

Cross-cultural Management: Case Study of Holley Electric Group (Thailand) Co., Ltd.

Li Renliang*

Abstract

Along with the implementation of China's going-abroad policy in 2000, more and more Chinese enterprises have come to invest in Thailand, which is one of the most ideal overseas investment destination, and by the end of 2012, China has become the second largest foreign investor in Thailand, only next to Japan. According to an incomplete statistics, there were more than eighty Chinese companies, including some world famous companies, invested in Thailand. However, among these companies, only few of them made successful, and Holley Electric Group (Thailand) Co., Ltd. is the best one.

Holley Company Electric (Thailand) Group Co., Ltd. set up in Amata Industrial Park, Chonburi, Thailand in 2000. The company is composed of 352 employees, only 2 come from China. Its main products are power metering instruments and power automation system, which occupies 80% of Thai market share and with 1 million sets of power meters sold in global markets.

In many foreign consumers' minds, products made in China are cheaper with low-quality, especially electrical and electronic wares. Consumers in ASEAN region, including in Thailand, are normally prefer to use commodities from Japanese rather than those from China. However, Holley Company as the most successful going-abroad company changed people's thinking with its successful story.

* School of Social and Environmental Development, National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA)
118 Moo 3, Serithai Road, Klong-Chan, Bangkok, Bangkok 10240, THAILAND.
E-mail: lirenliang2511@hotmail.com

Holley's success are due to many factors, the most important one is a successful and effective Cross-cultural Management, which is worthy of being learned by other Chinese companies. Integrated Chinese organization culture into local Thai community, Holley has become itself as a member of the local community.

At its original operation, the management team at each level and technicians of this Chinese company are mainly composed of people who come from China, and manners of its management were Chinese style of which focused only on increasing productivity and improving service quality. However, this operating strategy brought a lower competition and higher turnover rate of employees.

After a bitter experience, the top leader changed his mind. He decided to hire some Thai employees into the management team and technical department of company. Currently, besides the chief accountant and the Chairman in Holley, all of other employees are Thai people. During the business operation, the Chairman of Holley Co. has been trying to learn to communicate with Thai employees, to understand the Thai culture and tradition, such as manners of thinking, living and working, and finally to create, cultivate and socialize the Holley culture. The success of Holley Co. has verified its correctness of this Cross-cultural Management.

Keywords: Foreign Investment, Cross-Cultural, Management, Organizational Culture

การจัดการข้ามวัฒนธรรม: กรณีศึกษา บริษัท ฮอลลี กรุ๊ป อิเลคทริก (ประเทศไทย) จำกัด

หลี่ เหวินเหลียง*

บทคัดย่อ

ด้วยนโยบายการส่งเสริมวิสาหกิจจีน “ก้าวออกไป” ลงทุนในต่างประเทศในปี 2000 มีวิสาหกิจจีนจำนวนมากมาลงทุนในประเทศไทยซึ่งเป็นประเทศเป้าหมายที่นักลงทุนจีนนิยมมาลงทุนมากที่สุดแห่งหนึ่ง จน ณ สิ้นปี 2012 ประเทศจีนกลายเป็นประเทศที่มาลงทุนในไทยมากเป็นอันดับสอง รองจากประเทศญี่ปุ่น ตามสถิติของสำนักงานคณะกรรมการส่งเสริมการลงทุน ระบุว่ามากกว่า 80 บริษัทจีนรวมถึงบริษัทที่มีชื่อเสียงระดับโลกมาลงทุนในประเทศไทยด้วย แต่อย่างไรก็ตาม ในบรรดาบริษัทเหล่านี้ มีเพียงไม่กี่บริษัทที่ประสบความสำเร็จและบริษัท ฮอลลี กรุ๊ป อิเลคทริก (ประเทศไทย) จำกัด เป็นหนึ่งบริษัทที่ประสบความสำเร็จมากที่สุด

บริษัท ฮอลลี กรุ๊ป อิเลคทริก (ประเทศไทย) จำกัด ก่อตั้งขึ้นเมื่อปี 2000 ที่นิคมอุตสาหกรรมอมตะ จังหวัดชลบุรี บริษัทมีพนักงาน 352 คน มีพนักงานคนจีนแค่ 2 คน ผลิตภัณฑ์หลัก คือ มิเตอร์ไฟฟ้าซึ่งครองตลาดไทยมากกว่าร้อยละ 80 ของตลาดมิเตอร์ไฟฟ้าและจำหน่ายไปยังประเทศต่าง ๆ ทั่วโลกมากกว่า 1 ล้านตัว

ความรู้สึกของผู้บริโภคต่างชาติต่อสินค้าจีนส่วนใหญ่เห็นว่าสินค้าจีนราคาถูก คุณภาพต่ำโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งเครื่องใช้ไฟฟ้า ผู้บริโภคในอาเซียนรวมถึงประเทศไทยด้วยมักจะนิยมใช้ผลิตภัณฑ์ญี่ปุ่นมากกว่าสินค้าจีน แต่บริษัท ฮอลลี กรุ๊ป อิเลคทริก (ประเทศไทย) จำกัด เป็นบริษัทจีนที่ไปลงทุนในต่างประเทศและได้เปลี่ยนความคิดของคนส่วนใหญ่ด้วยเรื่องราวที่ประสบความสำเร็จของบริษัท

* คณะพัฒนาสังคมและสิ่งแวดล้อม สถาบันบัณฑิตพัฒนบริหารศาสตร์
เลขที่ 118 หมู่ 3 ถนนเสรีไทย แขวงคลองจั่น เขตบางกะปิ กรุงเทพมหานคร 10240
อีเมล: lirenliang2511@hotmail.com

ความสำเร็จของบริษัท ฮอลลีย์ปิจัยหลายตัว แต่ปัจจัยที่มีนัยสำคัญที่สุด คือ จัดการข้ามวัฒนธรรมที่มีประสิทธิภาพและประสิทธิผล ซึ่งเป็นสิ่งที่มีคุณค่าสำหรับบริษัทอื่นจากจีนเข้ามาศึกษาเรียนรู้ บูรณาการวัฒนธรรมองค์กรจีนเข้ากับชุมชนไทย ทำให้บริษัทฮอลลีย์กลายเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของชุมชน

ในระยะแรก ๆ ของการดำเนินธุรกิจ ทีมผู้บริหารและช่างเทคนิคส่วนมากมาจากจีน วิธีการบริหารก็แบบจีนซึ่งให้ความสำคัญกับการเพิ่มผลผลิตและยกระดับคุณภาพการให้บริการ แต่ยุทธศาสตร์ดำเนินธุรกิจจีนทำให้ขีดความสามารถในการแข่งขันต่ำและอัตราการลาออกของพนักงานสูงมาก

ด้วยประสบการณ์ที่เพิ่มขึ้น ผู้บริหารระดับสูงเปลี่ยนความคิด เขาตัดสินใจจ้างพนักงานคนไทยดำรงตำแหน่งผู้บริหารระดับสูงและช่างเทคนิค ปัจจุบันนอกจากหัวหน้าฝ่ายบัญชีและประธานของบริษัทเป็นคนจีน พนักงานอื่นเป็นคนไทยหมด ในการดำเนินธุรกิจ ประธานของบริษัทพยายามเรียนรู้สื่อสารกับพนักงานคนไทย เข้าใจวัฒนธรรม ขนบธรรมเนียมไทย เช่น แนวความคิด วิถีชีวิตและวิธีทำงาน ในที่สุดสร้าง ชัดเกล้าวัฒนธรรมองค์กร ความสำเร็จของบริษัทฮอลลีย์ได้พิสูจน์ความถูกต้องของบริษัทในการจัดการข้ามวัฒนธรรม

คำสำคัญ: การลงทุนโดยตรงจากต่างประเทศ ข้ามวัฒนธรรม จัดการ วัฒนธรรมองค์กร

Introduction: Overview of Holley Group Electric (Thailand) Co., Ltd.

Holley Group, founded on September 28th, 1970, is a multi-industry corporation with Holley Worldwide Holdings, which is the parent company and its core business focused on pharmaceuticals. Holley has also involved in various businesses beside pharmaceuticals, such as power metering instruments and power automation system, wireless and wide-band telecommunication, electronic materials, real estate, agriculture, petrochemical and mining etc.

Established in the year of 2000, Holly group Electric (Thailand) Co., Ltd., as a subsidiary company of Holley group, is a professional meter manufactory in Thailand, worked as headquarter in Southeast Asia. Holley group has its own head office in Bangkok, but its factory area is around 8400 sqm in AMATA industrial zone, located in Chonburi, Thailand.

Holley Group (China) with 70% of capital investment and Amata Group (Thailand) with 30% of capital investment joined to develop Thai-Chinese Rayong Industrial Zone. The total programming area was 4 square kilometers under great support given by both China and Thailand governments. Rayong Industrial Zone was recognized as China's national overseas Economic & Trade Cooperation Zone in 2006 ---it also became an industrial center and manufacture & export base for Chinese traditional industry, and eventually was formed as a modernized comprehensive zone for manufacture, exhibition, storage and logistics, commercial and living integrated as a whole. With the greater location advantages, convenient transportation, perfect infrastructure facility, the preferential policies and the one-stop service, Rayong Industrial Zone becomes the best choice for Chinese enterprises' investment in Thailand.

At present, there are total 41 Chinese companies invested in this Rayong Industrial Zone.

Holley's Main Products:

- 1) Integrated Management Automation System Automatic Meter Reading, as an integrated Management Automation System, is an efficient, economical and reliable all-in one solution for automatic meter reading and management.
- 2) Single-phase watt-hour meter, adopted the latest technology in the range of ferrous type induction meter, has been designed in a modular structure allowing for fewer components with the benefits of reduced cost and increased reliability. Servicing costs have been kept to a minimum due to the structure design and the wide measuring range, which ensure the accurate measurement at both low and high loads.



Automatic Meter Reading



Single-phase Watt-hour Meter

Holley's Achievements

Holley Group China has more than 44 years history in R&D, designing, manufacturing and service for meter. Holley Group adopts the essential technology on meter manufacturing of Holley Group China, and spends more than 14 years on developing their own factory-running experiences in Thailand. At present, the products of energy meter have been sold to Electricity of Thailand and many other Southeast Asia countries. Nowadays, Holley accounts for 80 percent of Thailand meter market and exports of 1 million meters per year around the world. In Thailand, Holley has already become the leading meter manufacturers, which will help this company to become the biggest electricity meter manufacturer worldwide to some extent.

Holley's products have gained a good reputation for the excellent quality, and Holley's products become more and more popular among oversea customers. The company strictly carries out the ISO9001 standard to exercise overall quality controls over its products, which as a result, has passed international certifications including CE; GS; TUV; EMC; RoHS and UL; FCC; ENERGYSTAR.

Holley's Obstacles

As we all know, Thai people usually love the products especially electrical appliances a lot from Japan, Europe, the United States, and Germany. In Thailand, Japanese companies has a long history of production, electrical appliances of Japanese company occupy most of the market.

However, China's products, such as electrical products, in the eyes of the majority of people in the world including the Thais', are cheap, low-quality, rough, not durable products and lack of good after-sale service. Therefore, generally, Thai people are more willing to spend a bit or even more money to buy Japanese electronic products rather than Chinese products.

Holley, when it first came to Thailand, Holley' managers, technical staffs were all Chinese people, they had no Thai language communication abilities. While, as for its employees, most of them were Thais, so they also couldn't understand the Chinese language, thus, the Chinese managers and Thai employees could not communicated with each other. Everyone worked in a non-understanding, mutual suspicion environment, due to the lack of understanding about Thailand's political, economic, cultural, and legal situation, its top manager who came from China could not manage the staff orderly, and the company's efficiency was very low, and the products also had some quality problems. Not many customers were willing to accept Holley products at the beginning. Cultural conflict was the biggest obstacle at that time. For example: Chinese workers worked very hard, efficiently, one day a person can produce 20 pieces of meter, but the Thais can only produce 10 pieces of meter, after work, Chinese workers were willing to work overtime, because they could get a free dinner and some extra money, but Thai people did not want to work

overtime. Chinese workers did not ask for leave, they could get one month of perfect attendance award, but Thai Workers often asked for leave to attend a friend's birthday party, weddings, funerals, and various Buddhist activities, so they not only could not get a bonus, but also deducted. These were cultural conflicts that Chinese workers could not understand and also were the problems which made Chinese managers headache.

Cultural Conflict

Culture reflects the way of life. Two different cultures can be reflected by two very different ways of living and thoughts, or by two different views of their own towards family, the state and economic systems. Culture such as greeting, office wear, social etiquette, customs, and social traditions and so on, was like an iceberg. The 10% out of the water part is relatively easy to identify, but the 90% of the hidden underwater part is really difficult to find, which is in fact the culture core, will produce the cultural differences, and it is reflected by and embedded in the heart of the basic concept of the culture values, beliefs and assumptions.

For overseas companies, cultural conflicts usually have a significant impact on their operation and management, which will be reflected in everywhere, such as in the general interests of business stakeholders, in the external business communication activities and in the internal staff management as well. Hence, in order to manage the overseas employees well, the top managers should pay sufficient attention to the cultural differences, try to understand rather than neglect. As known, the local employee is an important carrier of the local culture. So foreign managers will easily encounter this kind of cross-cultural conflicts especially in the process of communication and idea exchanging with the local employees, and those conflicts are usually turned out very direct and obvious.

If the managers are not good at cross-cultural management, cross-cultural conflicts will have a negative impact on overseas company's operation, and cause a series of problems at the different levels of management, those problems are as follows:

1) Tend to be conservative. Mild cultural conflicts affect the harmonious relationship between expatriate managers and local staff, which makes overseas operators in the management of local staff rely on the rigid rules and regulations to control the operation of enterprises, and the staff feel more distant. Meanwhile, the staff will work to become more enterprising, and the managers of the Action Plan will feel more difficult to implement. The consequence is that both sides can't work effectively, and the social distance between both is further increased.

2) Communication is interrupted. If the social distance between managers and workers is increased, it will naturally impact on the communication between them. When this distance reaches a certain extent, bottom-up communication is interrupted. As the consequence, the top managers can't understand the real lower worker levels, corporate management can't be implemented, and the misunderstanding between both sides will be deepen.

3) Irrational reactions. If the managers can't properly understand these existing cultural differences, they may have some emotional or non-rational attitudes in treating the local workers. This irrational attitudes are very vulnerable to some irrational revenge employees, which result in deeper misunderstanding, then the antagonism and conflicts will become more intense.

4) Cultural predicament. Serious cultural conflicts can make organizational procedures disorder, information blocked, and responsibilities of various departments ignored, finally, the oversea company's management will be in trouble. Due to the performance requirements from the parent company, the subsidiary company will face more challenges. When this cultural conflicts develop to the extreme level, then the multinational companies may have to make divestment decisions, which may make global strategies of multinational companies in trouble.

Chinese – Thai Cultural Conflict Analysis

As we all said that China and Thailand are geographically closed to each other, and blood are interlinked. In Thailand, there are many Chinese People and Chinese descendants. On the surface, Chinese culture and Thai culture seem very similar. Someone may think that there is no cultural conflict between China and Thailand. In fact, Chinese culture and Thai culture are very different. The cultural conflict, for many Chinese companies, can be a big headache.

Facing enormous cultural conflict and cross-cultural communication barriers, Holley's Management staffs tried to find the differences between Thai culture and Chinese culture in deep level by consulting with both Thai and Chinese experts. They found a lot of cultural differences between Thai culture and Chinese culture, for example:

1) Chinese people work very fast and efficiently, but not all the products are not fine. However, Thai people work very carefully and finely. But the Chinese managers may feel Thai workers work very slowly, far below Chinese managers' expectations, and this feeling makes both sides unhappy.

2) May be due to the harsh natural conditions, Chinese people are used to working hard. However, Thai people are born with superior natural conditions, so Thai people like easy-going life, they do not like the pressure, if they feel pressured, they will resign and look for a new job, and they can find the new job easily.

3) Due to the great competition, Chinese people nowadays pay attention to the economic benefits, they used to work hard to earn money quickly. However, Thai people pay more attention on the interrelationship with friends and relatives, so they often participate in various activities, such as, birthday parties, weddings, funerals, and a variety of religious ceremonies.

4) Chinese people tend to think and plan in a longer term way, they enjoy planning the wages and position in the future. However, Thai people especially the workers, tend to consider the current interests only.

5) Both Chinese and Thai people focus on the superior-subordinate relationship, the lower level leaders are likely to follow their superiors' idea, but Thai people pay more attention on their "face", they can't accept the direct criticism, especially in front of lots of people.

Holley's Cross-culture Management Solution

The solution for oversea companies' cross-cultural management can be summarized into three cultural management modes, including overriding, assimilating and accommodating. Different cultural management models will have the different impacts.

Cultural overriding means to put one culture high above, and override another culture.

Cultural assimilation is the process that the relatively weak, backward culture and relative strength, advanced sound culture after contact, and gradually introducing advanced learning strong culture.

Cultural accommodation is the process that the newly exposed culture accommodates with the other one. In other words, tolerance of the other culture, without expecting it to conform.

Holley used the basic accommodation model in their case. The main reason is that the majority of the company's employees are Thais, Chinese managers are new comers, and the Chinese culture is a new culture here, so obviously Chinese culture can't override the Thai culture. And what's more, using Thai culture in the management can reduce the resentment of local workers. And as the top managers knew, cultural assimilation usually need a long time period, 10 years, 20 years or maybe even longer to conform to the new culture. So the Holley made its final decision to use the culture accommodation model. They then did the following steps:

Firstly, they implemented a localization strategy. All the technical staffs were withdrew back to China to focus on research and development in China. Only a general manager and a finance supervisor stayed in Thailand, the rest workers are

promoted Thais, and all the middle level managers are Thai people. Implementation of localization had many benefits, such as reducing language misunderstanding, which could reduce the cultural conflicts between Chinese managers and local workers. This strategy not only made the people psychological balance but also easily retained the local workers, and it is much easier to communicate with the local government.

Implementation of localization was of the primary reasons to achieve Holley's success. After this strategy is implemented, the communication between superiors and subordinates got well, Thai workers felt less pressure and they work more effectively. Then, the quality of products was improved greatly, which changed the traditional image of made-in-China products in Thailand. Watt-hour meters have been accepted by the Thai government.

Secondly, in order to encourage workers' attendance, Holley implemented the full attendance award system. Full attendance award is an assessment of workers within months, if workers do not be absent any day, they can get some 1,000 Baht incentives per month; and if they have an annual full attendance, the reward will be increased to 5,000 Baht. The reason to set full attendance award was also due to the consideration of Thailand's cultural background. Thai workers enjoy the pursuit, so very often after each payroll, many workers would not come to work in short time, but after all the money were spent, they would come back to work again. This culture will seriously affect the workers' attendance and the company's operation, which can make the production ineffective.

Thirdly, in the daily management, sought to emphasize harmony and avoid the sensitive topics and cultural conflicts. Knowing that Thais have strongly self-esteem, Holley tried to encourage the Chinese managers and local staff to exchange ideas and thoughts. And from real experiences, Chinese managers also learned that they can't criticize the Thai workers directly and loudly, otherwise the workers will resign and leave immediately, because it may damage their personal self-esteem.

Noticing the characteristics of the Thai people, Holley often organized the local workers to do some activities that they love, such as play basketball, karaoke OK, soccer etc. And the top and middle level managers would also attend the local worker's wedding ceremony, visit the sick and wounded worker. If the workers perform well in their job, manager would recognize their achievement openly in a public occasion. And for those who break the rule, Holley would ask the workers to resign instead of expelling them so as to save their faces.

Conclusion

Any enterprise operating abroad will encounter various problems, such as: language communication issue, legal issues and so on. This is what we called "cross-cultural communication problems". Cross-cultural communication plays a very important role for the success or failure of an enterprise. Therefore, the enterprise's top managers must be good at handling these cross-cultural communication problems.

Just like Holley, when they firstly came to invest in Thailand, they also encountered many cultural conflicts and cross-cultural communication problems. Holley took a series of decisive measure, including used the localization management, adjusted management system according to the characteristics of the Thai people, and emphasized the harmony in the daily management.

All these actions helped Holley Group to avoid cultural conflicts and achieve great success in Thailand, now Holley Group has become the world's largest meter manufacturers, but they continued to join with AMATA Group to invest and operate industrial zone in order to attract more Chinese enterprises to invest in this area. Holley Group has built a successful cross-cultural management story for Chinese enterprises to invest in the overseas.

Teaching Note

1. Case Overview

Holley Company Electric (Thailand) Group Co., Ltd., a Chinese company was set up in Amata Industrial Park, Chonburi, Thailand in 2000. It's main products were watt-hour meter.

At its original operation, the management team at each level and technicians of this Chinese company are mainly composed of people who come from China, and manners of its management were Chinese style of which focused only on increasing productivity and improving service quality. However, this operating strategy brought a lower competition and higher turnover rate of employees.

After a bitter experience, the top leader changed his mind. He decided to hire some Thai employees into the management team and technical department of company. Currently, besides the chief accountant and the Chairman in Holley, all of other employees are Thai people. During the business operation, the Chairman of Holley Co. has been trying to learn to communicate with Thai employees, to understand the Thai culture and tradition, such as manners of thinking, living and working, and finally to create, cultivate and socialize the Holley culture. The success of Holley Co. has verified its correctness of this Cross-cultural Management.

2. Learning Objectives

- 2.1 In order to explain some differences between Chinese culture and Thai culture.
- 2.2 In order to identify some characters of Chinese organizational culture.
- 2.3 In order to express the importance of culture in the business management.
- 2.4 In order to discuss some ways of cross-culture management.

3. Pedagogy

3.1 Audience of the case

The case was relevant to undergraduate, graduate students who studied in the fields of sociology and management as well as executive managers who worked in the multicultural environment.

3.2 prerequisites

No prerequisites for university students and managers.

3.3 Supplemental materials

Company profile: Holley Group Electric (Thailand) Co., Ltd.

<http://www.holley.co.th/eng/index.php>

Sanit Samakarn. (2003) Cultural Change and Societal Development. NIDA: Bangkok

4. Assignment Questions

Is the Chinese culture difference from the Thai culture?

What is the organizational culture?

Do you have some experience about conflicts of cross culture?

Do you know the meanings of the words “Accommodation” and “Assimilation”? can you give some examples?

Do you have some ideals how to resolve the cross culture conflicts?

5. Case Analysis

Case analysis focused on the cross culture management, a Chinese company was set up in Thailand, the managers and Thai workers had the different language, culture and working style, they could not communicate each other, these were the main problems. After carefully learning Thai culture, the managers made decision to solve the problems by cross culture management manners-assimilation and localization by employing the Thai managers to manage the Thai workers.

6. Teaching Plan

Totally 120 minutes:

- Class introduction 30 minutes, the key points of the case, who, when, what did the company do, what's the problems, how to resolve and result.
- Assignment questions, 30 minutes: discussion the questions, share the ideals.
- Supplemental teaching components, 15 minutes: Video introduction about the profile of the company.
- A board plan, 15 minutes: listing the topic: definition of the culture, definition of the organization culture, Chinese working style, Thai working style, the importance of the cross culture management.
- Epilogue, 15 minutes: accommodation and assimilation are two different concept. For this case, the top managers adapted and assimilated into the Thai society.

7. Conclusion

Cross culture management is very important in the transnational organizational management, so will greatly encourage the students to find and bring some interesting cross culture management cases to discussion in the class.

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