



Project documentation and reflection on the project

**“Doing project work with Chinese students –
particularities based on cultural differences”**

(FOM students programme from 3rd March 2011 to 7th May 2011)

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1. Preface

1.1 Description of the project idea

My CertiLingua essay is based on the FOM pupil - programme “Basics of International Business Planning” in cooperation with the Fachhochschule für Oekonomie und Management (FOM University of Applied Sciences, for convenience I will just write “FOM” when writing about it.) The Programme consisted of a course of lectures and a final project thesis, which we had to prepare in a Chinese-German team of students. All courses and the final project thesis took place in Essen during March and May in the year 2011.

Since my school is Europe-certified, the pupils have the chance to take part in various programmes and exchanges. Some other pupils of my school had already participated in this project and were very excited about it. Therefore they told us a lot about their project and presented their excellent results and I was immediately interested in it and wanted to experience the project myself. It seemed very interesting to me to experience the topic of “Economy” in a new way because we had the chance to realize our theoretical ideas in a practical way. Moreover, I very much wanted to attend these lectures at the FOM because I thought that they would be a good experience and definitely a foundation for my further business studies class. Furthermore I thought that it would be a really great experience to work in a Chinese-German team. I have never worked with Chinese people before, so I really wanted to join this project.

1.2 Introduction of the main topic and explanation of the individual question within the framework of the project

The whole project, named “Basics of International Business Planning”, was originated by the FOM University of Applied Sciences, which has been involved in the topic “school and economy” for many years now. In the framework activities, the FOM University regularly arranges certain pupil programmes, in order to support the very important topic of “Economy” among pupils.

In my year of participation, we had to attend 5 different lectures:

Lecture 1: Intercultural Management

Lecture 2: Basics of Business Planning

Lecture 3: The Global Village

Lecture 4: Effective Internet Research

Lecture 5: Fit for the international job market

They all dealt with the principal topic of business planning and prepared us for the final project thesis. Mostly all of them were presented to us in English, except the last one. It was also possible only to attend these lectures without working out the final project thesis. If you do this, you get a special certificate. I decided to attend the whole programme. It was a big chance which I by no means wanted to miss. Our task was to work out a business plan about the topic of "International Marketing of German products in China". When we went to our first lecture, certain project topics were presented to us, like the distribution of eatables, machines/technology, cosmetics or services in China. Each main topic was divided into some other special ones. Some classmates and I immediately decided to join the eatables distribution in China because we saw high potential in selling high-quality German food in China. We therefore chose the case study of the German candy manufacturer "Schokotraum".

Since the FOM University also offers study paths especially for Chinese students, we had the chance to work out our business plan in a multicultural team because two or three Chinese students joined each German team, normally consisting of four Germans.

It really was an enrichment for the teams because they were already studying Business Administration and therefore knew a lot about the matter. After a short period of getting to know each other we made a big brainstorming on our project thesis. We got some preliminary information from a little initial situation of our topic to get initiated into it.

In it, it was said that we were a candies manufacturer from Essen in the premium price segment. Furthermore the situation was that we already had several prospective customers, who were Chinese tourists and liked to buy souvenirs in our shop. In view of our excellent sales figures, the candies manufacturer wanted to expand and build a new branch in China in order to produce for a new target group.

It was therefore our task to create a mostly complete business plan that covered all aspects referring to the expansion in China.

Although we were taught how to create a business plan in one lecture, it was a big challenge for us. It was not so much the new subject area of business studies which made it difficult for us; it was also a problem of communication with the Chinese students in the beginning because the Chinese students did not speak English or German quite well so we often had to find new ways of communication. As the Chinese students are very hard working as regards the communication they often translated their ideas into German so that we have been able to find agreements together. Fortunately we got used to it very quickly and made good efforts. With regard to the multicultural work I would generally like to put my focus on the differences between the German and Chinese business culture and especially on the Chinese freedom of opinion. It really was noticeable that the Chinese students have a completely different behavior than the Germans when working in a team.

The project definitely represents an innovation for my school because the students that participate learn to realize their ideas in a fictitious project. In school it is often not possible to arrange those projects because the teachers have to keep to their programmes. Therefore the project can help the pupils to have their own experiences in the wide world of business. It also supports intercultural learning and competences.

1.3 Personal view on the project

From the moment we were informed about this students programme in school, it was immediately evident to me that I would definitely join it. The idea of connecting the factors of “economy” and “multicultural work” convinced me because in school they are not easy to connect.

As I am attending a commercial High school my intensive course in school is, of course, Economics. Besides most our subjects have an economic focus, e.g. in Maths, French, History or Computer science. Therefore we all thought that participating in this project would be a great idea to improve our skills.

Furthermore having the chance to be for once “small businessmen or women” and to get a whiff of entrepreneurial activities seemed very attractive. As explained from former students who already participated, we would get to know the big world of business in another context. This was also an argument why this project was irresistible to me.

The first thing I personally thought about this programme was the fact that I could establish contact with Chinese students. I had never worked with them before, so this prospect motivated me a lot. Moreover I was interested in finding out differences between the Asian culture and the cultures I have already met. I have already seen a lot of differences between the French, the Danish and the English with regard to commitment, diligence, curiosity, open-minded and virtues. The most interesting fact in this context was for me the differences in holding one's opinion. As I know that the freedom of opinion in China is very restricted I immediately wanted to find out more about this in the project. Therefore this multicultural meeting would definitely result in, in my point of view, an improvement of my cross-cultural competence. This competence is very important for the further professional life because you can establish understanding for other cultures and therefore you are able to develop a cosmopolitan spirit and a tolerance towards other cultures. The last argument I had for this programme was the fact that we would be able to experience the daily life of a University of applied science because all the lectures and the final project thesis would take place in the University in Essen.

I really have to admit that I had very high expectations towards this students programme. The reports and experiences of the former students always sounded so brilliant that I absolutely wanted to have good experiences of my own. Therefore I was certain that I would probably improve my economic skills as well as establishing the international contact with the Chinese students.

Of course I had, no doubt, some questions in advance that I considered a lot, like: Will we have communication problems with the Chinese or will they be helpful and dedicated during the project work? Moreover I was wondering if we would get help from the coaches when theoretical or communication problems occurred.

1.4 The context of school

The pupil programme „Basics of International Planning“ in corporation with the University of Applied Sciences does not refer to a special subject in school. The whole programme was chosen voluntarily by the participants. However one can say that the programme has a particular context referring to our school. As my school has been “Europaschule” since 2011 our school has a quite big international orientation. Therefore my school supports programmes like this and feels that the pupils gain many experiences.

2. Realization of the project

2.1 Factual description on the execution of the project

After we had gone to the first lesson, in which we formed each groups, our Chinese-German team stayed in contact because we now had two weeks left to prepare the next meeting. Each team consisted of approximately four German students and two additional male or female Chinese students. In our case two female Chinese students, both at the age of 22 joined our team. We knew that we would have enough time to work out the plan, but we thought of making inquiries at home in order to make good progress.

That was definitely the case because when we had our second lecture and meeting with the Chinese students in Essen, we all had good suggestions. With the help of the lectures and the Chinese students we learned how to create a Business plan and how to figure out the subject information for it. The most difficult task in my opinion was to figure out a special market gap, because this must be the basis when creating a new concept.

My classmates and I went to the FOM University in Essen during the work. The University also has other campuses in Germany, but Essen was the one with the best train connection from our school in Ahaus. The journey was quite long, we firstly had to take the bus to the train station and then the train to Essen. So, each time, it was quite exhausting for us, but we always thought about the progress we could make and of course the fun we had in connection with this multinational project. That is why we often forgot the stress in school we had in this time. The span time between the different lectures or phases was approximately two weeks.

During all our meetings we made substantial progresses. After we had found a special market gap which was suitable for the Chinese market in our opinion, we started to fill our presentation with information step by step.

It was also helpful to have the Chinese students in our group because they not only knew a lot about Business Administration, but also helped us in with our market research. As I already mentioned, we had to launch German chocolate into the Chinese market and therefore had to define some specifics in order to reach our new target group. With the help of the Chinese students we found that normally Chinese people do not eat as much chocolate as we do and have, as a result, not as many

manufacturers as we have. The reason for this small market is the problem that many Chinese people are intolerant to lactose. These little details helped us to find the right products for this market.

The whole business plan had to consist of the sheets:

Our products, market / competition, marketing / distribution and chances / risks.

As it was also our task to prepare a little exhibition stand for the final presentation, we put a lot of effort into the design. We showed pictures of our teamwork, made some chocolate and even had a little chocolate fountain. We thought that the first impression is the most important one and therefore set a great value on our outside appearance in order to gain an edge over our competitors.

Moreover, it was our choice to choose a language in which the whole business plan is written and presented. We decided to choose the German language because we thought that this would be the best idea to show the jury how the Chinese students integrate themselves in a German-Chinese team. In this decision, we immediately found a common ground. The Chinese even suggested choosing German although their German is not quite perfect.

We were obviously successful with our idea because the jury, consisting of professors of the FOM, was very content when we presented our business plan at our little exhibition stand. We firstly showed them our power-point presentation on a screen and after that we were questioned by them about special things. Just after the company's presentations the jury made known the results and elected the three winner teams.

Fortunately, the effort we have put into this presentation was worthwhile and our group got the first place together with another team of our school. We really are very proud of ourselves that we managed to meet the requirements, made by the jury.

2.2 Personal experiences during the project work

My first impressions of the work in this German-Chinese team were really interesting. I would never have thought that our cultures and behaviors would be so different. I can really say that two worlds have collided in this case. On the one hand the German pupils - normally very eloquent, with high demands towards success and luxury. On the

other hand the little Chinese students who are very shy, hard working and almost very conservative.

I was really surprised by the fact that Chinese people are so reserved when working with people that they just have met. However during the project thesis it has come to my notice that the Chinese always treat people so distantly. When we discussed vital points of our presentation they never dared to state opinions in order to prevent a possible disappointment on our part. I assume that this behavior is perhaps just unconscious because they grow up with the feeling that everything is a bit monitored and therefore they are very shy in stating their opinion.

This behavior was very unusual for us because in Germany the people are normally not afraid of making known their own opinion. Of course we knew that the freedom of opinion is very limited in China but we would never have thought that we would experience this phenomenon in our group work. We often had to ask them their opinion twice or thrice until we were able to make decisions in our group. This was of course also a challenge for us because every single situation was different than in other group work, we had done before, but it was in no way negative for our final results.

My impression is, nevertheless, that the Chinese are very friendly and warm-hearted. They were smiling all the time and seemed to be very cheerful. Moreover they were very hard-working. When we attended the lectures in Essen, which were mostly brought to us in English, they have noted and translated every single aspect from the presentations we heard. Furthermore they had always prepared the next meeting well and brought in useful new aspects for our final results.

As we also had to think about our marketing strategies for our products and my German classmates and I came to the conclusion that the products would probably find considerable interest if they were promoted on the Internet, the Chinese pointed out that they do not have as much social media access as we have. That was why the Chinese were really interested in seeing all the media we use in order to promote a product. It was unimaginable for them to broadcast a little commercial in order to show it on a video platform because their access to "Youtube" for example was abolished by the government. They were also surprised by the fact that mostly all homepages are available to us. I have learned that they have special homepages, only available for Chinese people. Their media are very controlled so that they have just a little access to the World Wide Web sites. Last but not least I was really astonished by that fact that our Chinese students also were not allowed to use "Facebook" in China. I would never have thought that China, which is, in my opinion, a country with enormous economic progress,

interdicted the access to this global social network. Our students said that they have a very similar network called “RenRen” which they can use, but that is also just available to the Chinese population. Fortunately they talked with us about this problem because it helped us a lot in finding suitable advertising ways on the internet.

I am sure that my German classmates enjoyed the time in our group as much as I did. After a while we got to know each other very well and had a lot of fun.

When we met for a meeting in our home village of Südlohn, the Chinese were really thrilled about our houses and streets. It has come to my notice that the Chinese get enthusiastic very easily about things they have never seen before.

I consider this as a very positive attitude because it is very important to be open for new things abroad in our globalized world.

Another impression was that the Chinese love colorful things. When we created a logogram for our company they always suggested taking many colors. They said that a lot of Chinese appreciate colorful things and prefer buying them. This was of course a good hint for our product's packaging because with the help of those hints we answer to taste of the Chinese population.

3. Reflection and Retrospection

I am very happy that I decided to take part in the FOM-students programme “Basics of International Business Planning”. The programme definitely exceeded all my expectations. I would never have thought that such a programme would change my view of intercultural meetings so much. Firstly, as I also have learned a lot from the different lectures presented to us by well-known and experienced professors, the contact with different cultures is nowadays essential for business as well as for personal careers.

This intercultural teamwork was supposed to prepare us for the globalized business world we are going to work in and of course should show us how different teamwork can be in a multicultural team.

I am of the opinion that the project has succeeded in making the topic “International Economy” accessible to us. We have seen it in a totally different context and could witness the process in which our theoretical ideas were turned into practical ones by ourselves.

I feel that all the lectures were very informative and gave us a good and detailed impression of daily life at a university. This is very helpful because we have to choose our way after the “A levels” soon and therefore I already got an impression of what studying at the FOM University is like.

The most important aspect in my opinion is that we got to know an entirely different culture and two nice girls. The Chinese students I worked with were really kind and we got along very well in spite of the age gap.

I am sure that the Chinese enjoyed the time as much as we did. Although we had some communication problems in the beginning, we all tried our best and made great progress. I am convinced that we definitely would not have had as much fun if everything had gone to plan.

As I have already mentioned before I found out some interesting differences between our two cultures and countries.

From our experiences in my group and of course from the stories of the other groups I noticed that the Chinese have a very hierarchical way of living. As seen in the university, they subordinate themselves if there is a more qualified or higher positioned person like the professors. They behave extremely differently in their presence. I lay this down to the fact that they live in a dictatorship. I have learned that this fact is even more fixed in the business world because the employees are afraid of being fired if they say something wrong or inappropriate.

I can summarize from my personal experiences in the group work that the Chinese students have a totally different attitude to work, willingness to perform and social behavior in contrast to many other cultures I had been in contact with before. Firstly one can say that the Chinese students are not really proactive until you have given them a little impulse. As mentioned before they are very careful and therefore want to avoid situations, which could turn negative. We often had to give them an impulse before they have started working. Nevertheless the things they worked out were very informative and contributed a great progress to our final results.

Moreover it was noticeable that Chinese people are truckled although they are working with people who are even younger. I knew that they live hierarchically but I have never thought that they would treat us like that as well. Therefore I have determined an interesting difference, which shows that the Chinese have outclassed us in view of their knowledge in business studies but when working in team one could not see the actual difference between our ages because it was often the

case that the Germans were the ones who outperformed the Chinese students.

However the Chinese students were also very cooperative and kept our good atmosphere within our group if we had bigger discussions about important decisions. From my own experience I can say that the Chinese students are very open-minded as regards meeting new people and of course visiting different places. They are all very hospitable as I experienced when our students invited us for a typical Chinese meal in their flat share in Essen. In my opinion they treated us in a different way in this case. I could observe that they were more relaxed and certainly more eloquent.

Furthermore I noticed a considerable difference in our media system. The Chinese population has a very restricted access to the Internet which surprised me quite a lot. The Chinese are so far advanced in many topics, e.g. technology. Therefore I would never have expected that their government decided to restrict so many things like the internet or the television. No wonder that they sometimes have a very conservative point of view when they didn't catch light of things which happen in our world. As an example our Chinese students told us that they are very astonished that so many young couples are seen in the streets. They told us that in China a lot of parents would probably forbid this until their children are somewhat older.

I personally can only draw positive conclusions from the project. I have gained extensive experiences which I won't forget easily. On the one hand I got to know a different culture and learned how to handle those multicultural differences. This is very important for my further life because due to globalization I will surely have contact with other countries. I was definitely able to extend my cross-cultural competences. I can also say that the project also enhanced my self-confidence when being with people from other countries.

Summing up I can say that this intercultural meeting has given me an understanding of a different culture and has finally awoken my interest in getting to know many new ones. Concerning the Chinese culture I now have a totally different view because now I know that they have very restricted media access which explains their behavior and lack of freedom of opinion in some situations very well.

4. Outlook

This programme has, as I said before, definitely awoken my interest in other cultures. I just can strongly recommend taking part to other pupils. As a result of this project I decided to be a willing worker on an organic farm in Great-Britain after I have graduated from school. I very much look forward to experiencing a new culture and to figuring out differences or perhaps similarities. As I learned from the project, I now have to gain my own intercultural experiences and ideally use them as much as possible. However I will probably also make use of these experiences in my further career. Since I would like to work in a leading international company it is very helpful to have working experiences with the Chinese people because the country China is the economic superpower and is therefore getting more important for big companies.

6. Statement of Authorship

7. Permission for anonymous publication

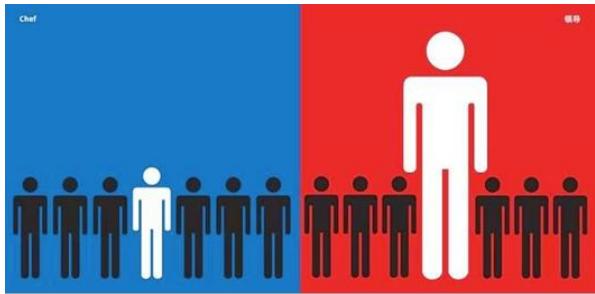
It is planned to make the project documentations available for scientific research and for the CertiLingua network by publishing examples of best practice on the CertiLingua website. This will be done anonymously. The author's consent is nevertheless necessary.

- I hereby authorise the anonymous publication of my project documentation.
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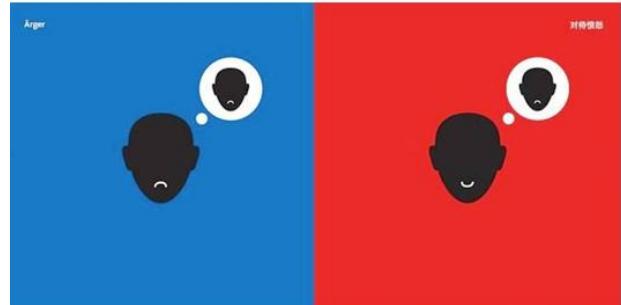
8. Encloses

Little cartoons about the behavior and habits of the western (blue; left) and eastern (red; right) cultures

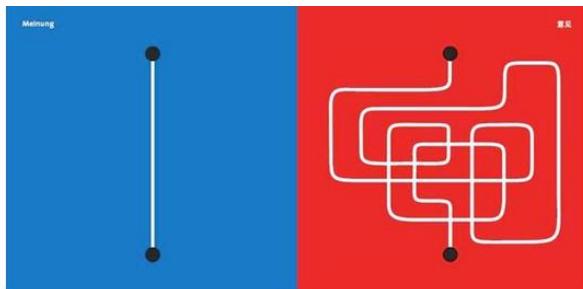
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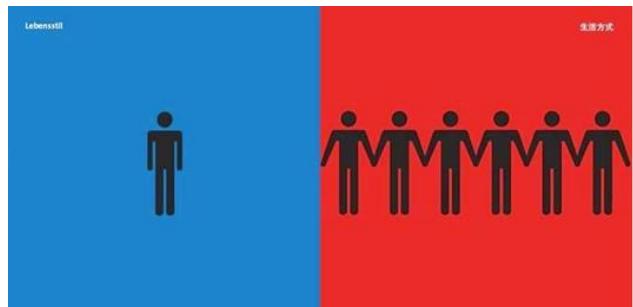
keyword: trouble



keyword: opinion



keyword: lifestyle



Bibliography:

Comparison of the Western and Eastern culture

http://www.google.de/imgres?q=china+west+gegen%C3%BCberstellung&start=218&hl=de&s_a=X&biw=1400&bih=853&tbo=isch&tbnid=TLdU6OIFEj_pZM:&imgrefurl=http://blog.art-i.de/2012/03/ost-und-west/&docid=keBfyY4XIapglM&imgurl=http://blog.art-i.de/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Bild-8.png&w=531&h=265&ei=QnErUZ3pBYiWswayyIHwDA&zoom=1&iact=rc&dur=281&sig=116094277493631113165&page=6&tbnh=128&tbnw=258&ndsp=44&ved=1t:429,i:148&tx=155&ty=47

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Hohes Preissegment	Luxusartikel	Konkurrenz	Marktlücke	Chinesische Bedürfnisse
Zielgruppe: Personen, die deutsche Qualität und den Luxus unserer Pralinen wertschätzen und bereit sind, einen hohen Preis zu zahlen	westliches Luxusgut als Statussymbol	• Nestlé, Le Conte, Mars • chinesische Pralinenhersteller	hoher Markt-potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • laktosefrei • firmeneigenen Onlineshop • aufwendige Verpackung • Geschenkartikel • frei zusammen stellbare Pralinenschachtele

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Best case	Average case	Worst case
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