

# Geography has a significant impact assignment

[Sociology](#)



It is this intercultural communication and conflict that is much more visible given the heightened amount of travel that results from technological advance, and the ability to communicate with people many thousands of kilometers away that results from the rise of the internet. With so many different nations in the world today, and often many different cultures that exist within the borders of those nations, there is cause for concern.

It will be argued that geographic borders create significant barriers to communication. This essay will define the nation and some of the problems that can arise from the assignment of geographic borders as it will also explore the differences between cultural philosophies and the impact on communication such preferences can have, internally and externally. It should also be known that while there are other issues to cover, these shall not be included in order to provide a focused and concise essay.

Nations consist of, as defined by Peter Taylor [1989: 175], “ natural units with a cultural homogeneity based on common ancestry or history. ” Within these nations exist usually multiple cultures, layered on top of one another – the unifying factor is a common image presented to the external world. Tyler, Sense & Ryan [2005: 268] define culture as “ a society shared and systematic ways of living. ” Cultures exist and differ due to geographic isolation, usually imposed by either natural constraints or social constructs like the nation-state.

Communication between nations and thus cultures is significantly more important in today’s world than in ages past; with a climate of incoming economic globalization negotiation between states is common – and can be

significantly affected by cultural perceptions, ideologies, and context.

Cultural differences such as the perception of rights and the degree to which interdependence is emphasized (heavily in collectivist cultures, weakly or not at all in individualist cultures) can create miscommunication which are often not perceived by those communicating.

Using Taylor's definition of the nation [Taylor, 1989: 175], it is not difficult to see how barriers and conflicts could arise when communication across borders begins. Understanding is integral to effective communication and this can be difficult when, in a cultural sense, even basic things such as time can be perceived differently as can the context of the communication itself. Cohen explains the contrast between these two, often linked, examples of how cultures can differ, " In collectivist cultures, communication tends to be very context-sensitive.

Communication forms emphasize politeness, relationship-building, tact, and even indirectness. " Such indirectness is epitomized in the example Tyler, Sense, & Ryan use of the sign outside the library in the Republic of Korea - The sign reads, " There is much laughter and fun in our trees and park outside. " In an individualist culture such as the USA such a sign would have title place or purpose, yet in the Republic of Korea it is equivalent to a sign in the USA stating " Silence in the library. Individualist cultures rarely, if ever, place such an emphasis on the context of communication and within these cultures communication is much more direct in nature. Such differences can often create misunderstanding and when negotiating, it is important in today's world to confirm mutual understanding so that conflicts do not arise. Mutual understanding however is often not present between two differently

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located arties and a lack of cultural knowledge is often one of the major barriers to inter- cultural communication.

Many may not know that different cultures perceive even time differently – Cohen [1991] defines two main forms of chronological perception – monochromatic cultures that view time in a rather strict and ordered fashion emphasizing the future, and haste. The other being polyphonic cultures that place more emphasis on the past and living in the present. These are further defined – monochromatic cultures as “ low context” and polyphonic cultures as “ high context. ”

Symbolic gestures may be far more important to a high context culture than with a low context culture and historically there have been misunderstandings due to such cultural differences. Cohen describes an early part of I-IN-Chinese reconciliation that went awry after Chairman Mao had invited an American Journalist to stand by him on the Gate of Heavenly Peace – To Americans this was an obscure, unimportant gesture and there was little if any response to it, but it was a very important symbolic gesture by the Chinese who responded significantly [Cohen, 1991: 126].

The Astoria affair fleets such contextual differences in cultures presenting problems and being potential causes for conflict – in 1938 a Japanese ambassador to the USA had died and the US president at the time had ordered the ashes of this diplomat be returned to Japan immediately by way of the Ana cruiser, Astoria [Cohen, 1991 : 4-6]. To the Japanese this was a sign of immense respect and friendship, yet US policy at the time was in strong opposition to the Japanese government [Cohen, 1991 : 4-6].

Such problems can cause major issues between nations as what may seem like a mundane gesture by one party, can seem like a highly symbolic and deeply personal gesture to another. The existence of the nation-state and its continual fragmentation of human culture create significant barriers to communication. This is particularly evident in the way high context and low context cultures communicate with one another - but how can such issues be resolved?

It is easy to become complacent in regards to inter-cultural communication when we are safely assigned to our geographic location, and such complacency with regards to other cultures can be seen with the examples of the Astoria affair and the early difficulties in American-Chinese reconciliation. Mutual awareness must be a cornerstone of any intercultural communication and one should have knowledge of the cultural background of those that will be communicated with.