

A Contrastive Analysis of Chinese and American Views about Silence and Debate

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Abstract

As representatives of western and eastern cultures, China and America stand at the two extremes of the cultural continuum. People from these two cultures hold almost opposite views toward talk. Chinese people always criticize Americans being talkative and boastful, while Americans blame the Chinese for their indifference to others' words and their lack of viewpoints. This paper attempts to show different beliefs about public speaking and debate between Chinese and American, and to analyze the reasons that lead to their differences. An analysis of the results of a survey of cultural members indicated four dimensions of contrastive cultural values between Americans and Chinese. Cultural values (e.g., the value of talk) and philosophical factors (e.g., Confucianism and Taoism versus the classical rhetoric of Ancient Greece and Rome) lead to differences in the views about silence and debate.

Introduction

We all admit the existence of sociolinguistic diversity, yet when an intercultural communication takes place, misunderstandings are almost unavoidable. This is something that always happens in the course of the communication between the Chinese and American people. One problem that always frustrates both the Chinese and Americans when they come across each other is that they seem to have difficulty in agreeing when a person should speak and how.

American teachers who teach in Chinese schools always complain that Chinese students don't participate in class at all. The teachers have thought that the Chinese students are not competent enough to comprehend what they have taught, but later, through the essays written by Chinese students, they find out that these students are very thoughtful. The Chinese people always criticize Americans being talkative and boastful, while Americans blame the Chinese for their indifference to others' words and their lack of viewpoints. In the eyes of the Chinese people, Americans have the national character of standing arrogantly over others interfering others' affairs; while to the American people, China is such a mythic nation that will never be understood. These prejudices between two peoples have, to much extent, hinder the development of their relation, and the consequences brought by them can be far reaching.

The purpose of this paper is to study the different attitudes held by the Chinese and Americans toward silence and debate and to explore the reasons for these differences, with the hope that it can provide the two peoples necessary information about this issue so that misunderstandings between them can be avoided while cooperation be enhanced. In the first section, a questionnaire delivered to a number of Chinese speakers is described and its result is shown and briefly analyzed. In the third section, the paper focuses on several dimensions of contrastive values held by the Chinese and Americans, that lead to their different views on silence and debate. The fourth section will examine the philosophical influence on their views

on silence and debate.

Preliminary Study

In order to explore the Chinese and Americans' beliefs about public speaking and debate, I conducted a preliminary study on this issue. A questionnaire was distributed to different groups of the Chinese people and one group of American speakers. The Chinese speakers include a group of Ph.D. candidates (82), a group of teenagers (39), and a group of factory workers. To my surprise, I got quite similar results from the three groups of Chinese people despite their different family backgrounds, educational backgrounds, living and working surroundings, while the result given by the group of American speakers is quite the opposite. The questionnaire and its results are shown in the following table:

Factor analysis	Ph.D. candidates (82)		Teenagers (39)		Factory workers (32)		Americans (22)	
	N	Rates (%)	N	Rates	N	Rates	N	Rates
I consider myself a talker.	14	17.0	7	17.9	10	31.3	17	77.3
I feel comfortable initiating conversations with strangers.	15	18.2	5	12.8	8	25	18	81.8
I always voice my opinion voluntarily in a group discussion.	12	14.6	6	15.4	6	18.8	18	81.8
I feel comfortable to deliver a speech in a formal occasion.	10	12.2	4	10.3	6	18.8	15	68.2
I feel comfortable to voice my opinion in an informal occasion.	14	17.7	8	20.5	10	31.3	18	81.8
I believe that one always communicates most effectively through talking.	15	18.2	16	41.0	9	28.1	15	68.2
I feel comfortable to debate with others when I have different opinions with others.	17	20.7	10	28.2	8	25	17	77.3
Debates between my friends and me won't have negative effect on our friendship.	7	8.5	5	12.8	8	25	16	72.7

I have positive feeling toward people who talk a lot.	14	17.0	8	20.5	10	31.3	4	18.2
I think talkative people are annoying.	57	69.5	22	56.4	20	62.5	0	0
I feel comfortable with silences in a conversation.	52	63.4	24	61.5	18	56.3	2	9.1
If others try to persuade me, I would pretend to accept their opinions, while still sticking to my own in mind.	58	70.7	20	51.3	20	62.5	2	9.1
I'll try to find ways to break the ice during conversations.	22	26.8	10	25.6	8	25	20	90.9

The table shows that the rates among the three groups of the Chinese people are quite close. The answers given by the Chinese subjects show that most of them did not feel comfortable to talk a lot, especially to speak out their own ideas in public. Only a few liked to debate when they held different ideas with others, while most others preferred to keep silent while still sticking to their own opinions in order to keep harmonious relationships with others. The slight difference among the three groups of the Chinese subjects is due to the difference in sociability, knowledge storage, and social surrounding. Adults are more skilful at engaging conversations with strangers because of their rich social experiences, while children feel less uncomfortable to debate with others because they have only a vague sense of face. Ph.D. candidates do a little better in public speaking than factory workers because the former have more experiences in this aspect, while the latter feel more comfortable to carry out private conversations with friends.

On the other hand, the answers given by the American subjects are quite the opposite to those of their Chinese counterparts. Most of them regarded themselves as talkers and were willing to make contribution in group discussions; almost all of them felt uncomfortable with silence; non of them considered being talkative a negative quality; most thought debates with friends would not affect their friendship.

Then what causes the differences in the view on silence and debate between the Chinese and Americans? This is just the issue we are going to deal with in the following sections. My focus will be on their contrastive cultural values and philosophical beliefs in silence and debate.

Contrastive Cultural Values in Talk

The different views between the Chinese and American people on silence and debate are a just reflection of a series of contrastive values held by the two groups of people. The following dimensions are selected to show how they have affected Chinese and Americans views on silence and debate.

High-context culture vs. low context culture

China and the United States are respectively a member of high-context culture and that of low-context culture. In high context Chinese culture, communicators assume a great deal of commonality of knowledge and views, so that less is spelt out explicitly and much more is implicit or communicated in indirect ways. People depend on a number of paralinguistic factors, of which silence is of great significance, to decode the speaker's intension. In China, silence holds a strong contextual meaning, such as showing obedience to senior people, or being a sign of respect for the wisdom and expertise of others, or disagreement while avoiding direct confrontation, or a time interval for sorting out ideas, depending on the context of the time.

However, in America, which has a low-context culture, things are made explicit, and there is considerable dependence on what is actually said or written. People load as much information as possible in their words. Thus, their words must be adequate enough and not ambiguous, while silence can be perceived as an empty pause. There seems aversion to silence in that people find it awkward and embarrassing and silence tends to be interpreted variously as lack of interest; and unwillingness to communicate; a sign of hostility, rejection, or interpersonal incompatibility; anxiety or shyness; or lack of verbal skills. In low-context American culture, the responsibility for the meaning falls mainly to the speakers, whose job is to formulate ideas into clear language. Therefore, those who are good at expressing themselves with verbal languages are respected, and people are conscious to train themselves into a competent speaker.

Thus, generally when Americans communicate with others, they verbally state what they are thinking, with very little need for non-verbal cues. The opposite can be said of the Chinese, who use body language, status, relationships, silence and many other factors to communicate meaning. As a result, it is of course difficult for an American to understand the words of a Chinese, because he has to not only master the Chinese language, but know the whole context behind the language as well.

Harmony vs. confrontation

The silence of the Chinese can be linked to their propensity to seek harmony rather than confrontation. Chinese tradition appears to value reserving the harmony of the social group more highly than individual expression of one's inner thoughts and feelings. In Chinese eyes, taking opposite sides of an argument necessarily means becoming a personal rival and antagonist of the one who hold the other side. The more important concomitant of this idea is that if one does not wish to become a lifelong opponent of someone else, he will not venture contrary to the other's opinion in public. As a result, when the Chinese hold discussions, few people would like to speak out their opinions voluntarily. Even they do, their participation is never argumentative. They never openly expressed disagreement with others because it is considered to be aimed at the individual, thus will damage the long-nourished and established harmonious *guanxi* (i.e. social relationship), which has a very important position in Chinese society.

The Chinese word *guanxi* means relationships and it refers to the concept of establishing connections in order to secure favors in personal relations. It is a relational network that Chinese cultivate energetically and it contains implicit mutual obligation, assurance and understanding. It is very important for the Chinese to have harmonious relationships, since they consider good social relations as a symbol of personal ability and influence. Most Chinese are accustomed to keeping a different view to himself because they have been taught both at school and at home, since their early childhood, to agree with an opinion even if he does not like it in

his heart.

Contrary to the Chinese preference to harmony, Americans will choose confrontation, i.e., honestly expressing his own ideas, defending his own opinions, and openly confront opposing ideas. To them, this is a better way to solve problems than avoiding conflicts. This means facing the facts, meeting the problem head on. Consistent with these tendencies, it is also desirable to face people directly, to debate with them, and to confront them. Confrontation is not necessarily rancorous, but it does involve reporting one's feelings honestly, expecting reciprocal honesty, and dealing directly with the person involved in the problem. The strategy of confrontation seems to call for a temporary neutralization of social relations to allow real facts of the case to emerge. At the root of the American confrontational style is the concept that adversaries can compete against each other and at the same time cooperate under the rules for interpersonal conflict. Even two intimate friends may often argue bitterly for their discrimination. However, they can still get on well afterwards as if nothing had happened.

Collectivism vs. individualism

The Chinese and Americans' preference to silence or debate is also a reflection of their different views of collectivism and individualism. Chinese society values collectivism which expects people to identify with and work well in groups which protect them in exchange for loyalty and compliance. Contrary to this is Americans' individualism in which uniqueness and self-determination are valued. A person is more admirable if he is a 'self-made man' or 'makes up his own mind' or shows initiative or work well independently.

"Collectivism is, by its nature, an act of balancing the need of the individual against the need of society" (Stata@gw.home.vix.com). In China it is natural to look upon things as a part of something much bigger, where the will of one person is a part of the cooperative will. As a result, it's the responsibility of a group of people, not an individual person to reach decisions by consensus. Thus in a public occasion when a discussion is undergoing, it seems meaningless for one to speak out his unique ideas or argue with others for a final support because sooner or later, he has to join the majority by giving up his own standpoint (Wurzel, 1998). One is supposed to keep accordant with the whole society and to know how to adjust him to the group when he has different idea in mind from the group. Presenting the "self" too obviously would give people the impression of being disrespectful of the community. Thus, it seems wise and also a customary thing for one to keep silence even though what he is thinking is quite contrary to others' views.

The identification of Americans' individualism can be dated back to about 150 years ago, when the French observer Alexis de Tocqueville described Americans as highly individualistic. He believed that this American individualism was inseparable from the new American concept of democracy (Scollon, 1995). To Americans, all individuals are different and unique, and everyone has a right to say what he considers right. The value of personal success, independence and the concept of 'pulling yourself up by the boot straps' are shared by common people. They think if one's view is different from others', then why not put it on the table and let everybody discuss it because everybody has the responsibility for the decision-making. After a heat discussion--- presenting, defending, and opposing views, one will either persuade others or be persuaded by others while a problem will not be left unsolved.

Obedience vs. Aggression

The fact that Chinese people talk less is rooted in their cultural emphasis on obedience and social hierarchy, and a de-emphasis on aggression. In Confucian code, everyone should know their place in the social hierarchy and speak according to the norms required for him. This belief is deeply rooted in the Chinese minds because ever since they were born in their families--a kind of hierarchical institution, they have been brought up with the idea that one should behave within his own territory and should not pass the threshold. Some parents or grandparents tell the children explicitly that it is rude and disrespectful for children to take part in adult conversations.

At home, Chinese parents are intolerant of their children not treating them with respect and discourage fights between siblings. Chinese children are expected to accept whatever their parents ask them to do and are not supposed to question their parents' authority. Nor do they need to speak up to defend their action if they are to obey their parents. In addition, they don't have to verbalize their choices or decisions, which are often made for them by adults. Similarly, at school Chinese children are taught to respect and obey their superiors and are expected to listen to their teachers, take notes, and memorize. If they do not agree with something, they are trained to control this opposition and obey what the teacher says.

Because the Chinese are taught from a young age to avoid arguments, their performance on verbal tests is often lower than those of Westerners (Bond & Hwang, 1988, p. 217). They are weak in developing persuasive arguments and in their debating skills because they never get to practice it in real life (Bond & Hwang, 1988, p. 219). David Ho and his collaborators in Harvard University did a study comparing Chinese and Caucasian American infants and he came to a conclusion that the Chinese infants were less vocal, less active, and more apprehensive in social and separation situations; they were quieter, stayed closer to the mother, and played less when were with unfamiliar children or adults.

In the political field, the Chinese also practice this non-aggressive and obedient behavior. In Chinese culture, it is very important that the public respect the leader of the country. For example, in the ancient Chinese society, in a meeting with the leader about a certain program that was planning to be carried out, the subordinates must obey the leader and try to put their vision of truth aside. But if a difference in opinion occurred and could not be avoided, it was voiced privately through a third party. They would try to avoid a face-to-face confrontation but if it was unavoidable, the subordinate would use mild language to get the message through without offending the superior. Chinese often try to avoid direct confrontation if possible because they believe that arguing can lead to chaos.

In addition, the direct confrontation common to American style is ill-advised in the Chinese society where face is primary concern, since frequently the indirectness of statements masks feelings that, if stated, might cause embarrassment to both speaker and listener. A debate between friends may threaten their faces, and cause the breakage of their friendships. Thus, those who always argue with others will be thought too aggressive and won't be popular within a group. In short, Chinese prefer silence or agreement to bitter argument, even if the agreement is superficial. The language used by Americans in reference to communication, in the eyes of the Chinese, carries the feeling of adversarial confrontation and depersonalization.

Philosophical influence on Silence and Debate

Religion and philosophy may be the most important factor that has affected the views toward speech and rhetoric of Chinese and American.

Confucian influence on Chinese views on silence and debate

Although there were several antagonistic schools of thought in ancient China, which have dominated the culture and philosophical scene in China since, they each held similarly negative views of speech and language. The predominant two schools are Confucianism and Taoism. Both Confucianism and Taoism promote social harmony, yet by different means. Confucianism has prescribed moral codes for both individuals and governments. Confucian virtues include *ren*, or benevolence; *yi*, or righteousness; and *li*, or propriety. Taoism, on the other hand, sponsors a rhetoric emphasizing *wu-wei* (the avoidance of action), *wu-xin* (negation of mind), and *de* (the principle of spontaneous functioning).

Confucius is often known as the father of Chinese philosophy and culture. His views had long been accepted as the official state philosophy of the Chinese empire since the Han Dynasty and are deeply rooted in common people's minds. Oliver (1971) states that "The central theme of Confucianism was that ethical conduct creates conditions that result in just and harmonious human relations" (p. 124). Yum (1988) further argues that "As a philosophy of humanism and social relations, Confucianism has left a strong impact on interpersonal relationships and on communication patterns.

Central to Confucianism are three concepts: etiquette or propriety (*li*, a term originally meaning 'ritual offering), righteousness (*yi*, to behave with all moral qualities in every concrete situation), and benevolence (*ren*, to be kind to others). The first concept, *li* (propriety), shows that everyone in society had to use certain etiquette suited to his rank to treat other people. Confucius urged people to adhere to the highest standards for five key role relationships--between ruler and subject, neighbor and neighbor, father and son, husband and wife, and brother and brother. The term *li* could refer to many smaller "ritualized" behavior patterns involved in day-to-day human interactions. This would include proper speech and body language according to status, age, and gender. In this sense, *li* means any action *proper*, or appropriate to the situation. In the *Analects (Lun Yu)*, *li* is clearly defined in a relationship with humaneness, where humaneness is the inner, substantial goodness of the human being, and *li* is the functioning of humaneness in the manifest world. That is to say, *li* is filial piety, fraternal respect, familial affection, etc.

Based on this concept, common people were trained to exert obedience and loyalty to their superiors, filial piety to their ancestors, and virtue to society. As a result, in feudal society one was not supposed to question his rulers' authority or express too much of his own ideas in front of his superiors. People had learned to use a silent way to keep their thoughts to themselves. Although a few emperors had encouraged people to advise a higher authority frankly, yet few people would like to do so for the fear of being punished.

The second concept, *yi* (righteousness), exerts strong influence on the Chinese minds and behaviors, although it is not quite as essential a concept as the other two. It refers to a strongly internalized human capacity. Being attuned to Righteousness allows people to do the proper thing in the proper situation, to give each person, place and thing its proper due. Therefore, respecting others in a quiet way and not raising any argument would be considered a right thing to do on most occasions.

The concept of *ren* (benevolence or humanness) was used to teach the Chinese to keep a harmonious relationship with others and is the root of Chinese avoidance of confrontation with others during a discussion. According to Confucius, the purpose for communication was to

make friends and exert benevolence. It was considered worthless to argue with others since if the interlocutors had different views then they would not cooperate with each other or be friends. Besides, arguing with another person was not something that should be conducted by *jun zi*, a gentleman or superior man because as Confucius said in Analects, "The Superior Man has nothing to compete for." Any refined gentleman should embody the virtue of benevolence while maintaining traditional rites, customs, and filial piety toward his ancestors, family, and the gods.

Confucius established for China the ideal of the gentlemen, or "superior man"--not necessarily someone from the upper classes, but one who has properly cultivated himself in virtue and righteousness. Confucius envisaged the ideal man in this way: "The superior man is diligent in his work and careful in speech.

The Superior Man desires to be hesitant in speech, but sharp in action." Central to Confucius' philosophy was the principle that one's words should always be in accordance with that which one does, lives, and practices. He must always speak with discretion only of that which he is prepared to act upon to commit himself to. The superior man acts before speaking and speaks according to his action, and is ashamed of his words outstripping his deeds, since immodest statements are hard to live up to. Naturally, this principle manifested an antagonistic view towards bold or persuasive speech.

According to Confucius, some mistakes made by those who are of rank included: "To speak when there is nothing to be said; this is imprudence. To speak without paying attention to the expression on the person's face; this is called blindness."

Of course, Confucius was aware that there were times when appropriate speech was indispensable, but for the most part, the verses in Analects manifest his reticence to speak, as we can see from his dialogue with one of his disciples:

"Someone said, 'Yung is a humane man, but he is not sharp enough with his tongue'

Confucius said, 'Why does he need to be sharp with his tongue? If you deal with people by smooth talk, you will soon be disliked. I don't know if Yung is a humane man, but why should he have to be a clever speaker?'"

In short, Confucius emphasis is continually on being humble and respectful, rather than bold, assertive, or innovative. As Confucian biographer Herlee Creel put it, "Confucian was always markedly contemptuous of eloquence and of ornate language." Confucius opposed eloquent and clever speech, advocating hesitancy over brilliance, and he grounded his criticism of speech deeply within his philosophy of the ideal man.

Taoist influence on Chinese views of silence and debate

Next to Confucianism, the most important stream in Chinese thought is Taoism. It was in large part a philosophy of retreat and withdrawal on the part of thinkers who were appalled by perpetual warfare, instability, and death and so turned away from the struggle for power, status, and wealth. Although the Taoists were interested in man's finding peace within himself and within nature, a view which is in contrast to the Confucian concerns with public behavior, etiquette, and politics, they also took an opponent position to speech and rhetoric.

The ancient school of Chinese Taoist philosophy is best represented by the *Tao Te Jing* of Lao-zi and by Zhuang-zi. Tao, "the Way," is the ultimate reality of the universe, according to Taoism. The key to merging with the Tao is wu-wei or "doing nothing." The Taoist goal brings the world back to the Way by means of quietism, nonintervention, and inaction. If left to itself,

the universe proceeds smoothly according to its own harmonies. Man's efforts to change or improve nature only destroy these harmonies and produce chaos. By cultivating *wu-wei*, a type of inaction characterized by humility and prudence, a person can participate in the simplicity and spontaneity of Tao. Striving to attain virtue or achievement is counterproductive and unnecessary. A man without ambitions could be beyond all harms and achieve tranquility, which is the highest level of human life. Lao-zi clearly expressed the importance of tranquility, as is stated by the following verse:

“The Way takes no action, but leaves nothing undone.
When you accept this
The world will flourish,
In harmony with nature.
Nature does not possess desire;
Without desire, the heart becomes quiet;
In this manner the whole world is made tranquil. “

Arrays of Taoist saying, such as “To be always talking is against nature,” “One who speaks does not know,” and so forth, provide some attitudinal and behavioral guidelines for the Chinese people to conduct their conversational lives. Because of the belief that meaning can be sensed out but not phrased, a talkative person is often considered showy or insincere, or even patronizing: “*Honest people use no rhetoric; Rhetoric is not honesty.*”

Taoism values mystical contemplation, so the Taoists found it difficult to express their basic ideas in words. The Tao is founded on a nameless, formless "Non- being" which is, in essence, the totality of the natural processes. The classic text of the *Tao Te Jing* advocates silence from the beginning:

“Nature says only a few words:
High wind does not last long,
Nor does heavy rain.
If nature's words do not last
Why should those of man?”

The Taoists also believed that “Who understands does not preach; who preaches does not understand,” by which they argue that a knowledgeable person is cautious and modest in his words, while only those who do not know much are eager to show off in front of others. Thus, Taoists advocate: “Reserve your judgments and words;
Smooth differences and forgive disagreements.”

Like Confucianism, Taoism also advocates harmony. Oliver Robert asserts in *The Rhetorical Implications of Taoism* that Chinese Taoists put much weight on such values as tolerance and harmony. As he says:

“They could not abide unnecessary conflict for it was too disruptive. They developed a high regard for tolerance. Their political ideal was less justice and equality than harmony. To them, justice was so complicated that the very effort to define it often led to disputes and conflict; and they thought that equality manifestly was not observable among human beings. For this reason, when a Chinese finds himself hold a different view from another interlocutor, he would most

likely refrain from speaking it out directly for fearing a direct disagreement may hurt that person's feeling and thus may threaten their harmonious relationship. Instead, he will either choose a circumlocutory way or keep silent to maintain a rather strict reserve" (Oliver, 1961).

Tao Te Jing clearly states the importance of harmony:

"Cultivate harmony within yourself, and harmony becomes real;
Cultivate harmony within your family, and harmony becomes fertile;
Cultivate harmony within your community, and harmony becomes abundant;
Cultivate harmony within your culture, and harmony becomes enduring;
Cultivate harmony within the world, and harmony becomes ubiquitous.
Who accepts harmony, becomes harmonious.
Who accepts loss, becomes lost.
For who accepts harmony, the Way harmonizes with him,
And who accepts loss, the Way cannot find."

The Taoists believed that if one accepted what it was, then harmony was achieved and he could live with the world. In addition, language and precision are thought to be the root of contention and dissatisfaction, therefore a barrier to contentment and sagehood. While Taoism provides no solutions to social problems, it is thorough going in its rejection of both speech and communication.

The Influence of Greek and Roman rhetoric on American views of silence and talk

Since the Ancient Greeks, westerners have tended to celebrate talk and rhetoric, construing it as a vehicle for the discovery and expression of truth. The earliest known studies of rhetoric come from the Golden Age philosophers of Greece. They believed that rhetoric was the ancient art of argumentation and discourse, one of the most important functions of which was to persuade. One assumption implicit in the art of the Ancient Greek rhetoric was that people could disagree with each other. When disagreement became pronounced, there were only two results--either they began to fight, or they engaged in debate. Rhetoric removed disagreement from the arena of violence and turned it into debate--a healthy and necessary step in any democracy. When two persons have different views on an issue, they will directly speak out their opinions and try to solve the problem, instead of avoiding the conflicts. Americans have inherited this belief.

Writers from the Ancient Greece, and from the Roman republic and empire, supply us with the largest store of early texts explicitly devoted to speech in public settings. The major objective of Athenian rhetoric at an early stage was to prepare members of the middle class (farmers, shopkeepers, tradespersons, etc.) for participation in public debate in competition with the traditional aristocracy of the city. The major Roman rhetoric, on the other hand, circulated chiefly among Latin politicians and lawyers who wanted tips on how to prevail in the Senate, before the popular assembly, and in the courts of law. Later, rhetoric became a tool for all common people to defend their ideas, to win others' support, and to protect their rights.

In addition, the Ancient Greek and Romans believed that democracy was linked to rhetoric in which citizens were free to address other members of the community who, in turn, were free to weigh and vote upon competing visions of truth. This tradition is still kept today. Modern Americans, affected by the Ancient Greek and Romans, think that Government of, by, and for the people is a government based upon self-assertion. Democratic rule assumes that the best way to attain the good society is for self-interested individuals (read politicians) to pitch

their claims to an audience which then decides among competing ideas.

A number of the Greek and Roman philosophers, who had promoted the development of classical rhetoric, taught many techniques for gaining influence and for winning over people. This kind of rhetoric was responsive to the desire of a free people to assert their own personal self interest.

Aristotle and Cicero shared the assumption that public speech was a tool available for use by self-interested persons seeking to win fortune and reputation. Aristotle's book, *The Rhetoric*, provided useful skills that practical speakers want. Aristotle identified the ways to make a good impression upon listeners, to find striking content for one's speech, and to make speech interesting by choosing the right words. One of Cicero's favorite practical techniques was a pictographic method of memory that allowed a person to demonstrate high competence by speaking with no notes or with a bare minimum of visible props. To Cicero, the survival of a free state depended on the ability of wise citizens to communicate effectively on matters that concerned the public. He was convinced that open deliberation and debate were vital for society, and he cautioned that "mute and voiceless wisdom" could not advance humanity. Cicero saw a second danger when a society did not provide its public with a balanced education in rhetoric. Cicero recommended that a society should actively cultivate the eloquent habits of good speech. In this view, those who attained mature eloquence would "obtain glory, honor and high esteem." At the same time, society would benefit by fluent speech whenever, "it is accompanied by wisdom."

This sort of belief is deeply carved in western people's mind. Many philosophers or literate people have articulated the power of public speaking and debate, as is shown by the following typical examples:

"A sharp tongue is the only edge tool that grows keener with constant use" (Washington Irving, in *Rip Van Winkle*.)

"Speech is civilization itself. The word, even the most contradictory word, preserves contact--it is silence which isolates" (Thomas Mann)

Conclusion

In this paper, I attempted to show different beliefs in public speaking and debate between the Chinese and Americans, and to analyze the philosophical factors that lead to their differences. Chinese see that public speaking is awkward and unnecessary. People will try to avoid debate when having different opinions because they value the harmony of social relationship far more highly than expressing one's inner thoughts, thus they think debate will have negative effect on their friendships. On the contrary, Americans see that public speaking is indispensable, while silence is awkward and embarrassing and is interpreted as lack of interest or verbal skills. They prefer to speak their own ideas out other than to keep them unknown. The traditional Confucian and Taoist codes imprinted in the Chinese minds have led to their preference to using silence to preserve harmonious relationships and stability, while the ancient Greek and Roman style of rhetoric as well as the Bible make them highly value public speaking.

However, people from these two cultures are always unaware the differences between their views about talk, thus often misunderstand each other when having interactions. This would especially be so when those involved are blissfully unaware of structural differences in their beliefs about debate, let alone complex intervening socio-structural, sociopsychological and sociolinguistic processes, often in flux, which determine their quite different styles of

discourse over time. Therefore, this paper may provide some basic ideas for those who have chances to have interactions with people from the other nation but have little knowledge of the beliefs in silence and debate held by their counterparts.

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