in doing business (Klausner, 1993; McGregor & Toews, 1998), Thai respondents are likely to go out and develop relationships with other people. Therefore, Thai respondents tend not to take much time to adapt themselves to their foreign colleagues.

Finally, the findings illustrate that Japanese respondents seem to increase contact differently from American and Thai respondents. Even though Americans would rather spend little time talking about personal issues in a workplace (Copeland & Schuster, 2006; Hodge, 2000), American respondents tend to spend time socializing with their foreign colleagues in order to communicate with their foreign colleagues more effectively. Nevertheless, it was found that even though the Japanese think that socializing and drinking after work can foster relationships with others (Hall & Hall, 1987; Mente, 1981), Japanese respondents seem to be more comfortable spending their personal time going out with their own group rather than with their foreign colleagues. On the other hand, it was found that even though Thais are likely to insist on getting to know other people if they don't know them well (Klausner, 1993; McGregor & Toews, 1998), Thai respondents tend to socialize more with their foreign colleagues in order to become more acquainted with them and develop personal relationships with them.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

### **5.2.1 Factors that Affect Intercultural Communication Success**

The findings explain the significance of perceptions of factors that affect the intercultural communication success of American, Japanese and Thai respondents in terms of relationships, communication climates and time. It was found that Thai respondents seem to be more successful than American and Japanese respondents. The results demonstrate that Thai respondents seem to consider relationships as very important in working with

other people. They believe that if their relationship with their colleagues is not good, it is very difficult to get a job done easily. As a result, they tend to hide their real feelings or their disagreement in order to make people around them feel happy. Moreover, it was found that even though Thai respondents feel uncomfortable in focusing on time and push for a job to be finished immediately, they tend to be punctual for work and job assignments. As a result, Thai respondents tend to deal with time more comfortably.

### **5.2.2 Intercultural Communication Barriers**

The findings explain the significance of facing the problems of intercultural communication for American, Japanese and Thai respondents in terms of communication skills and attitudes. It was found that American respondents seem to face fewer problems in intercultural communication than Japanese and Thai respondents. The results illustrate that American respondents seem to be better at communication skills than Japanese and Thai respondents because most American respondents used English to communicate at the workplace, so they have few problems in speaking, listening, reading or writing. Moreover, American respondents believe that understanding their foreign colleagues' cultures is very important in working with people from different cultures, so they are more likely to be open and adapt to their foreign colleagues. As a result, it was found that American respondents seem to have more positive attitudes towards themselves and other people than Japanese and Thai respondents.

### **5.2.3 Intercultural Adaptation**

The findings explain the significance of adapting to people from different cultures for American, Japanese and Thai respondents in terms of improving empathy, encouraging feedback, acquiring social and cultural knowledge and increasing contact. It was found that American respondents seem to feel more comfortable in adapting themselves to people from different cultures than Japanese and Thai respondents. The results explain that American respondents agree that trying to adapt to people from different cultures is essential in working in a multi-cultural environment, so they are more willing not only to improve their ability to empathize with their foreign colleagues, but also to spend time socializing with their foreign colleagues in order to learn and understand them much more.

## **5.3 Recommendations for Further Research**

1. It is advised that a study of the perceptions of foreigners working in Thailand towards communication behaviors of their Thai colleagues is very useful so that the researcher will know how people from different cultures perceive the Thai communication behaviors.
2. The findings reveal that conflict management and conflict resolution should be investigated. Because each organization has many people from different cultures working together, different management as well as different resolutions must be used and implemented in order to resolve the conflict in a useful and effective way.



3. It is suggested that a comparative study be conducted because, at present, there are many nationalities doing business in Thailand, so problems of cultural differences are likely to arise all the time. Therefore, to study the comparison of intercultural communication between Thai and other nationalities employees would be very useful.

4. Due to the influence of increasing globalization, the results of the study are constantly changing depending on different aspects and situations. Therefore, more respondents and more personal interviews should be included on similar issues in order to verify the results.

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