

Cross-cultural Communication and Management

Carolina Grünschloß, Ph.D.
SEBA, Beijing Normal University
carolina@bnu.edu.cn

16.09.2011





What is culture?



Culture is

what I consider normal.

The meaning of culture

- Culture is a shared system of meanings. It dictates what we pay attention to, how we act and what we value. Culture organizes such values into “mental programs”.
- Culture is the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas

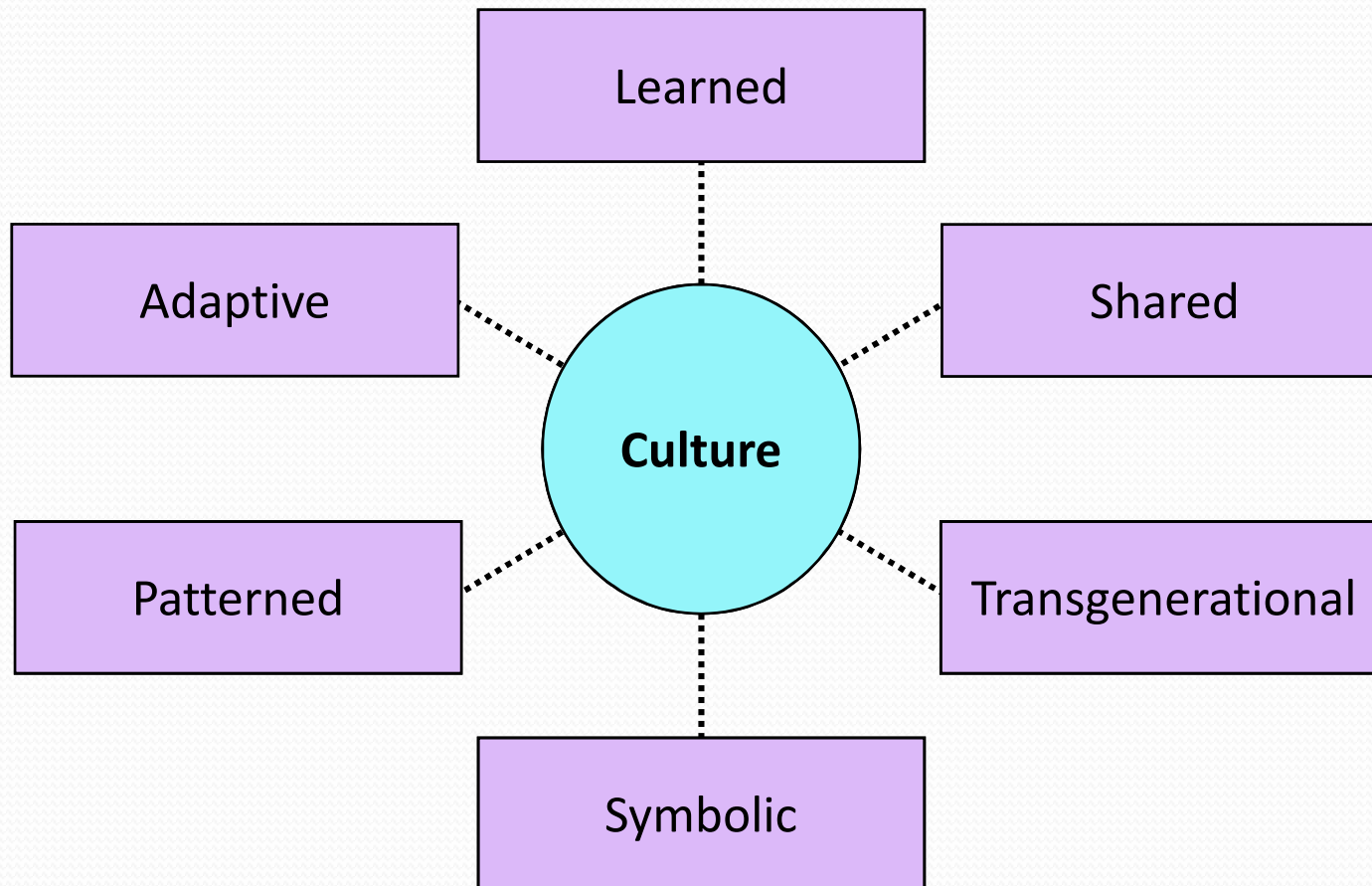




So what is culture?

- Culture is **man-made, confirmed by others, conventionalized and passed on for younger people or newcomers to learn.** It provides people with a meaningful context in which to meet, to think about themselves and face the outer world.
- Culture is the means by which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about attitudes towards life. Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action.

Characteristics of Culture

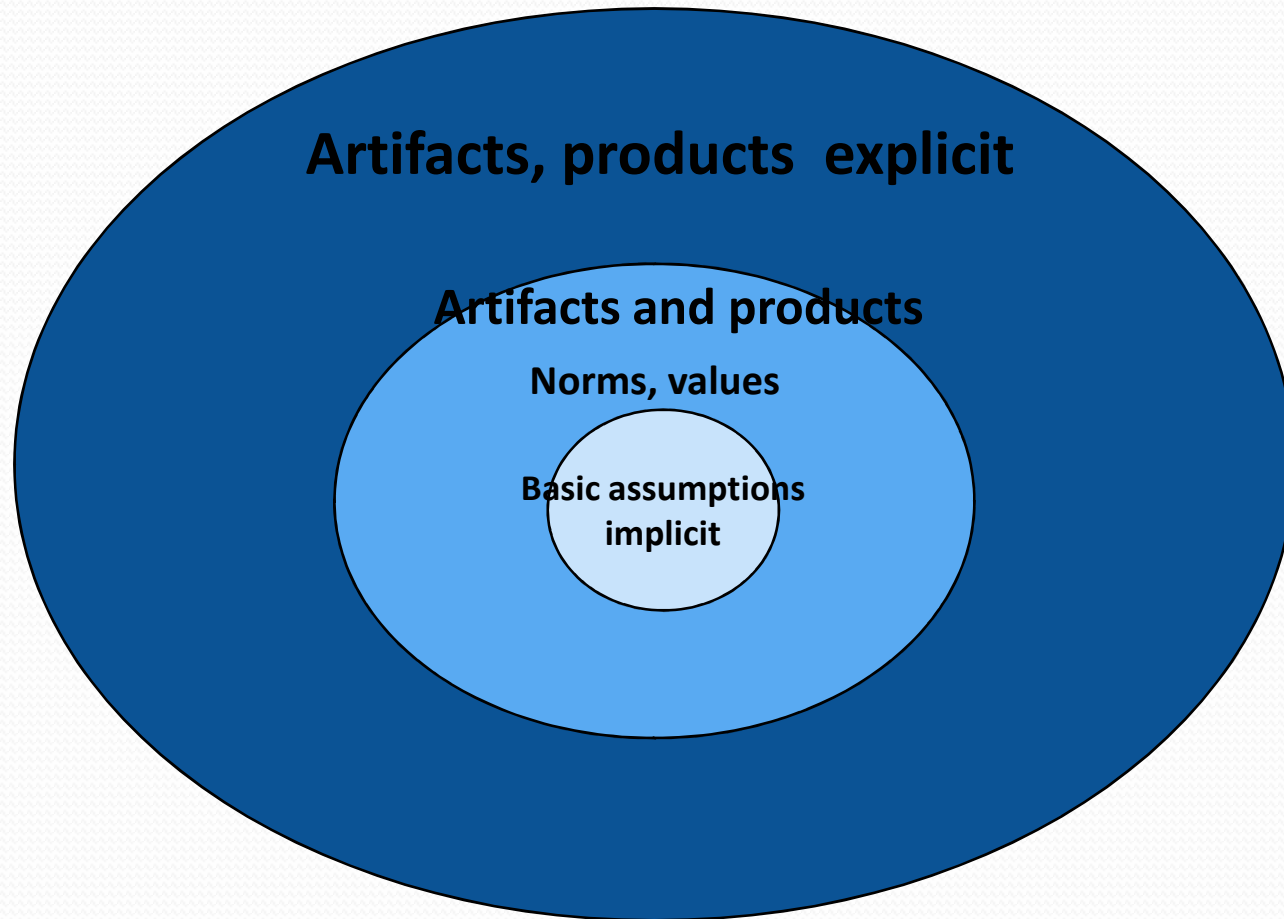


Culture as a metaphor

- Water to Fish, Air to Man
- Mental program
- Software of human being
- “Colored sunglasses”



A model of culture: onions





The layers of culture

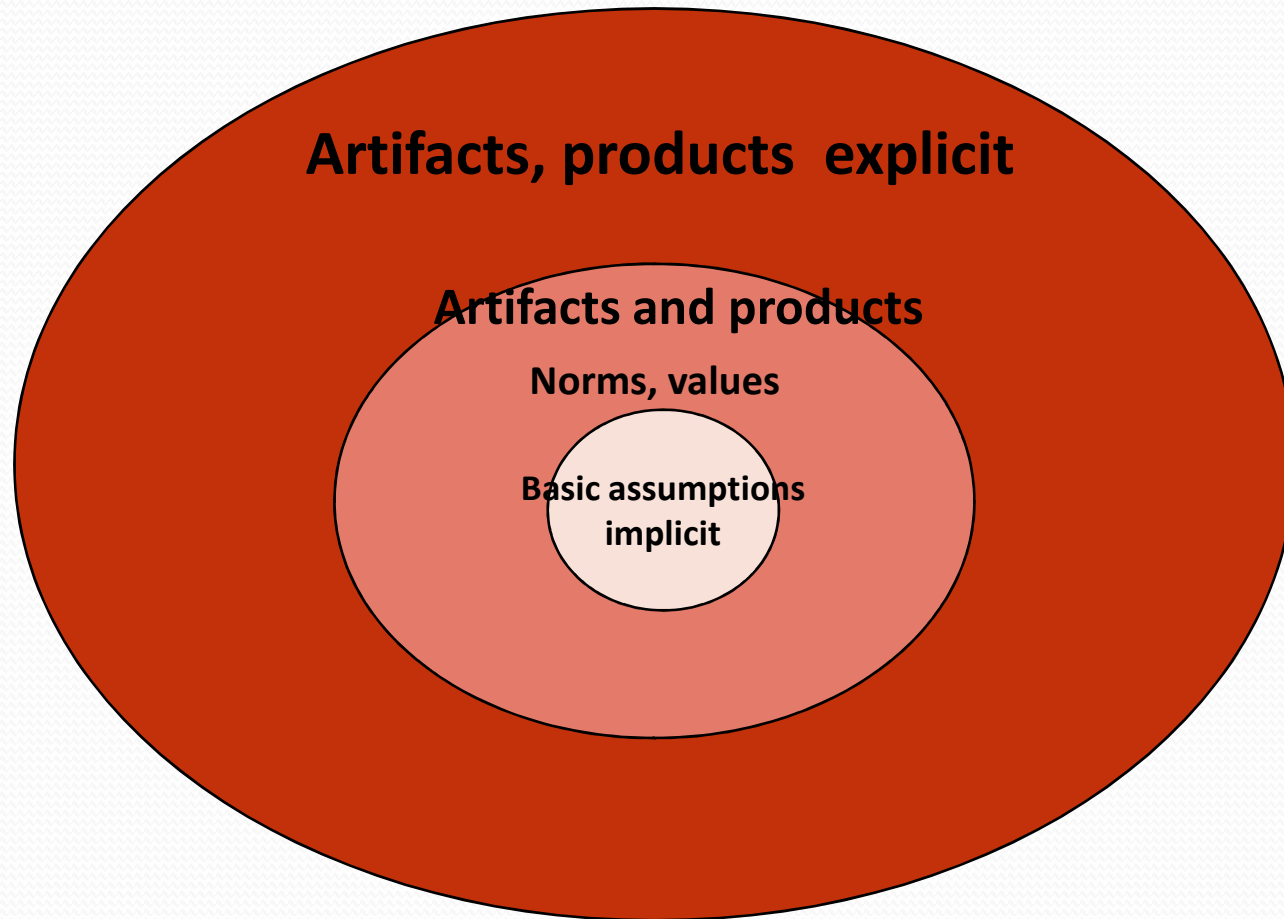
- **The outer layer: explicit products**
 - Explicit culture is the observable reality of the language, food, buildings, houses, monuments, agriculture, markets, fashions and art.
 - Each opinion we voice regarding explicit culture usually says more about where we come from than about the community we are judging



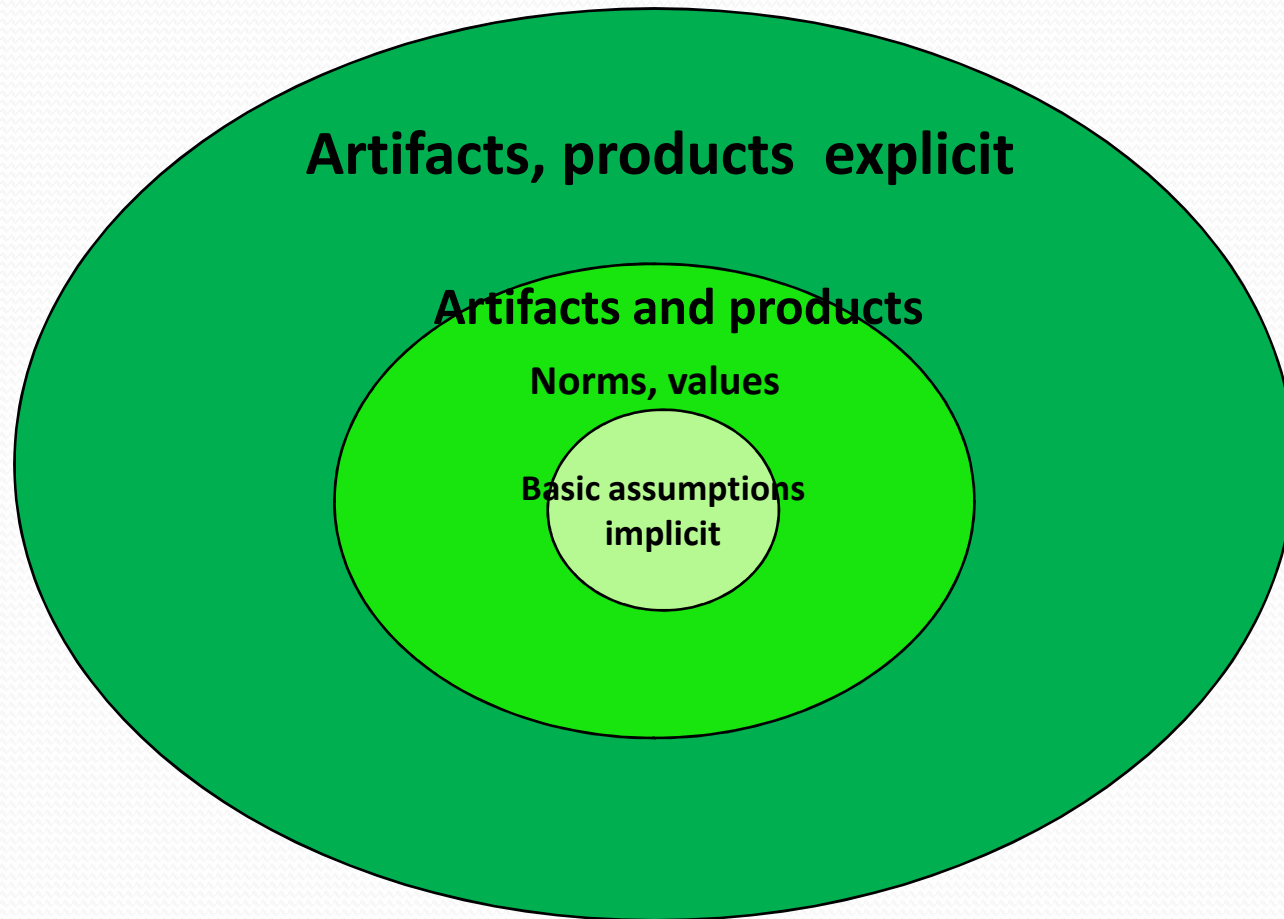
Layers of culture

- The middle layer: norms and values
 - Norms are the mutual sense a group has of what is “right” and “wrong”.
 - Values determine the definition of “good and bad,” and are closely related to the ideals shared by a group
 - Cultural values vs. cultural practice
- The core: assumptions about existence

Your country's onion?



The Chinese onion?



Interpreting a Smile

- It may be difficult for Western people to believe that smiling for the Chinese not only means that someone is happy but sometimes also means that someone is sorry for the error he/she has committed.



Interpreting a Smile

- It is desirable for a Chinese to apologize with a smile, which indicates humbleness and embarrassment.
- A belief in “a smile can kill anger” could account for the phenomenon that the Chinese smiles when he/she wants to apologize.



Girl or Woman

A Chinese teacher may refer to a group of female students in class as “girls”. This might sound offensive to some female students from abroad.



Girl or Woman?

Chinese perspective: In China, “girl” means someone who is young and single. “Woman” refers to the female who is married and might not be young. It is insulting to call the young females “women” in China.



Compliments

From time to time, compliments in one country are not those in another. (e.g. compliments about the beauty of a woman)



Misunderstanding of Compliments

A foreign teacher & a Chinese student are at a party)

- Dear Lisa, you look very pretty tonight.
- No, no...(shyness)
- Yes, really beautiful.
- No, I'm not!... (shyness grows stronger)



Making an Appointment?

- Many Chinese sometimes drop in their friends' home without an appointment. It doesn't mean that they are rude but indicates the close relationship between true friends.
- Some people are overjoyed to have friends roll up uninvited; others regard unexpected visits as a violation of privacy.



"Oh, you meant come by at seven o'clock in the evening."

Dropping in



- In China, if someone drops in uninvited, it isn't rude to say you'd love to see him but it's not a good time.
- However, a relation who drops in deserves more tolerance than a dropping-in neighbor.

Hospitality - Overdone or Underdone

Chinese hospitality -
overdone:

As a very hospitable people, the Chinese attach a lot of importance to taking care of their guests. They would try to help their guests with almost everything and feel bad if a guest had any complaint.



Overdone hospitality



The Chinese host would try his best to persuade the guests to eat more than they could. This would be a great show of the hospitality and the perfect respect to the guests.

The importance of gifts

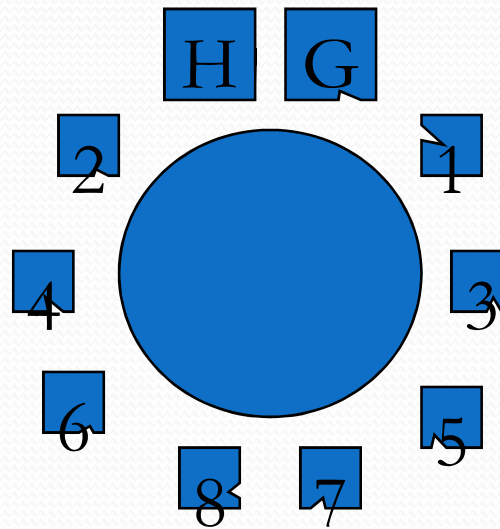


- In China, sending a gift to a guest, sometimes, is a devotion to show one's sincere thanks or best wishes to others.
- Gifts are given a high consideration and are usually carefully chosen.

Table Manners

Round Table:
(Chinese)

Sometimes the
hostess of the family
would not sit at the
table with the
guests.



(Door)



Use of Chopsticks

- Misuse of chopsticks:

- 1) Never erect the chopsticks in the bowl (It is a ritual for the respect of the dead),
- 2) Never cross the chopsticks on the rim of the bowl,
- 3) Don't suck the chopsticks,
- 4) Don't move the chopsticks to point the others at the table,
- 5) Don't use the chopsticks as other tools.

Eating noodles

Chinese noodle eating

- 1) Making noise while eating is accepted
- 2) noodles are said to be cooled by slurping in slowly
- 3) it is an indication that people are enjoying the meal.

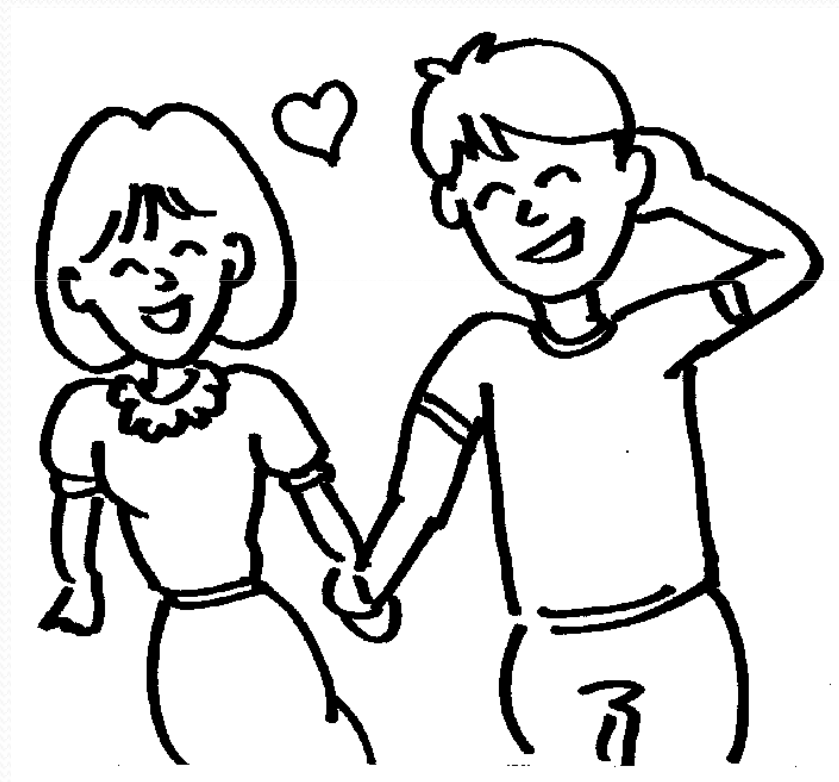


Romance and dating

Conversation between a Chinese girl and a Western boy:

- “What do you want to do?”
- “Whatever you want to do.”
- “Where to go today?”
- “Up to you.”

...



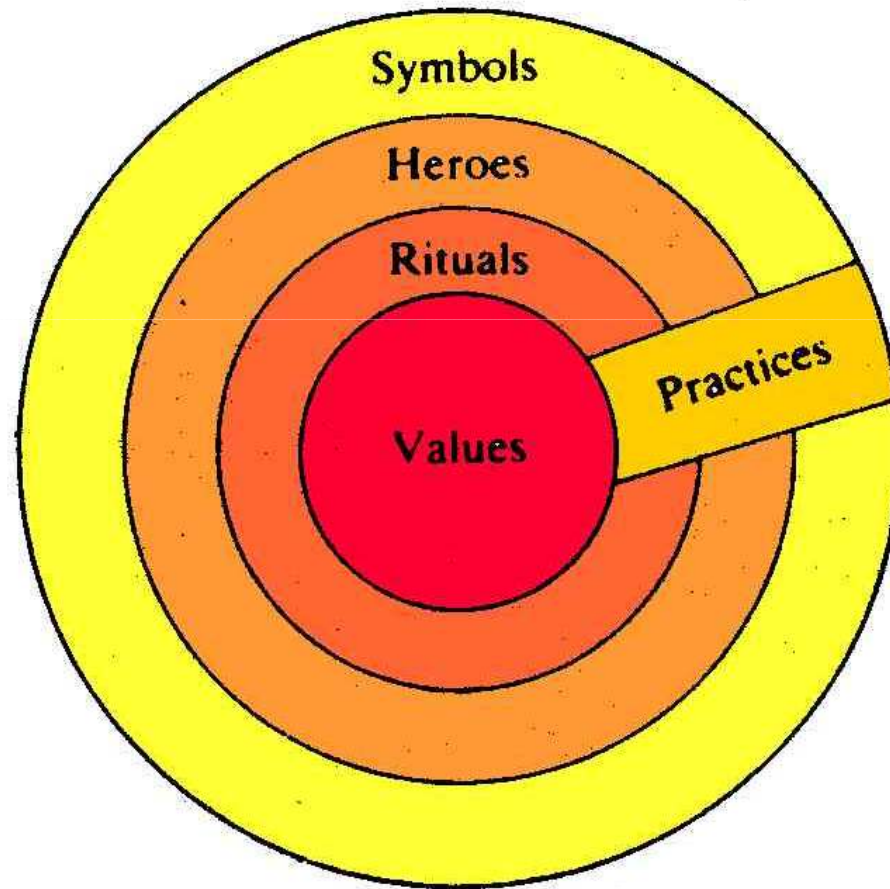


Romance and dating

Chinese perspective:

- In China, highly considering the opinion of others is common in order to show respect, or love, or politeness.
- In other countries, the lack of opinion about what she and he might do could be a sign one was losing interest in the other.
- While attitudes are somewhat changing recently, traditionally, Chinese people are very serious about dating (not much “casual dating” as in Western countries) and often plan for marriage quite quickly.

A model of culture: Hofstede model



(Hofstede, 2001)

A model of culture: The level of analysis issue

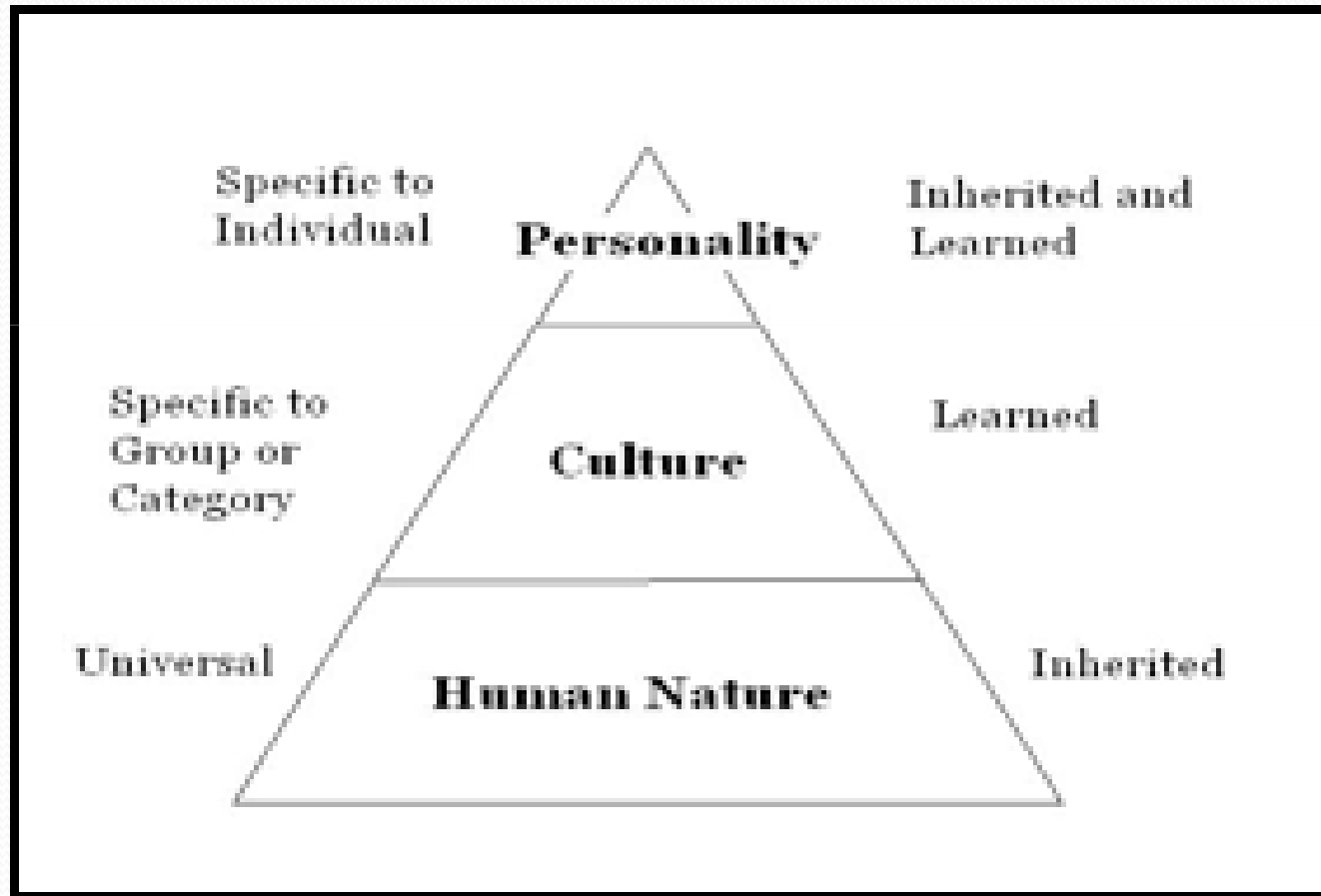


Note: From Erez & Gati, 2004

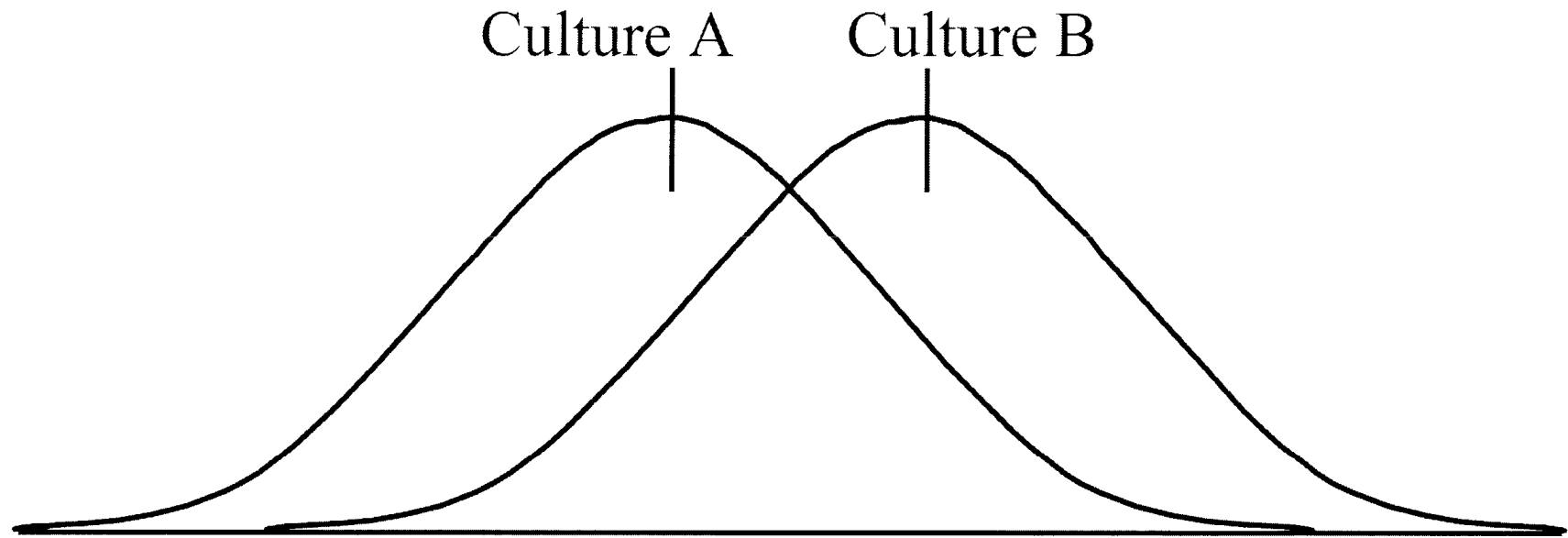
The cultural “iceberg”



Human nature, culture and personality



Culture as a “normal distribution”



Values in Culture

French culture

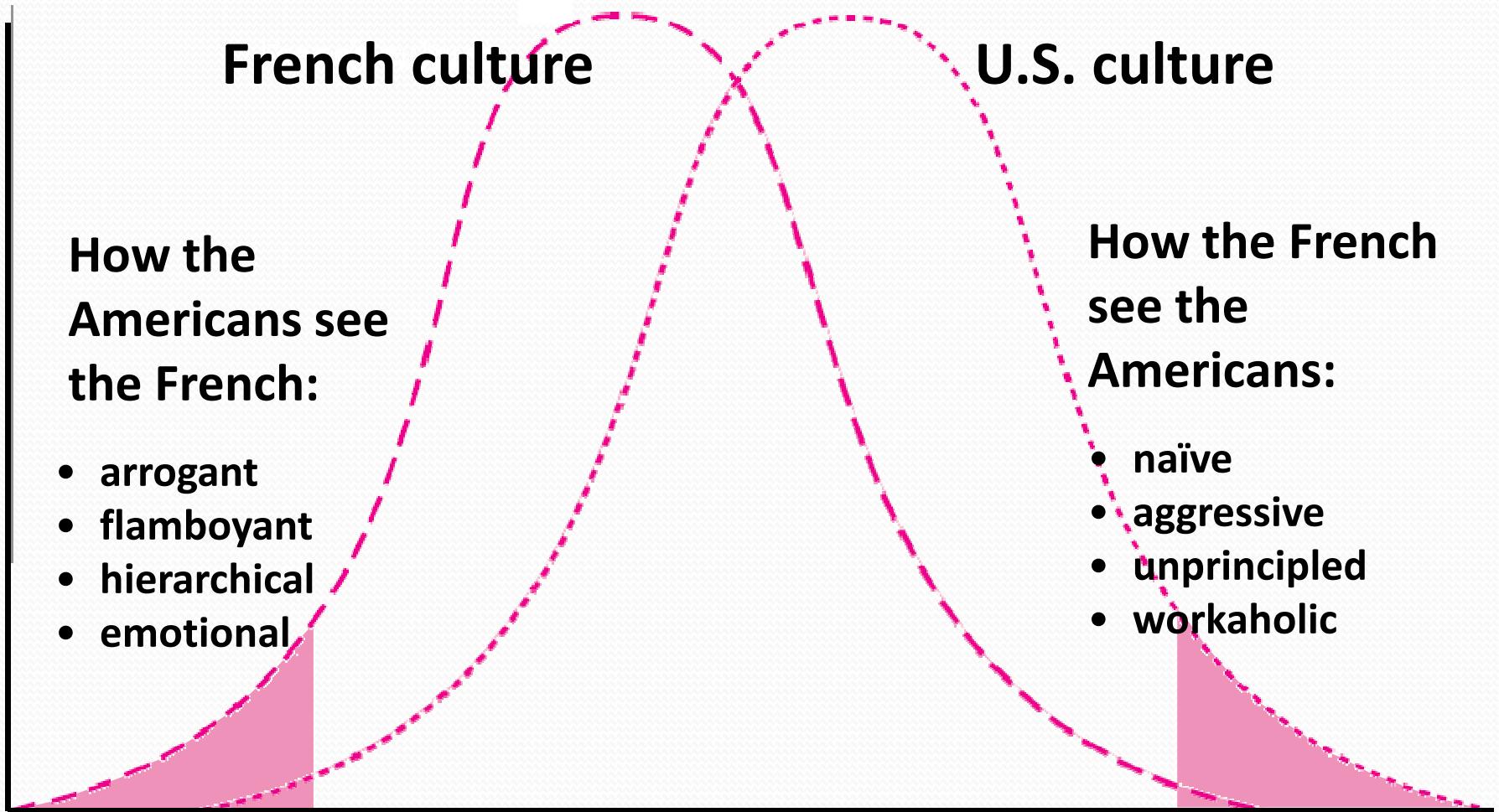
U.S. culture

**How the
Americans see
the French:**

- arrogant
- flamboyant
- hierarchical
- emotional

**How the French
see the
Americans:**

- naïve
- aggressive
- unprincipled
- workaholic



Video: Wearing Chinese glasses

