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Authors

Graham, John L

Kim, Dong Ki

Lin, Chi-Yuan

et al.

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Buyer-Seller Negotiations Around the Pacific Rim: Differences in Fundamental Exchange Processes

JOHN L. GRAHAM
DONG KI KIM
CHI-YUAN LIN
MICHAEL ROBINSON*

The determinants of buyer-seller negotiations in four cultures are investigated in a laboratory simulation. One hundred thirty-eight American, 54 Chinese, 42 Japanese, and 38 Korean business people participated in a two-person, buyer-seller, intracultural negotiation simulation. In negotiations between Americans, the use of more problem-solving bargaining strategies positively influenced negotiation outcomes. In negotiations between Chinese, more competitive strategies led to better results. In Japanese and Korean negotiations, buyers achieved higher economic rewards than sellers. In all four cultures, bargainers were more satisfied with negotiation outcomes when partners were rated more attractive.

A face-to-face, buyer-seller negotiation is perhaps the most fundamental marketing process. Before the existence of television advertising, direct marketing, supermarkets, shopping malls, electronic funds transfers, and credit cards, there were face-to-face, buyer-seller negotiations. Indeed, even before the concept of money, we had face-to-face exchanges of goods and services—that is, commercial negotiations in which it was hard to determine who was the buyer and who was the seller.

Although technological advances have made buyer-seller negotiations more efficient, the fundamental process of a buyer-seller negotiation and its purpose are unchanged. All commercial exchanges still involve two-way communication between buyers and sellers, even though they may not talk to one another directly (cf. Malinowski 1926). Moreover, it is our proposition that a clear understanding of a face-to-face, buyer-seller negotiation in its most basic form is the requisite for a deeper understanding of today's more complex and protracted buyer-seller negotiations. Indeed, a shortcoming of consumer research is its conception of producer behavior as simply a stimulus. Yet, social exchange theory mandates that an adequate understanding of consumer behavior is unattainable without understanding producer behavior and the interactions between exchange partners.

Dwyer (1984) and Schurr and Ozanne (1984) have outlined other ample reasons why consumer researchers should be interested in face-to-face, buyer-seller negotiations; for example, exchange agreements are still negotiated in America's car dealer show rooms and real estate offices and in a broader array of contexts in other countries. But, these reasons are really secondary to consumer researchers' needs to understand the most basic form of buyer-seller negotiation so that it may also be understood in its more complex forms of today.

The primary purpose of the study is to determine if face-to-face, buyer-seller negotiation processes vary across three Asian cultures. Specifically, the validity of generalizations about Oriental behavior are called to question by comparing simulated negotiations of Japanese, Korean, and Chinese (Taiwanese) business people. American buyer-seller negotiation processes are also examined and discussed in relation to the three Asian cultures.

* John L. Graham is Associate Professor of Marketing, School of Business Administration, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089. Dong Ki Kim is Professor of Marketing and Dean of the Graduate School of Business Administration, Korea University, Seoul, Korea. Chi-Yuan Lin is President of the National Sun Yat-Sen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan (Republic of China). Michael Robinson is Associate Professor of History, College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089. Research for this article was supported by grants from the U.S. Department of Education, Toyota Motor Sales, Inc. USA, and the International Business Education and Research program at the University of Southern California's School of Business Administration.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The basic theoretical perspective underlying all hypotheses in this study is drawn from social psychological (cf. Rubin and Brown 1975; Sawyer and Guetzkow 1965; Thibaut and Kelley 1959) and exchange (cf. Bagozzi 1978; Homans 1974) theories.[1] Briefly, three classes of constructs—the bargaining process, situational constraints, and bargainer characteristics—determine negotiation outcomes.

Negotiation Outcomes

In the hundreds of bargaining experiments conducted prior to this research, a commonly used measure of negotiation outcomes is profits (both individual and joint) attained by bargainers in negotiation simulations (cf. Rubin and Brown 1975; e.g., Clopton 1984; Dwyer and Walker 1981). Rather than a traditional focus on joint profit, our view is that individuals should (and usually will) try to maximize their own economic rewards while attempting to keep partners satisfied. That is, negotiators are really involved in a difficult balancing act between *their own profits* and *the satisfaction of their clients*. Such a view of key negotiation outcomes is consistent with the views of several authors (e.g., Graham 1986; Fisher and Ury 1981; Weitz 1978).

Negotiation Process Variables

Problem-Solving Approach. The problem-solving approach (PSA) to buyer-seller negotiations can be placed on a continuum: at one end of the scale are negotiation behaviors best characterized as cooperative, integrative, and information-exchange oriented and at the other end of the scale are negotiation behaviors described as competitive, individualistic, distributive, and persuasion oriented. Generally, the PSA has been found to positively influence joint negotiation outcomes. Graham (1986) found statistically significant relationships between negotiators' PSA and partners' satisfaction with negotiation outcomes, and partners' PSA and negotiators' individual profits. The present study is in part a replication of the latter work and therefore the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Negotiators' individual profits are positively related to their bargaining partners' problem-solving approach.

H2: Partners' satisfaction is positively related to negotiators' problem-solving approach.

In both cases, bargainers who encourage partners to provide information about themselves and their needs and preferences can be expected to achieve more favorable negotiation outcomes.

The influence of negotiators' approach (i.e., behavior and attitudes) on the partners' negotiation approach is also investigated in this study. Rubin and Brown (1975) and Weitz (1978) suggest the importance of adjusting one's bargaining tactics according to one's impressions of the opponent's negotiation style. Specifically, Weitz suggests that adaptive behavior will enhance bargaining effectiveness. Rubin and Brown posit high adaptability coupled with cooperativeness will favor higher negotiation outcomes. Although empirical support for these latter propositions is limited at best, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H3: Negotiators' problem-solving negotiation strategies are positively related to their partners' problem-solving negotiation strategies.

Pruitt and Kimmel (1977) describe the mechanism involved in Hypothesis 3 as reciprocation. When negotiators give information about needs and preferences, their partners will be likely to reciprocate. Gouldner (1960) explains that a "reciprocity norm" establishes a stable set of mutual rewards that guides interactions such as negotiations. Pruitt (1981), Putnam and Jones (1982), and Walton and McKersie (1965) are among several other researchers who describe a tendency of negotiators to imitate or match one another's bargaining strategies.

Lastly, Walton and McKersie (1965) suggest that the opposite of PSA strategies are distributive bargaining strategies, wherein the goal is to change a target's attitudes, attributions, or actions. An example of a distributive or instrumental appeal is Angelmar and Stern's (1978) "threat" content category. Threats are viewed by researchers to subtract from the recipient's utility of a particular alternative, and potentially moves the recipient (partner) closer to the threatener's (negotiator's) more favorable alternatives (Walton and McKersie 1965). Consequently, bargainers using distributive or instrumental strategies can be expected to achieve higher individual negotiation outcomes.[2]

H4: Negotiators' individual profits will be inversely related to their own problem-solving negotiation strategies.

Attractiveness of the Negotiator. Another important endogenous construct is attractiveness of the negotiator. Graham (1985) has shown that negotia-

[1] Note that these theories, as with most psychological research, are based primarily on the characteristics and behaviors of Americans.

[2] Note the antithesis implied in the literature and in the proposed model—Hypotheses 1 and 3 compared to Hypothesis 4.

tors' attractiveness positively influences partners' satisfaction in a negotiation simulation. Rubin and Brown (1975) also conclude that, generally, interpersonal attraction enhances bargaining outcomes. Therefore, to the extent that a person receives rewards from a relationship with someone s/he perceives as attractive, that person will be more satisfied with the negotiation outcome.

H5: Partners' satisfaction with negotiation outcome will be positively related to negotiators' attractiveness.

A Situational Constraint (Role of the Negotiator)

Graham (1984) finds role of the negotiator (i.e., buyer or seller) to be the most important causal factor in negotiations between Japanese; no such relationship is discovered between Americans. Specifically, Japanese buyers tend to achieve higher economic rewards than their respective sellers. This vertical relationship between Japanese buyers and sellers is well documented (cf. Nakane 1970). Indeed, Schmidt (1979, p. 2) puts it in no uncertain terms: "In the past as now, a seller was considered little more than a beggar. Yet the buyer—the *o-kyaku-sama* (honored guest)—was, and remains king." So, we might expect the role of the negotiator (i.e., buyer or seller) to have the strongest influence on profits for the Japanese.

Schmidt (1979) suggests that status is an important factor in negotiations between Taiwanese. Kim (1985, p. 4) echoes this theme for Korean business relationships: "vertical relationships are more emphasized than horizontal human relations." Because of the influence of status relationships in Asian cultures, we might expect Japanese, Chinese, and Korean buyers to do better than their respective sellers.

H6: In intracultural negotiations between Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans, buyers will achieve higher profits than sellers.

Hall (1976, p. 129) provides a rationale for the importance of role constraints. He describes a crucial dimension of culture to be the importance of the communication context and specifically states that the importance of context can be generalized to negotiating situations. That is, he defines Japan as a high-context country where the words used during negotiations are not as important as the negotiators' status relationships (e.g., who is buyer and who is seller), which are determined prior to the bargaining situation. In other words, deference will be given Japanese buyers because status relationships determine processes and outcomes in that culture.

A Bargaining Characteristic (Culture)

Aside from the cultural differences of the Japanese just described, a small amount of information regarding negotiation behaviors in the other Asian cultures exists. Therefore, we have assumed in this study that relationships between process variables and negotiation outcomes will generally hold across the four cultural groups—the three Asian groups and the American group. In a section following the tests of these various hypotheses, comparisons of the four groups are presented. Such a comparison is strictly exploratory. However, the following limited sources of information about negotiation styles of Koreans and Taiwanese do provide a "hazy" background for interpretation of the comparison results.

Kim (1985, p. 4) contrasts Korean negotiation styles to those of Americans and the Japanese. He points out the importance of developing personal relationships with Korean business associates: "The result of this attitude appears in (Koreans') intimate and lavish hospitality to acquaintances in contrast to their hostile and blunt response to other people who they do not know." Kim also describes Korean business relationships as vertical. Jang (1985, p. 36) supports Kim's views and emphasizes that Westerners who conduct business with Koreans should take care to build personal relationships, adding that

> Koreans have developed strong qualities that are not necessarily consistent with the Confucian teachings of moderation. It is not uncommon for a Western businessman to be surprised when he finds that his Korean counterpart, who had appeared to be very calm and gentle in his manner, actually in reality had the ability to be very shrewd, tenacious, and even ruthless.

Schmidt (1979) provides insight into buyer-seller negotiations of the Taiwanese. He describes Chinese negotiators as being "generally honest," very price conscious, and very competitive. He also suggests several differences from Americans in the negotiation process—negotiations take longer and all issues are talked out (both positive and negative aspects). Chinese initially ask for a lot, make group decisions top-down, and let age and status affect negotiation outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODS

Participants

The participants in the simulation were 54 Chinese, 42 Japanese, 38 Korean, and 138 American business people. All have been members of executive education programs or graduate business classes and have had at least two years business experience in their respective countries. The participants were paired randomly and assigned to play the role of either buyer or seller in an intracultural negotiation simulation.

Laboratory Setting

The negotiation simulation, developed by Kelley (1966), involves negotiating the prices of three prod-

ucts. Each bargainer was given an instruction sheet, including a price list with associated profits for each price level. The participants were then allowed fifteen minutes to read the instructions (i.e., either a buyer or seller position sheet and appropriate payoff matrix) and plan negotiation strategies. The participants were seated across from one another at a table, given final verbal instructions, and left alone. When either an agreement was reached or one hour had elapsed, the participants were given the post-game questionnaire. See Graham (1985) for complete details regarding the exercise.

Operationalization of Study Variables

All negotiations and game instructions were conducted in the respective native languages. The Chinese, Japanese, and Korean translations of the post-game questionnaire were checked by having the translations converted back into English by different translators, and in each case the two English versions of the questionnaires were compared and translation discrepancies resolved.

Two negotiation outcome variables were considered in this study. Negotiators' individual profits ($\$_n$) were derived directly from the bargaining solution agreed to by the negotiators. Partners' satisfaction (SAT_p) with the negotiation was measured using a four-item scale included in the partners' post-game questionnaires. All scales were developed specifically for this research program. Four dyads (i.e., two American, one Korean, and one Chinese) did not reach agreement and were eliminated from the analysis.

Two process-related measures were derived from post-game questionnaires. Each participant rated his/her personal bargaining strategies and his/her partner's bargaining strategies on several items. The scales for problem-solving bargaining strategies (PSA_n) combine four items from a negotiator's and four items from his/her partner's questionnaire for a total of eight items. Then, partners rated the interpersonal attractiveness (ATT_n) of negotiators. See Table 1 and Graham (1985) for more details.

The Japanese were given a shorter questionnaire form. Japanese data were collected first and the questionnaire was expanded for the other groups. Thus, the data presented in Table 2 reflect use of a single item for measurement of SAT_p and a six-item scale for PSA. Correlations between the longer scales and the subsumed, shorter scales were $'SAT_p = 0.864$ and $'PSA = 0.957$ for the combined American, Chinese, and Korean groups. Finally, for the PSA measure, correlations between the sums of negotiator-reported items and partner-reported items, were calculated for the eight-item measure, $r = 0.327$ ($p < 0.05$), and the six-item measure, $r = 0.259$ ($p < 0.05$).

RESULTS

Hypotheses Tests

Hypotheses 1 through 5 were tested by calculation of partial correlation coefficients, controlling for the effects of role of the negotiator (i.e., buyer or seller). This analysis approach was necessitated by the strong effects of role on negotiation outcomes for the Japanese and Korean groups. The results are reported in Table 2.

A positive relationship between negotiators' profits ($\$_n$) and partners' problem-solving approach (PSA_p), Hypothesis 1, was confirmed only for the American group ($p < 0.05$). Partners' PSA apparently had no effect on negotiators' profits for the three Asian groups.

Hypothesis 2, a positive relationship between negotiators' problem-solving approach (PSA_n) and their partners' satisfaction (SAT_p), was supported for the American group and weakly supported for the Korean group. No such relationships were apparent for either the Chinese or Japanese groups.

Consistent with Hypothesis 3, strong positive relationships between negotiators' problem-solving approach (PSA_n) and their partners' problem-solving approach (PSA_p) were discovered for the American, Korean, and Japanese groups. For the Chinese, there was no relationship between negotiators' and their partners' PSA.

Alternatively, an inverse relationship ($p < 0.05$) between negotiators' profits ($\$_n$) and their problem-solving approach (PSA_n) was found only for the Chinese negotiators. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was not supported for the American, Japanese, and Korean groups.

As predicted in Hypothesis 5, positive relationships between negotiators' attractiveness (ATT_n) and partners' satisfaction (SAT_p) were found for all four groups.

Hypothesis 6 was tested using analysis of variance with role of the negotiator (i.e., buyer or seller) as the effect. Only Japanese and Korean buyers achieved significantly higher profits ($\$_n$) in the simulation than did their respective sellers. For the Americans and Chinese, the role of the negotiator appears to have had no influence on profits.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Interpretation of Results

American buyers did achieve higher profits than American sellers, but the difference was neither statistically or practically significant. Except for Hypotheses 4 and 6, all other hypothesized relationships were supported for the American group. Thus, it appears that a problem-solving approach was helpful in American negotiations. Such an approach, emphasizing the exchange of information, appears to have fa-

TABLE 1

VARIABLES IN THE STUDY, A COMPARISON OF THE FOUR CULTURAL GROUPS

Category	Variable	Symbol	Description and measure	Mean/sd (range) American (n = 134)	Chinese (n = 52)	Japanese (n = 42)	Korean (n = 36)
Negotiation outcomes	Negotiators' profits	$\$_n$	Negotiator's individual profit level associated with final agreement in Kelley's (1966) negotiation game, range = 28 to 80	45.9/10.2 (13–65)	43.0/10.4 (16–68)	47.9/7.7 (31–64)	43.2/10.9 (15–62)
	Partners' satisfaction	SAT_p	Partners' satisfaction with the outcome of the negotiation, 4 items, range = 4 to 20, Cronbach α = 0.79 (single item for Japanese)	14.9/2.8 (5–20)	14.5/2.8 (4–20)	3.83/.09* (2–5)	13.7/2.9 (7–19)
Process variables	Problem-solving approach (strategies)	PSA_n	Negotiator's and partner's rating of negotiator's bargaining strategies along PSA continuum, 8 items, range = 8 to 40, Cronbach α = 0.73 (six items for Japanese, Cronbach α = 0.68)	25.2/5.2 (11–39)	28.4/3.1 (23–35)	21.1/3.7* (13–29)	29.0/5.1 (21–40)
	Interpersonal attraction	ATT_n	Ratings of interpersonal attraction, 3 items, range = 3 to 15, Cronbach α = 0.68	11.9/2.3 (6–15)	11.6/2.0 (6–15)	12.0/2.0 (8–17)	11.6/1.9 (9–15)
Situational constraint	Role of negotiator	B/S	Role of the negotiator in the experiment, either buyer = 1 or seller = 0	–	–	–	–
Bargainer characteristics	Age	Age	Negotiator's age, years	31.8/8.1 (25–60)	37.6/12.1 (25–65)	36.9/5.1 (25–48)	39.0/7.6 (25–53)
	Experience	EXP/IC	Interorganizational contact—percentage of work involving contact outside the participant's company	47.6/30.0 (0–90)	46.9/21.8 (0–90)	51.8/19.9 (10–90)	55.0/19.6 (10–90)

NOTE: * = values for a shorter scale (see "Description and measure" category).

cilitated American partners' satisfaction. At the same time, problem-solving strategies apparently encouraged American partners to reciprocate with problem-solving behaviors, which in turn increased profits. That is, American negotiators positively influenced the two crucial negotiation outcomes (i.e., their own profits and their partners' satisfaction) by using a more cooperative, problem-solving approach. However, the mediating role of American partners' behaviors should be noted. When American partners did

TABLE 2

HYPOTHESES TEST RESULTS PARTIAL CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS

Hypotheses	American group (n = 134)	Chinese group (n = 52)	Japanese group (n = 42)	Korean group (n = 36)
H1: ($PSA_p \rightarrow \$_n$)	.329[a]	.120	−.046	.074
H2: ($PSA_n \rightarrow SAT_p$)	.489[a]	−.039	.083	.297[b]
H3:[c] ($PSA_n \rightarrow PSA_p$)	.496[a]	.161	.467[a]	.696[a]
H4: ($PSA_n \overset{(-)}{\rightarrow} \$_n$)	−.073	−.289[a]	−.103	.074
H5: ($ATT_n \rightarrow SAT_p$)	.265[a]	.412[a]	.327[a]	.550[a]

[a] $p < 0.05$.
[b] $p < 0.10$.
[c] For Hypothesis 3, the unit of analysis is the dyad. Thus, sample sizes are halved and the influence of role of the negotiator is not partialed out.
NOTE: Results controlled for role (i.e., buyer or seller).

TABLE 3

HYPOTHESIS TEST RESULTS ANOVA, NEGOTIATORS' PROFITS ($\$_n$)

Statistics	American group (n = 134)	Chinese group (n = 52)	Japanese group (n = 42)	Korean group (n = 36)
Buyers' profits (mean)	47.6	45.6	51.6	48.0
Sellers' profits (mean)	44.2	40.6	44.3	38.1
R^2	.028	.057	.232*	.170*

NOTE: * indicates $p < 0.05$.

not reciprocate with problem-solving behaviors, their respective negotiators' economic rewards suffered. Finally, as Rubin and Brown (1975) and others would predict, when American negotiators were positively attracted to partners, they were also more satisfied with negotiation outcomes.

Buyer-seller negotiation data for the Chinese group differed from the American model of buyer-seller negotiations implied by our results. Problem-solving bargaining strategies had a direct and negative effect on the Chinese group's profits. Chinese negotiators who used more competitive strategies did better in the buyer-seller simulation, which appears to support Schmidt's (1979) comments about Chinese competitiveness. Interpersonal attraction was also found to be an important influence on partners' satisfaction for the Chinese negotiators.

The results of this study appear to support the idea that in the Japanese culture sellers defer to buyers. The buyer-versus-seller role of the negotiators explains 23 percent of the variance in Japanese negotiators' economic rewards. (Indeed, this was the strongest influence on negotiators' profits among all four cultural groups.) Interpersonal attraction also appears to be important in Japanese negotiations. For the Japanese participants in this study, it seems that a problem-solving approach may have an important indirect effect on partners' satisfaction. Although it was not a hypothesis in this study, Japanese negotiators' problem-solving strategies appear to lead to higher ratings of interpersonal attraction, which in turn are associated with higher partner satisfaction. This relationship ($PSA_n \rightarrow ATT_n \rightarrow SAT_p$) deserves more attention in future studies of Japanese negotiation behaviors. Finally, the Japanese tend to reciprocate a cooperative approach. Like the Americans, negotiators' problem-solving behaviors were strongly associated with their partner's problem-solving behaviors.

Three negotiation models seem apparent from the interpretations of the American, Chinese, and Japanese negotiation results. Problem-solving strategies are the key to successful negotiations for the Americans; competitive strategies yield higher economic rewards for the Chinese; and the role of the negotiator— buyers always do better—determines most buyer-seller negotiation outcomes for the Japanese. It appears that the Korean's negotiation style incorporates aspects of the American negotiation model (i.e., Hypotheses 2, 3, and 5) and the Japanese negotiation model (i.e., Hypotheses 3, 5, and 6). As with the Japanese, the Korean buyers achieved higher profits than Korean sellers in the simulation. This tends to support Kim's (1985) views about Koreans' having vertical personal and business relationships. Additionally, like the Japanese, problem-solving strategies were associated with higher levels of interpersonal attraction (i.e., $PSA_n \rightarrow ATT_n$). Consistent with both Kim's (1985) and Jang's (1985) predictions, Koreans' interpersonal attraction was a key influence on partners' satisfaction.

The results of this study suggest that generalizations about negotiation styles of different nationalities, even those in the same region, are fraught with danger. For example, similarities were found between the Korean and Japanese negotiation models, but differences also exist. Furthermore, the Chinese approach appears to be quite different from the approaches of the Korean and Japanese as well as the Americans. An American model of negotiation appears to be irrelevant to the normative negotiation processes of two of its major trading partners—Japan and Taiwan.

If there is a universal principle, it is the importance of interpersonal attraction. For all four cultural groups, interpersonal attractiveness had strong influences on negotiation outcomes. But our findings cast serious doubt on the generality of much of our knowledge about negotiation behaviors and processes. Almost all of the studies of negotiations in U.S. literature use American college undergraduates as subjects and limit face-to-face, free communication (cf. Rubin and Brown 1975; Clopton 1984). Omitting face-to-face negotiation simulations in research eliminates and ignores the important influence of interpersonal attraction on negotiation outcomes.

Final Comments

This work should be viewed as only a first step in the study of exchange processes and negotiations in different countries. Similar studies using alternative subjects, settings, and methods will be crucial for mitigating the obvious measurement and external validity limitations inherent in a single study. Deserving further attention are the broader implications of the differences discovered about this fundamental exchange phenomenon, the face-to-face, buyer-seller negotiation process. If the buyer-seller negotiation process differs at the face-to-face level, what happens to the process during the more protracted negotiations that occur involving television advertising, direct marketing campaigns, supermarkets, shopping malls, electronic funds transfers, and credit card transactions?

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