

INTERCULTURAL TOOLS  
WORLD MAPS  
THE CURVE OF THE INTERCULTURAL PROCESS  
DO'S AND DON'TS  
IN CHINA, THE UNITED STATES, FRANCE  
POLAND, SENEGAL

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# The western point of view



# The point of view of America





# Chinese point of view *Zhong guo, the country of the middle*



A Chinese  
Puzzle  
2004

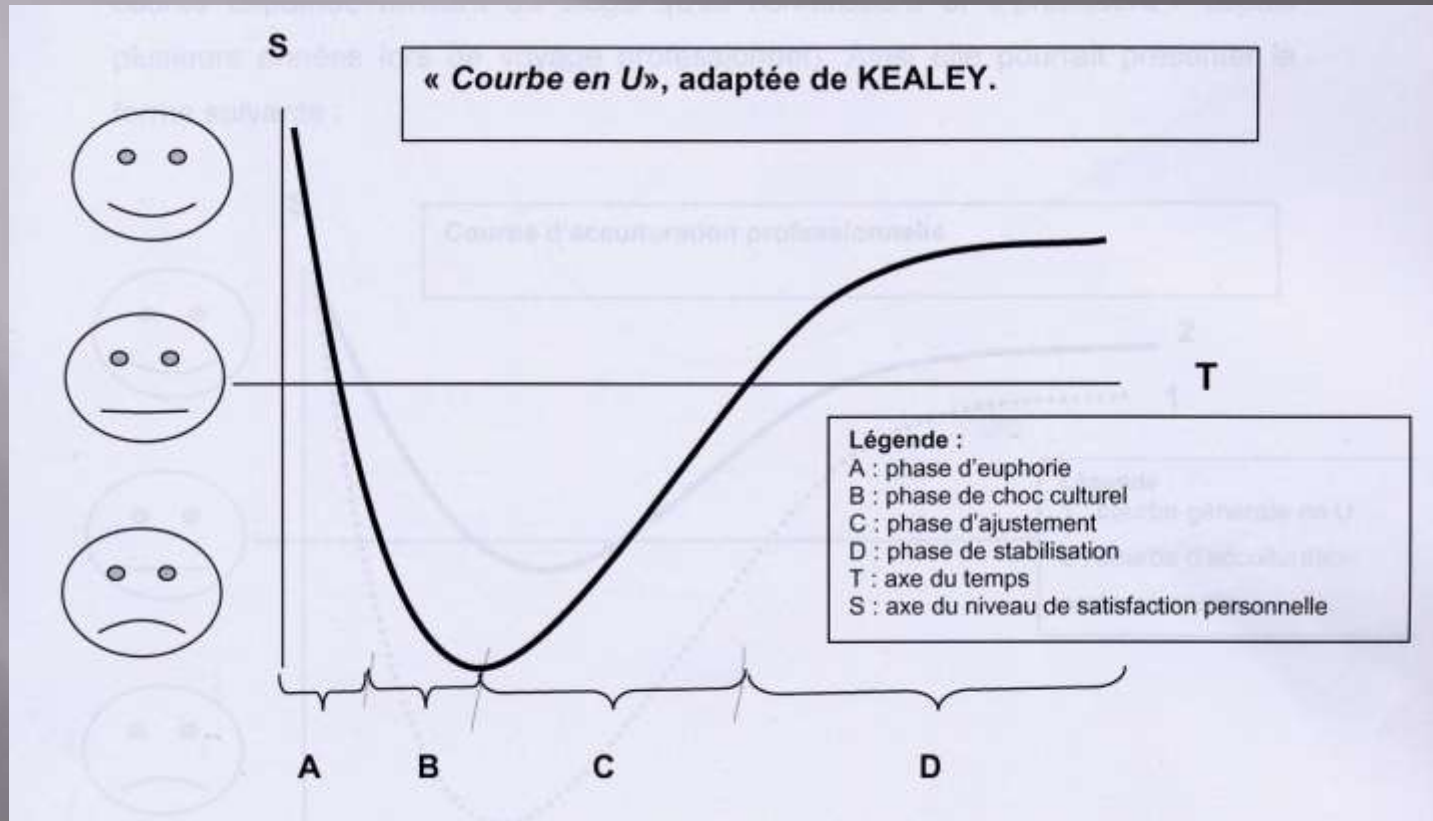
# Where is the center ?

Les Echos  
1/12/2009



## II - Cross-cultural behavior as an itinerary

### The dynamics of the "bell curve"



Bell curve  
adapted from  
Kealey's model  
by J.Y. Agard

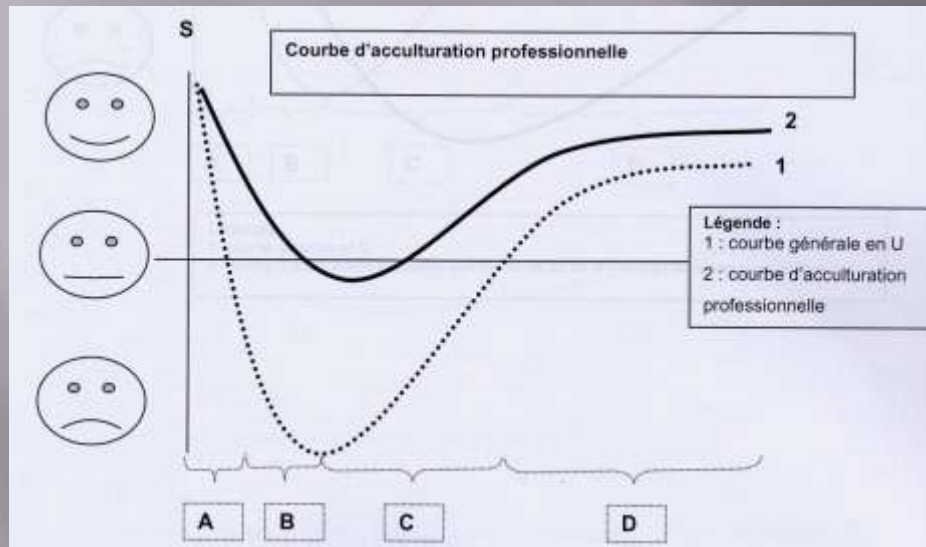
- Euphoria
- Culture shock
- Adjustment
- Stabilisation

T = Time axis  
S = personal  
satisfaction

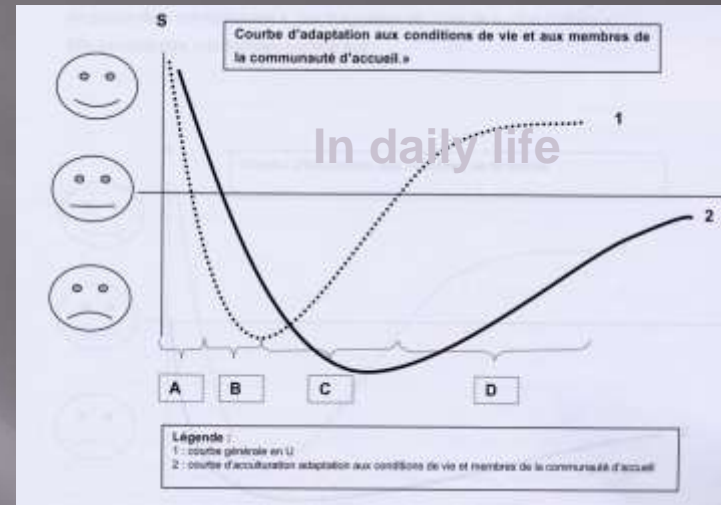
**Intercultural adaptation varies over time:  
It changes in function of situation and social interactions.**

# Intercultural socialization of workers abroad

In the workplace



In daily life

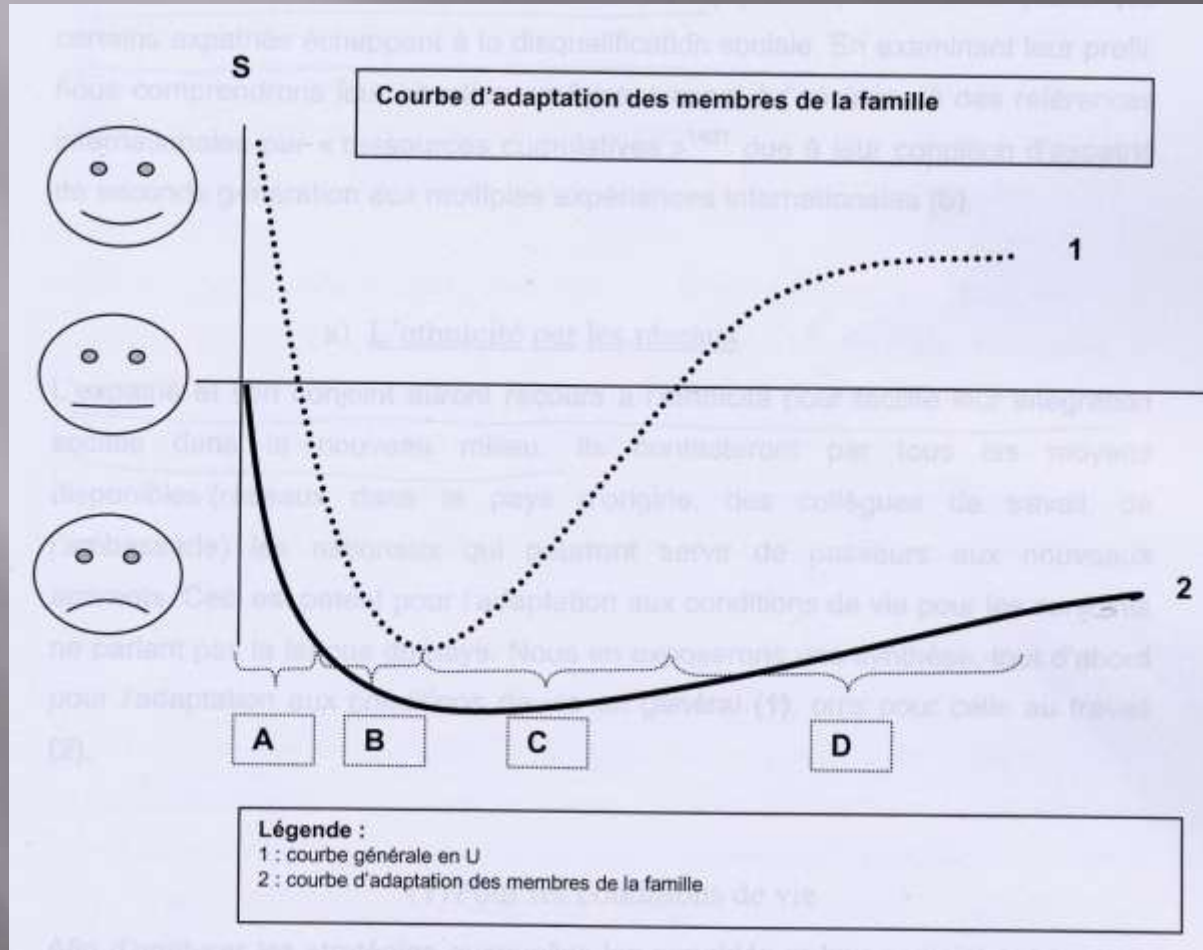


Cultural shock is stronger in everyday life than on the job.

From research by J.Y Agard (2004, Sorbonne, Paris 5)



# Socialization of families



Adaptation curve for family members. Adaptation is more difficult for family members

From research by J.Y Agard (2004, Sorbonne, Paris 5)

9/19/2011



### III - Do's and don'ts: It is impossible to know all the rules governing social interactions throughout the world

- ▣ We need to learn how to observe, recognizing that what is obvious in our culture may not be valid elsewhere.
- ▣ Today's objective is to study a few examples to increase our awareness.
- ▣ The bottom line is that when there are different options, it is usually best to adopt the most discreet practice.
- ▣ All examples we are going to talk about are based on field studies in many countries

## Rules governing social distance and proximity between individuals

- ▣ They have developed out of practices that are prescribed, allowed, or forbidden.
- ▣ They may vary, depending on whether they occur in public, private, or intimate space.
- ▣ They may change from one generation to another and vary in different social and gender contexts.
- ▣ The rules are thus dynamic and diverse.
- ▣ Cultural interactions are embedded into strategic and power relationships what means that culture is not the only explanation of human issues

## Use of first names upon first contact: from prescribed to forbidden

- ▣ In the USA, a *first name* may be used on first contact. First names are prescribed. This does not necessarily signify proximity, which causes confusion among the French in these contexts.
- ▣ In France, first names are not generally used at the outset in professional contacts. Using a first name denotes a certain closeness. First names are allowed.
- ▣ In China, first names are not used in public contexts; they are only for intimate use (although some change is noted in new generations). First names are forbidden. This interdiction explains why many Chinese have recourse to nicknames or foreign first names, which may be used in public.



## Addressing a colleague: formal and informal pronouns, first names and family names

### ▣ In Poland

- **First names** are used only by **family and friends**.
- Colleagues at work **use a pronoun plus first name or family name**, depending on their relations.
  - The titles *pan* (m) and *pani* (f) are equivalent to the formal pronouns for "you". For example: "pani Kasia" (first name), "pan Nowak" (family name).
  - A **hierarchical superior** may address a **subordinate by name without pronoun**, but this denotes hostility or signals a **reprimand**.

### ▣ In Senegal

- *"Women are called by their married names, not by their maiden names as they do in the senegalese phone company Sonatel. People like to be called 'madame' "*

# A greeting could cause offense!

- ❑ In Senegal, people may say hello several times a day. NOT doing so may offend.
- ❑ In France, people say hello once, every day, and shake hands or kiss. Forgetting to do so may appear rude.
- ❑ In the USA, a handshake is used for formal contacts. Physical contacts are kept to a minimum; hugs are used between friends or family members.
- ❑ In China, people shake hands only the first time they meet. Doing so again afterwards could offend, in that it implies that the encounter was forgotten.

# In Poland: shaking hands may denote either tradition or modernity.

- ▣ Shaking hands on a regular basis: for men
  - As a rule, men shake hands on every meeting to say hello and often also to say goodbye.
  - Women do not follow this ritual.
  - Traditionally men kiss women's hands.
  - Women make a slight curtsy.
- ▣ Shaking women's hands: a sign of modernity
  - Men who do not want to be viewed as misogynistic may extend their hand to women as well as men.
- ▣ Hand-shaking for both genders
  - When a **presentation** is made, persons of either gender shake hands.
  - Modern "**liberated**" **women** extend their hands to others for a handshake.
  - **A generation factor:** handshaking regardless of gender is now popular among adolescents.



# Smiling in public

- ▣ In the USA, the social rule is to smile whenever eyes meet. If there is no smile forthcoming, people will worry and wonder whether they haven't done something wrong (cf. *Friends or Foes*).
- ▣ In France, the rule is not to smile at strangers. The risk is that of looking like an idiot. Americans often perceive the French as arrogant because of this.
- ▣ In China, a smile can denote embarrassment, which may be misconstrued by the French: "And to top it off, he was laughing..."

# Saying thanks denotes social distance in Poland and China.

- **In Poland**

- In daily life, among family members, explicitly saying "thank you" is not very common, although there may be other verbal signs of gratitude or contentment.
- "Thank you" (*dziękuję* in Polish) is rather official; it is used in institutions (post office, banks, etc.) and on the telephone, when addressing persons that are not very close.

- **In China**

- It is not common to say thank you to one's wife or to persons who are very close. Thanking denotes social distance.

- **In France** children are educated in saying thank you at the end of many social interactions

# Eye contact

- In Poland, someone who **avoids eye contact** during a conversation is considered to be **untruthful** or **very timid**.
  - Looking **straight into the eyes** of the other person is a sign of **self-confidence**. (Poland)
- In China it is not allowed to look straight into the eyes of the other person
- In France it is prescribed to look straight into the eyes but not too much



# Anger, emotions

- ▣ *"As a woman, one is allowed to express anger, but not like a French woman. There is the weight of culture. There are things that are intolerable. That tends to give an advantage to men. Men are like your husband, like your father." (Senegal)*
- ▣ *Emotion in China*
  - what looks a weak anger for a French looks very strong for a Chinese



# Time

- ▣ In China, appointment books are not used. Appointments are made from one to three days in advance. Using a calendar may denote having a bad memory, which is a very negative trait.
- ▣ Time between two sentences
  - **French: 0.3 seconde**
  - **Amér icans: 0.5 seconde**



That is why a French is often seen like someone who doesn't listen

## Social connotations of e-mail: managing emergency vs. respecting social relations, speed vs. slowness

- ▣ The speed for responding to e-mail depends on its urgency.
- ▣ A portion of all e-mail is never read.
- ▣ Speed also indicates the importance attributed to the other party. It is part of the social play involving management of distance and proximity between persons.
- ▣ Slowness has a role of limiting tensions in dealing with conflicts.



## Using English: from hard to easy, the issue of globish

### ▣ Some problems

- *“It is **very complicated** to conduct work in English”.*
- *“In negotiations with the Chinese, they don't speak a word of French. Their **English isn't great**, and we're beginners”.*

### ▣ Some solutions :

- *“In English, it's **not as easy**. It's by e-mail and telephone. You have to hunt for your words. When it's something that you use often, it flows okay. We manage to understand each other. I **don't just rely on oral**. I ask for an e-mail message. They're very short discussions. It's to solve problems”.*
- *“**One colleague is more proficient in English**. After telephone conferences in English, he **sends out a recap**. He explains afterwards. He's available [to help]”.*
- *When English speakers come, they use **PowerPoint presentations**.*
- *Using **Globish** (global English) is a mean to solve this issue*

## Trust and mistrust: the importance of networks and of life outside the office in Poland, China and France

- ▣ Trust is often based on the fact of being recommended, heightening the need for social networks in relations within different institutions.
- ▣ In order to benefit from these relations, it is necessary to create a positive image by extending invitations for food and drink.
- ▣ Links between work and private life
  - In many work contexts, it is possible to make links between the two, such as when office colleagues talk about personal problems.

## Conclusion : Strategic issues in communication, power relationships, commitment, and clarification in many places

- ▣ The choice of a means of communication may be:
  - **practical**, for logistical considerations or to verify that the information is understood
  - **strategic**, to manage tensions and negotiations.
- ▣ The strategy takes place through:
  - **personalized direct contact, which allows one to negotiate better, but increases the cost of regulation in terms of time and emotions, or**
  - **standardized indirect contact, which saves time but which may cause frustration.**
    - ▣ The choice depends on each party's margin for maneuvering.
- ▣ Written communication enables one to:
  - convey a more conflictive point
  - conserve a trace of decisions that were made
  - allow for studied comprehension.
- ▣ The main point is that an efficient communication is based on a balance between Oral and written communication

▣ Thank you