

## Business Column

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CHINAWAYS SPECIALIZES IN INTERCULTURAL TRAINING PROGRAMS. THE FOCUS IS TWOFOLD: DUTCH/ WESTERN CULTURE EXPLAINED FROM A CHINESE PERSPECTIVE AND CHINESE CULTURE MADE ACCESSIBLE TO WESTERNERS.

# CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

## 文化疏通：中国人眼中的荷兰人

### THE DUTCH FROM A CHINESE PERSPECTIVE

An awareness and understanding of cultural differences increases the chance of business success. As a sinologist in an international business environment, I have for many years focused on dealing with cultural differences when doing business in China. With so many Chinese companies now coming to the Netherlands, it may be wise for the Dutch to look into the mirror and see themselves from a Chinese perspective!

So, from a Chinese point of view, what do you think – are Dutch people good at networking and do they ever bother about face? Is their image of being direct, practical and goal-oriented, the same when seen through Chinese eyes?

In China relations or guanxi are very important. You are whom you know. Of course this applies to any society in a way, but the art of maintaining relations with a complex system of reciprocity, perfec-

ted by the Chinese, is much less pronounced in the Netherlands. The focus is on the individual, who is responsible for his own life. Dutch people regard their family and friends as 'private', and not to be mixed with business. So it is not unfriendliness that your Dutch business partner does not spend the weekends and evenings with you, he just draws the line between private life and work!

The Dutch have an egalitarian society. Everyone has the right to speak and to be heard. It is not strange to address your boss by his or her first name, or to disagree openly. Criticism can be quite blunt, especially seen through Chinese eyes. Saving or giving 'face' is not an issue in the Netherlands. An opinion, albeit a different one, shows commitment and is met with appreciation. Already in primary school children are encouraged to form opinions and to express them. In China, one who speaks a lot shows weakness, while someone who can afford to be silent shows authority. In the Netherlands, silence is seen as ignorance, or disinterest. A tip for Chinese trying to do business in the Netherlands is: profile yourself, don't be too modest and do ask questions. Another advice in the field of communication: when giving a presentation, try to be authentic, realistic and do not burden the audience with endless facts and figures.

The Dutch are known for their singleness of purpose and their practicality. But why is it that in China you phone someone on his mobile and make a same-day appointment, while in Holland it can take quite a while to get through (barriers can consist of secretaries or the person being in a meeting)? And when you do make your appointment, it will be in three weeks time, as diaries tend to be full... Let's first consider those meetings – a typical Dutch phenomenon, known worldwide as polderen. This stems from the well-known struggle against water, when farmers all had equal rights and responsibilities for the dry keeping of their land and reaching consensus among all involved was crucial. So remember that in the Netherlands bosses continually consult their employees and an authoritarian attitude simply will not do.

Apart from adhering strictly to one's diary, planning and time keeping is serious business in the Netherlands. When you consider the view of a Chinese manager: "You can plan but changes will happen anyway!", you can sense a completely different cultural attitude.

Concluding it can be said that with an open mind, knowledge and a sense of humor, Chinese-Dutch cultural differences can be overcome and doing business together will become a rewarding and even a refreshing experience!

意识到不同文化之间的相似及相异会有助于双方事业合作的成功。我自己作为活动于商界的汉学家，多年来，我一直关注着文化的异同带来的影响，尤其目前很多中方公司来到荷兰，从中国视角来审视荷兰人大约会比较明智的。

我想问问，中国人眼中的荷兰人，他们是否善于建立关系网？荷兰人有没有面子一说呢？荷兰人的直接了当及实际的性格在中国人眼中又如何呢？

在中国，关系相当紧要，你认识谁是很关键的。当然喽，我们可以说在任何社会都有“关系”一说，但是呢，关系网的维持极具文化背景的复杂性，在这方面，荷兰社会却没有中国社会那么发达那么注重。荷兰社会提倡个人，就是说每个人自己的为人行事是他自己的事，与他人无关，荷兰人把家人朋友当成自己的私事，没有必要卷入工作中，所以如果荷兰人在周末或者晚上没有陪同你去做点什么，并不是说他对你没有好感，仅仅是“公私分明”罢了！

荷兰社会人人平等，每个人都有权发表自己的观点和看法。直接叫老板的名字是常见的事，公开地不同意上级的看法也是可以的，批评有时候对中国人来说会很很针锋相对。“丢面子”或“给面子”在荷兰不存在。如果一个人持有不同的见解，说明这个人很卖力，所以会得到赞赏。荷兰孩子们从小就被鼓励表达个人的思想，而在中国，通常的人认为话多是弱点，如果一个人沉默寡言，大家似乎会觉得有威信。在荷兰呢，如果一个人什么也不说是无知或冷淡的表现。我建议来荷兰工作的中国人最好要表露自己，不要过分谦逊，多提问题。在交流沟通方面，我主张在介绍企业时，强调独创与实际，不要重复一些冗长的数据。

荷兰人以办事明快、简略实际著称于世，但是我们也知道在中国当天打电话就可以约会见面谈事情，而在荷兰约会见面则困难重重，会有秘书啦，开会啦，而且呢，即使是约好了也是三周之后才能见面，荷兰人似乎忙得不可开交。荷兰的开会现象也是著称于世的，它的历史根源是荷兰人与海水的斗争，在过去，农民们每家每户都聚会到一处，一起来协商如何不受水入侵自己的农田，每户人家都有责任都得参加，所以千万记住在荷兰，听员工的意见很重要，不是上司说了算。

除了荷兰人大家似乎都很遵守提前很早计划约会，时间表和守时也很要紧，而中国的经理们常常会说：“计划归计划，变化会发生！”，所以这就是不同文化不同态度。

我的结论也很简单：大家以开放、开明和幽默的方式来对待所有的差异，那么双方的合作会成功，而且也会带来新奇的经验！ ●