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Cultural Notes on Chinese Negotiating Behavior

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Abstract

Western businesses negotiating with Chinese firms face many challenges, from initiating and smoothing communication to establishing long-lasting relationships and mutual trust, and from bargaining and drafting agreements to securing their implementation. Chinese negotiators can be at once warm hosts and friends and tough bargainers. Unique Chinese cultural elements such as complicated local etiquette, obscured decision-making processes, and heavy reliance on interpersonal relationships instead of legal instruments all add to the complexities of Sino-foreign business negotiations, and can make the process tiresome and protracted. Besides talking past each other, Chinese and western negotiators often harbor mutually unfavorable perceptions. Many westerners find Chinese negotiators to be inefficient, indirect, and even dishonest; Chinese negotiators frequently perceive their western counterparts to be aggressive, impersonal, and insincere. The way to decipher the Chinese negotiating style and bring about mutually beneficial results is to better understand the key elements of Chinese culture to which Chinese negotiators attune their business mentality and manners.

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