

## The Impact of Cultural Differences on Business Communication Between Vietnam and China

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### **Abstract**

Since the 21st century, Vietnamese business activities have continuously developed and expanded, especially with the increasingly close trade relationship with China. In the context of the international market, business communication between Vietnam and China is not only an interaction between enterprises of the two countries but also involves cultural exchanges between countries. There are many cultural differences in business communication between Vietnam and China, which greatly impact international business activities. For Vietnam, which is integrating with the world economy, long-term cooperation with Chinese enterprises is crucial, and therefore, further strengthening a deep understanding of Chinese culture is also essential.

With the continuous promotion of business relations between Vietnam and China, Vietnamese businessmen are deeply influenced by Chinese business culture and the Chinese economy, and economic globalization is increasingly deeply rooted in people's hearts. However, there are still some cultural differences in business communication activities between Vietnam and China, resulting in inevitable obstacles in business communication. The state and enterprises should take these obstacles seriously on time, and optimization plans for short-term and long-term promotion of business activities should be continuously proposed to reduce and eliminate these hidden dangers and strengthen individual and collective processing capabilities. Resolving cultural differences will improve the effectiveness of business communication between Vietnam and China, promote friendly economic development between the two countries, and enable Vietnamese businesses to maintain a stable economic position in world trade activities and seek strength.

**Keywords :** *Cultural Differences, Business Communication, Business Culture, Vietnamese Culture.*

### **1. Introduction**

According to the length of history, the emergence of humanity is related to the formation of general culture. Over time, the concept of culture has had different interpretations. Chinese culture is one of the world's oldest and most complex cultures. The culture of Vietnam is deeply influenced by Chinese culture. Although there are similarities on the surface of culture, there are hundreds of different cultural concepts, regional similarities and differences, and differences arising from the unique cultural similarities and differences of

people in different countries (LE PHUONG LOGISTICS, n.d).

The best way for humans to communicate with each other is through culture. Communication is a requirement and one of the indispensable factors in human life, especially in integrating with the world economy, where communication plays an important role. Business communication culture is an important part of international business activities. Cultural differences have a huge impact on business communication. In cross-cultural communication, especially in business activities, the differences in taboo language and various

aspects of life behavior make it difficult to effectively and smoothly communicate. According to the explanation in *Intercultural Business Communication* published by Capital University of Economics and Business Press: “Business communication is the process of mutual understanding, trust, support, and cooperation within and outside a business organization to achieve success in business operations, gain competitive advantages, seek long-term survival and development, create a good business environment, organize a large number of business activities, connect certain channels, send various information related to business operations to established objects inside and outside the organization, and seek feedback” . Business communication is diverse in many aspects, with many potential opportunities and hidden risks. Business communication is a cultural activity that is both scientific and artistic. Unlike traditional communication activities, today's business communication culture involves the participation of modern scientific and technological factors, enhancing the importance and effectiveness of communication (Ya Qi, 2009).

The trend of integrating with the world economy in the context of globalization and communication culture has played an important role in the field of economy and commerce. A good communication process will establish good relationships with partners and customers while creating good opportunities for business activities. International business activities are carried out in different fields, and it is necessary to understand each other's cultural characteristics in various aspects. Vietnamese or Chinese business activities always hope to enter new markets in foreign trade activities. The first important thing is understanding the local culture where you plan to enter and conduct business. Enterprises should pay attention to the differences between their business culture and business culture, as this is a factor that helps them improve competitiveness, shape their corporate image, and facilitate foreign and long-term cooperation (Những điều cần biết về ngoại thương Trung Quốc, n.d)

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1 Data Sources**

This study selected data on the total value of imports and exports of goods from Vietnam

and China from 2015 to 2022. The data involved in the study come from data published by the National Bureau of Statistics, "Promoting Economic and Cultural Exchanges, Deepening Vietnam-China Relations," and other electronic reports published by the Communist Party of Vietnam (Vietnam Customs Service, 2024)

The correlation coefficient mainly adopts the literature research method and the relevant data published by the National Bureau of Statistics. Also, it refers to the “A Comparative Study of Speech Communication Styles between China and the United States from the Perspective of High and Low Context Culture” (Zhang & Yue, 2018; *Corporate Culture in the Process of International Integration*, 2017).

### **2.2 Research methods**

The main research method of this article is literature research and analysis, which is a qualitative method of analyzing and synthesizing the collected information. I mainly use statistics, analysis, and summary methods to conduct research on relevant information in literature and magazines based on previous work.

## **3. Results**

In the context of Vietnam's integration with global economic globalization, communication culture has played an important role in the field of economy and commerce. In foreign trade activities, if both parties hope to develop new cooperation in business activities, the first thing they must do is to understand the local culture in which they intend to enter and conduct business, and strengthen mutual understanding (Sun, 2013).

From 1992 to 2021, the scale of bilateral trade between China and Vietnam maintained a high-speed growth of 28% per year, which was much higher than the growth rate of Vietnam's foreign trade of 15% and China's foreign trade of 13% during the same period. This shows the height of growth in trade between the two countries. Mutually beneficial and highly complementary.

For many years, Vietnam has regarded consolidating and developing its comprehensive strategic partnership with China as a strategic choice and priority for Vietnam's independence, autonomy, multilateralism, and diversified diplomatic path. Due to this good relationship, the trade between the two countries has achieved positive results in many fields, and the trade

relationship between Vietnam and China is becoming increasingly close. Even in the face of the adverse impact of COVID-19, bilateral trade and investment continued to increase, demonstrating the remarkable resilience and development potential of bilateral economic and trade relations. One year after implementing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, it has promoted closer economic and trade exchanges between China and ASEAN. ASEAN has become an important trade partner of China, of which Vietnam ranks first, accounting for

27.65% of the total Southeast market. According to the statistics of the General Administration of Customs of China, in 2022, China's import and export of goods to ASEAN reached 6.52 trillion yuan, an increase of 15% compared to the same period. Among them, the bilateral import and export volume of goods between China and Vietnam was 234.92 billion US dollars, an increase of 4.716 billion US dollars compared to the same period in 2021, a year-on-year increase of 2.1%.

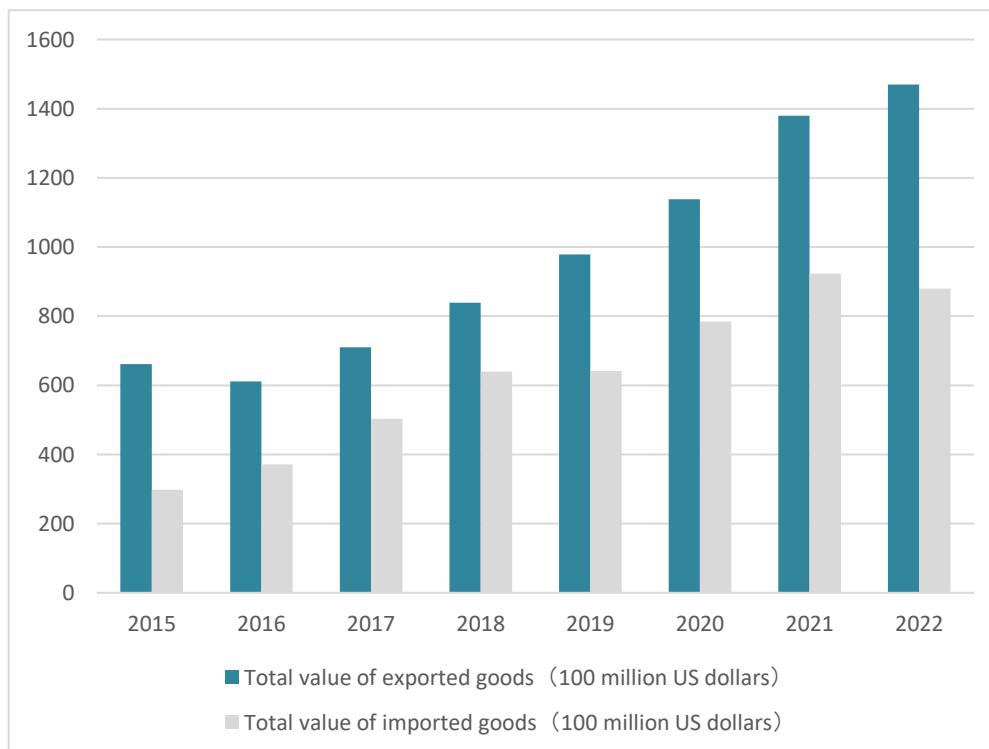


Figure 1. Total Value of Import and Export Commodities between China and Vietnam from 2015 to 2022. Data source: China Government Affairs Network Customs Statistical Data Inquiry Platform ([customs.gov.cn](http://customs.gov.cn))

From an annual perspective, the total value of China's exports to Vietnam in 2022 was \$146.96 billion, an increase of \$80.836 billion compared to the total value of \$66.124 billion in 2015, which is more than double the amount. Compared to the same period in 2021, it increased by \$9.03 billion, a year-on-year increase of 6.8%. In 2015, China's total import value from Vietnam was 29.842 billion US dollars. In 2022, the total import value was 87.961 billion US dollars, an increase of 58.119 billion US dollars compared to the same period in 2015, which is twice as high. Data statistics show that the total value of imports and exports between China and Vietnam has increased, and the economic and trade relationship between

China and Vietnam is becoming increasingly close. From a trade perspective, China remains Vietnam's largest trading partner and second-largest export market. In contrast, Vietnam remains China's largest trading partner in ASEAN and China's sixth-largest trading partner globally.

With the continuous promotion of business relations between Vietnam and China, Vietnamese businessmen are deeply influenced by Chinese business culture and the Chinese economy, and economic globalization is increasingly deeply rooted in people's hearts. However, there are still some cultural differences in business communication activities between Vietnam and China, resulting in inevitable

obstacles in business communication. These obstacles should be taken seriously by the state and enterprises in a timely manner, and optimization plans for short-term and long-term promotion of business activities should be continuously proposed to reduce and eliminate these hidden dangers and strengthen individual and collective processing capabilities. Only by

addressing the impact of cultural differences on business communication between Vietnam and China and promoting friendly economic development between the two countries can Vietnamese businesses stabilize their economic position in world trade activities and seek strength.

Table 1. Sino-Vietnamese business negotiation variable factors table

Variable Factors	Sub Variable Factor	Related Information
Values	Personality	In handling business affairs, emphasis is placed on personal independence, creativity, and decision-making.
	Group Orientation	When dealing with business affairs, collective harmony and interdependence are emphasized, and decisions are made only after collective discussion.
	Save Face	When a conflict occurs, the attitude adopted is to give the other party "face" first and not to damage the relationship.
	Keep Friendship	You want to maintain a long-term, strong, and stable relationship with your business partners.
Concept of Time	One-way Time	In business activities, everything must be strictly adhered to the schedule, and the way of handling affairs is to complete one thing step by step.
	Pleiotropic Time	In business activities, there is no need to strictly arrange the schedule, and there is no time limit for handling affairs. Several things can be completed at the same time.
Verbal Behavior	Speaking Style	The way of speaking is reserved and does not like to argue.
	Spiral Thinking	In the business discourse structure, a spiral statement is adopted first and then the topic is expressed.
	Linear Thinking	In the structure of business discourse, a linear approach is adopted, in which the subject is discussed first and then explained.
Nonverbal Behavior	Smile	Facial expressions and smile patterns during business events.
	Eye Contact	During business activities, maintain eye contact.
	Body Touch	In business activities, physical contact with guests: hugging, shaking hands, kissing, slapping, etc.

(Data source: Communist Party of Vietnam Electronic Report ([dangcongsan.vn](http://dangcongsan.vn)))

Table 2 . Means and standards for different variables

Country	China		Viet Nam		T Value	P
Subvariable Factor	M	SD	M	SD	(df=58)	
Personality	2.2000	0.61026	2.5667	0.81720	-1.969	P<0.10
Group Orientation	2.4667	0.68145	2.6333	0.71840	0.922	P<0.2
Save Face	1.8000	0.92476	1.8333	1.01992	-0.133	P<0.2

Keep Friendship	2.6333	0.76489	2.6000	0.62146	0.185	P<0.2
One-way Time	2.1000	0.80301	1.8667	1.07425	0.953	P<0.2
Pleiotropic Time	1.9333	0.82768	1.1333	1.00801	3.360	P<0.01
Speaking Style	1.8667	0.89955	1.4667	0.89955	1.722	P<0.05
Spiral Thinking	1.7667	0.79438	1.8000	0.76112	-0.159	P<0.2
Linear Thinking	2.3000	0.79438	2.1000	0.71197	1.027	P<0.2
Smile	2.4333	0.89763	2.0667	0.98027	1.511	P<0.1
Eye Contact	2.3333	0.88409	2.3000	0.87691	0.147	P<0.2
Body Touch	1.93333	0.82768	2.1000	0.99481	0.705	P<0.2

(Data source: Communist Party of Vietnam Electronic Report ([dangcongsan.vn](http://dangcongsan.vn)))

The average table of variable factors in Sino-Vietnamese business negotiations shows the value tendencies confirmed by Chinese and Vietnamese businessmen. Validation was performed using statistical methods to determine each variable's mean and standard deviation. The results are shown in Table 2, where M represents the mean, SD represents the standard deviation, df represents the degree of freedom, and P represents the significance level. Among the various variables, Chinese businessmen have the highest average value of confirming the value of maintaining friendship, with a value of 2.64, followed by smiles, with an average value of 2.43, and spiral thinking methods, with the lowest average value, with a value of 1.77; Vietnam Businessmen have the highest average value confirmation value for the personal ontology factor of values, with a value of 2.64; followed closely by the two factors of group orientation and maintaining friendship, with average values of 2.6 and 2.57 respectively; the average value of polydirectional time The lowest value is 1.13. It can be seen that Chinese and Vietnamese businessmen have different recognition values of various variables in business negotiations, and time management also has differences in one-way and multi-way time systems. At the same time, there are similarities in factors such as saving face, maintaining friendship, discourse structure, and eye contact. Therefore, in Sino-Vietnamese business activities, we must pay attention to the similarities and differences in business culture factors between the two countries, correctly handle cultural conflicts or cultural communication errors that occur in business activities, and achieve effective cultural business communication.

The differences in values in international business communication are much deeper and more difficult to overcome than the differences

in description, which may create more difficulty in reconciling differences in business communication. Values are the evaluation criteria and reverence for objective things in a society or group and are the fundamental differences in the opinions of different societies, groups, and even individuals. They are the core content of culture. Once values are formed, they will significantly impact people's lifestyles and behaviors. In international business communication, companies must understand each other's values. The different cultural characteristics of Yue Shang and Zhong Shang resulted in their different outlooks on life and values.

According to Wang ZhiLe's book "New Trends in the Development of Multinational Companies in China": "As a core part of a culture and a huge potential force determining its characteristics, values are one of the deep-seated factors that affect business communication". Vietnam and China encourage compliance and discipline, advocating for implicit expression and a humble attitude. In the era of economic globalization, mainstream international culture does not appreciate excessive humility. Vietnamese Chinese culture emphasizes interpersonal relationships, love, and harmony and establishes and maintains long-term cooperative relationships based on mutual trust. Both parties are accustomed to avoiding legal considerations and considering issues from a theoretical and moral perspective. So, in most cases, Vietnam and China cannot quickly solve problems because they also need to deal with theoretical and moral issues and seek the opinions of their superiors. This value orientation in negotiations is manifested as the difference between decision-makers and decision-making authority.

In negotiations, this value orientation manifests as the difference between decision-makers and decision-making authority. However, the different business values between Vietnam and China can affect the communication process and the consensus between the parties in making decisions. For example, in terms of personal and group-oriented values, Vietnamese tend to emphasize individual independence, creativity, and self-decision-making when handling business affairs. Still, they will remember collective harmony and interdependence. At the same time, Vietnamese businessmen tend to be slow and stable, focusing on results. Therefore, Vietnamese businessmen usually use negotiation to achieve a specific goal. Chinese businessmen are not without individual and group-oriented values but are deeply influenced by feudal ideology and ruling systems. They value hierarchical values more, so the negotiation team must have several people, relative positions, and not only representative power of the company. The vertical hierarchical relationship in China has always been prevalent to some extent, and hierarchical relationships also characterize the social structure. People value the difference in status and their position in the hierarchical relationship, which constantly affects their words and actions.

The values between Vietnam and China are not only different but also have similarities, and to some extent, the same can also bring negative impacts. For example, in international conversations, Vietnamese Chinese culture emphasizes interpersonal relationships, loves harmony, and establishes and maintains long-term cooperative relationships based on mutual trust. Both parties often habitually avoid considering issues from a legal perspective and, instead, consider issues from a theoretical and moral perspective. Therefore, whenever a decision needs to be made, they also need to deal with theoretical and moral issues, seek the opinions of their superiors, and delay in solving the problem.

In all communication activities, the way of thinking is the internal program of human brain activity, which plays a decisive role in people's words and actions. As a long-term cultural accumulation, the way of thinking subtly impacts people's social lives. However, cultural differences among countries worldwide lead to

differences in people's thinking. The differences in thinking styles often become one of the key factors in the success of international business communication activities.

Vietnamese businessmen have vitality, can easily integrate new things, and can enter the market faster. However, most people still need to decide whether to change with new trends, which is still slow and efficient in solving problems compared to Chinese businessmen. Vietnamese businessmen have a broad mindset, but they dare not take risks. Therefore, when encountering favorable opportunities during the negotiation process, they will seize and resolve them as soon as possible. Conversely, they will flexibly coordinate and always hope to achieve harmony, gradually compromise or give up.

Through the accumulation of history, the Chinese have long been accustomed to knowing Hieroglyph, so they generally have a general idea and tend to discuss all issues at once. The Chinese way of thinking often takes a holistic approach and compromises to solve problems. Meanwhile, in business activities, the Chinese side leans towards multi-directional time. Therefore, when participating in discussions, the Vietnamese side needs to prepare the content to be discussed carefully.

In business activities, a successful business owner must not only have rational thinking but also flexibly and reasonably use and consider the thinking of both parties to understand, analyze, and solve problems in business activities. The thinking patterns of Vietnam and China exhibit a certain degree of intuitive wholeness, with obvious generality and ambiguity. Based on objective differences in thinking, business owners from different cultures exhibit differences in business communication methods. Vietnamese and Chinese people prefer visual thinking and overall thinking and are accustomed to combining various parts of an object into a whole, considering its attributes, aspects, and connections. Especially in terms of thinking, Vietnam and China are accustomed to expressing their views in a roundabout way, rarely directly negating them and expressing them in a roundabout manner. So in the communication process, it is important to pay attention to the thinking styles of both parties to avoid cultural differences affecting the effectiveness of business communication.

Habit is a behavior formed through frequent actions in life and exercise, repeated repeatedly, just like human second nature. Feng Meng Long of the Ming Dynasty mentioned in "The Episode of Awakening the World" that "The country is easy to change, and the nature is hard to change" (Stories Old and New: A Ming Dynasty Collection - Feng Meng Long - Google Sách). Character has formed habits; once they are formed, they are not easy to change and affect one's thinking and behavior. Therefore, business communication activities are greatly influenced by social habits and may determine the outcome of judgment. Regardless of the cause, cultural differences often manifest through habits.

Due to the differences between Vietnamese and Chinese customs, national customs and cultural conflicts inevitably occur in the communication process. Communication in business activities is equally essential as trade negotiation and communication. The process of business communication activities mainly goes through three stages: the preparation stage (before negotiation), the ongoing stage (during negotiation), and the conclusion stage (after negotiation). At each stage, there may be factors that can lead to misunderstandings and confusion. So in the communication process of conveying, understanding, and feedback information, problems may be reflected in individual ethnic habits.

Mao Ze Dong advocated in his "Strategic Guidelines for the Second Year of the Liberation War": "Do not engage in unprepared battles, do not engage in uncertain battles". This is true for battlefields and shopping malls. Before starting business communication, it is necessary to be fully prepared, set goals, and understand the relevant information of the negotiation. "Knowing oneself and the enemy, one is invincible in a hundred battles", but Vietnamese people often overlook this habit or do not have a deep understanding and grasp of the other party's situation, especially their cultural and etiquette habits. Many Vietnamese enterprises neglect their duties by understanding the laws of other countries and still adopting a "Vietnamese style" when conducting business cooperation with foreign partners. Although these aspects may not seem directly related to negotiations, they can sometimes have unexpected effects. In business communication, understanding the cultural

differences between both parties makes it easier to promote communication, increase trust, and understand the other party's intentions. Therefore, we must prepare corresponding knowledge and skills for the negotiation team to facilitate communication. In addition to understanding the other party's information, Chinese people also value equal position in business, so our negotiation team also needs to consider issues such as age, position, and number of people.

In addition, Vietnamese businessmen often encounter communication difficulties due to cultural and ethnic customs, which affect some habits that are difficult to change during the communication process. In cultural communication, it is necessary to listen attentively, accept opinions, and engage in open and harmonious communication. But sometimes, there are bad habits, such as shaking legs, doing private things during meetings, ignoring everyone's opinions, and interrupting. Due to these bad habits, there will be great differences between different countries and nations, which is an obstacle to cultural conflict in international business activities. Life is always changing, and changing consciousness is a difficult process, but even more difficult is that although one realizes that some things are not good, there is no improvement in behavior, resulting in those stubborn bad habits that always follow old thinking and habits. Without change, it is difficult to integrate into the cultural communication of international business.

There are still significant differences in customs between Vietnam and China in daily life. Therefore, in business communication, these differences in business habits constantly affect the cooperation between both parties.

#### **4. Discussion**

Each country has different communication methods, customs, and behavioral habits, and each country also has its own handling methods when choosing strategies to address cultural differences. The unique cultures of Yue and Zhong inevitably create obstacles in cross-cultural business communication. The most effective way to address cultural differences is through communication (Ya Qi, 2009).

Firstly, improve verbal and nonverbal communication skills using clear and concise language. In communication, culture determines

people's language and nonverbal communication methods. Language and nonlanguage are mirrors of culture, reflecting cultural connotations and serving as the foundation for communication and exchange. The cultural differences between Vietnam and China reflect the differences in business thinking between both parties regarding language and nonlanguage, directly affecting communication effectiveness. Therefore, it is important to focus on improving the ability to use language and nonlanguage communication tools and become proficient in the language and nonlanguage communication tools used. Accurately applying business communication language and nonverbal forms is crucial (Jia Yang & Li Qi, 2020).

Secondly, gain a deeper understanding of Chinese cultural background, customs, values, and ways of thinking. Knowing oneself and the enemy means knowing the other party's situation in advance like the palm of one's hand. Vietnamese and Chinese businesses' thinking and problem-solving perspectives are unique, reflecting their work, life, investment, and business practices. A deep understanding of Chinese culture is fundamental in the economic and trade relations between Vietnam and China, directly affecting the ideas, actions, and behaviors of Vietnamese and Chinese businesses in the communication process. It is one of the keys to successful communication. In communication with Chinese businessmen, it is necessary to be familiar with different Chinese cultures, demonstrate the advantages of communication styles on different occasions, adopt flexible negotiation methods, and maintain initiative. This is a necessary task for businessmen to do well. Creating a business culture for an enterprise is crucial, but maintaining and leveraging good ways of thinking and values in business communication is the feasible way to guide the future. Therefore, in different environments and backgrounds, gaining a deeper understanding and mastery of the other party is beneficial for gaining initiative in communication (ChuChu, 2020).

Finally, it is necessary to strengthen communication and negotiation skills and establish an expert business negotiation team. A successful negotiation is based on the negotiator seizing the opportunity to demonstrate their good qualities. In this way, in a negotiation,

professionals need to master professional knowledge and "empathize" with the other party's experts, avoiding misunderstandings caused by asymmetric professional knowledge between both parties and improving negotiation efficiency. It is difficult to avoid cultural conflicts in international business communication. And each ethnic culture will continue to harmonize with the development of international culture. Business specialists need to strengthen their professional skills in business negotiations to occupy an advantageous position in international business activities and promote China's trade to the world (Jianfang & Yaguang, 2013).

## **5. Conclusion**

Against rapid economic globalization, business communication between Vietnam and China will become increasingly frequent, and trade cooperation between the two countries will become increasingly close. Due to the many differences in cultural background and cultural environment between Vietnam and China, communication between the two parties will inevitably encounter obstacles and misunderstandings. Therefore, as a Vietnamese business worker, one should be aware of the impact of cultural differences on business communication, fully understand China, the cultural differences between Vietnam and China, and understand China's cultural characteristics, economic development status, and development trends. Establishing a global perspective on culture is the only way to truly achieve economic globalization, and we must face the important role played by China on the world trade stage

Based on the cultural differences in business communication between Vietnam and China will form the driving force for our country to continuously improve and develop its business culture. If the difficulties and obstacles of the above business culture differences are solved, it will promote the trade relations between Vietnam and China, realize the sustainable development of Vietnam's national economic and trade business, reach a new height, and be able to enter the global trade market and develop in harmony with countries around the world for mutual benefit and win-win results.

## **6. Conflict of Interest**

We certify that there is no conflict of



interest with any financial organization regarding the material discussed in the manuscript.

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