CONFlict ResoLUTIOn PreFEreNCeS Of
CHINESE ANd CAucSIAn-AMERICAN STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined cultural differences in conflict resolution preferences among Chinese and Caucasian-Americans in Hawaii. Based on Ting-Toomey's face negotiation theory, Hofstede's cultural variability of individualism-collectivism, Hall's high-context vs. low-context, as well as Rahim and Bonoma's conflict management model, the hypotheses predicted that Americans will have higher preferences for dominating, integrating and compromising styles whereas Chinese will have higher preferences for obliging and avoiding styles. The sample consisted of 113 undergraduate and graduate students from Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, Hawaii, and the U.S. mainland. The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI) was used as measurement based on the five conflict resolution styles: integrating, dominating, obliging, avoiding, and compromising. ANOVA was used to analyze the data. The results indicated that the conflict resolution style preferred by Caucasian-American students is dominating and the one preferred by Chinese students is avoiding. This study also found that Chinese might also have a greater tendency to use both integrating and compromising styles than do most Caucasian-American students. Finally, no significant gender by ethnicity differences was found with regard to conflict resolution preferences. Implications of the findings and future research are discussed.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal conflicts and how to deal with them have presented a dilemma for man since the beginning of time. However, the different strategies that people employ when trying to resolve conflicts are often times simply adopted from what they have been taught through their individual cultural rituals. It is, therefore, necessary for researchers to look into what people's preferred methods are with respect to conflict management.

Before seeking a better conflict resolution strategy, it is important to keep in mind that people from different cultures may have acquired different ways of communication based on their cultural norms and values. Therefore, one's culture exerts great influence on how one communicates, which alternately shapes the culture they share. Under such a notion, we can probably consider that cultural variability will affect the way people communicate.

As quoted from Gudykunst and Kim (1995), "We communicate the way we do because we are raised in a particular culture and learn its language, rules, and norms." (p.430). Therefore, we may assume that while exploring the issue of conflict resolution people somehow tend to prefer the conflict styles that they have encountered in their own cultures.

Statement of Problem

Recent research has focused attention on the interaction between cross-cultural communication and conflict resolution. A number of studies (Cushman & King, 1985; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Lee & Rogan, 1991; Rahim, 1983; Turbisky, Ting-
Toomey & Lin 1991; Ting-Toomey, 1988) also have shown the dual concerns in interpersonal and organizational conflict in terms of intercultural communication. The study of cross-cultural conflict is a complicated process, but no understanding of conflict management would be complete without taking cultural variability into account. Such an analysis is desperately needed in areas where different cultural and ethnic backgrounds coexist, such as in Hawaii.

In order to develop a better understanding of conflict management, it is essential to investigate the role culture plays in the conflict communication process. The dimension of cultural values, such as individualism-collectivism, is frequently mentioned with respect to how it can affect an individual’s internal conflict management process. Furthermore, there are many additional factors that affect peoples’ ability to handle intercultural conflicts such as ‘face’ concerns, cultural value patterns. Therefore, analysis should be focused on studying the relationships between these factors and the conflict communication process, and ultimately, conflict resolution styles.

**Objectives**

The proposed study, therefore, aimed to explore the concept of a conflict communication process through an empirical examination of conflict resolution preferences by a sample of students who are Chinese and Caucasian-American in Hawaii. It examined how ethnic and/or cultural values influence individuals’ conflict resolution styles. Building on Ting-Toomey’s face negotiation theory, Hall’s high-context vs. low-context, Hofstede’s work-related cultural values, as well as Rahim and Bonoma’s conflict management model, this study examined the relationships between ethnic cultures,
exposure to a multi-cultural environment, and conflict resolution preferences of both Chinese students and Caucasian-American students. Furthermore, this study also investigated the relationships between gender and conflict management styles.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the theories regarding face concern, face negotiation, individualism-collectivism, high-context vs. low-context, and conflict styles will be discussed and the correlations among them explored.

**Face concerns**

Conflict resolution represents a major issue in the cross-cultural dimension. Conceptually, it is necessary for intercultural professionals to clarify the importance of the function of culture in conflict management. For instance, Ting-Toomey (1988) presents the concept of face-negotiation theory specifying the influence of three main factors of cultural variability on conflict communication style. The first factor is the role of cultural variability in face management. Ting-Toomey points out that the concept of face-work is “a projected image of one’s self in a relational situation.” (Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 215) For example, in collectivistic cultures, such as those in China, Korea, and Japan, there is a focus on the concept of “face” in which there is a high level of importance placed on allowing others to “save face” while dealing with conflicts in both social and personal relationships. But in individualistic cultures, such as that of the United States, it seems that importance is placed on maintaining a person’s private and public self-image (Ting-Toomey, 1988).

The second factor that Ting-Toomey discusses is the role of cultural variability in conflict styles. She indicates that there is a connection between interpersonal and organizational environments based on conflict styles, such as forcing, confronting,
sharing, withdrawing, and smoothing in terms of the concepts of concern for self interest and for the interest of others. The third factor is the relationship between cultural variability and face management processes. Ting-Toomey discusses this concept based on two dimensions: individualism-collectivism and low-context vs. high-context and also explains how these two dimensions are associated with the different conflict resolution styles. Furthermore, Ting-Toomey assumes that culture variability in managing conflict also exerts influence on one’s preferred manner of managing conflicts. Therefore, cultural variability will be discussed in the next section.

Similarly, Rahim (1983) offers his classification of conflict styles based on two dimensions: concern for self and for others. He points out that the first dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person will go in order to try to satisfy his or her own “face” need, whereas the second dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person intends on going in order to satisfy others’ concerns and interests. In short, these two dimensions are related to maintaining mutual face concerns (Ting-Toomey, 1988). Later in this paper, the concept of conflict styles will be explained exclusively as well as how they relate to cultural variables such the individualism-collectivism dimension and the high vs. low-context dimension.

Based on Ting-Toomey (1988) and Rahim’s (1983) face concerns, the dimensions of concern for others and concern for self, a determination of one’s preferred style of conflict management can be made. The next section presents how conflict styles are categorized.
Conceptualizing Conflict Styles

It is believed that conflict must be initiated between two individuals. As defined by Thomas (1976), "dyadic conflict is the process which begins when one party perceives that the other has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his or hers." (p. 891) Similarly, according to Pruitt and Rubin (1986), conflict is defined as "perceived divergence of interest, or a belief that the parties' current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously." (p.4) Obviously, conflict is a part of people's daily life and is not always a bad thing, depending on how people try to resolve these conflicts. Some people may just deny the existence of conflict while others seek a better solution that will benefit both parties. Therefore, we may assume that conflict management behaviors have diverse dimensions based on the above description. Additionally, many professionals have already made efforts to explore the conflict behaviors that exist in both interpersonal and organizational environments. The following sections will explore how conflict behaviors are formed.
While numerous research efforts have studied conflict behaviors (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Thomas, 1976; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Rahim, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1992), it is considered that Blake and Mouton (1964) were the first researchers to propose that there are actually styles of managing conflicts. They presented a concept called the ‘managerial grid’ that included a dual dimensional framework of managing organizational conflict based on the degree of concern for production and the degree of concern for people (Blake & Mouton, 1964). According to these two dimensions, they analyzed five types of handling interpersonal conflict: forcing (low concern for people and high concern for productivity), smoothing (high concern for
people and low concern for productivity), withdrawing (low concern for people and productivity), problem-solving (high concern for people and productivity), and compromising (adequate concern for people and productivity).

Based on Blake and Mouton's (1964) managerial grid model, Thomas (1976) further interpreted their model into the other two dimensions: concern for self and for others. He pointed out that the first dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person would go in order to satisfy his or her own concerns, whereas the second dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person intends on going in order to satisfy others' concerns and interests. The combination of these two dimensions was later developed by Pruitt and Rubin (1986). They proposed the dual concern model in terms of concern about one's own outcome as well as concern about the other parties' outcome.

Similarly, Putnam and Wilson (1982) developed the conflict management behaviors categorized into three styles: non-confrontation (indirect strategies for handling conflicts, such as avoidance and smoothing), solution-orientation (open and direct discussion; the acceptance of compromises), and control (direct confrontation that causes argument). However, they criticized other previous studies because they considered that these studies, methodologically, produced low levels of reliability. Compared to Putnam and Wilson's study, Rahim (1992) proposed other models of handling conflict management, arguing that Putnam and Wilson were not able to obtain a five-factor solution for their Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument.

Rahim and Bonoma's (1979) proposed styles of handling conflict included the
dual dimensions of concern for self and concern for others. According to Rahim (1992),
they are clustered into integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising
styles. The integrating style maintains a high concern for self and others in which the
focus is collaboration between parties. The obliging style shows low concern for self and
high concern for others. It involves the smoothing of differences and is concerned with
satisfying other people’s desires. The dominating style includes a high concern for self
and a low concern for others, embodying a win-lose orientation that forces behavior. The
avoiding style displays a low level of concern for both self and others, and is best
described as a general desire to withdraw from a conflict situation. The compromising
style is an intermediate level of concern for self and others. It is akin to a ‘give-and-take’
or sharing approach that seeks a middle-ground situation.

**Cultural Variability: Individualism–Collectivism and Conflict Styles**

Ting-Toomey (1988) assumes that cultural variability will influence one’s
preferred manner of managing conflicts. Many researchers have also indicated that
cultural variability has a strong influence on conflict resolution preferences (Cai & Fink,
2002; Chua & Gudykunst, 1987; Cushman & King, 1985; Elsayed-Ekhouly & Buda,

When discussing the issue of cultural variability, the chief theme has been to first
focus on the individualism–collectivism dimension. Moreover, a number of scholars have
done cross-cultural research over the past few decades on individualism and collectivism
(Chua & Gudykunst, 1987; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Triandis,
1988). The individualism–collectivism concept was originally proposed by Hofstede
(1980, 1991) as one of his four dimensions: individualism-collectivism, power distance, masculinity-femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede (1991) conducted a study for organizational behaviors in 50 countries and 3 regions (in his early report, 1980, he analyzed data from 40 countries), and identified that individualism-collectivism is one of the four dimensions relevant to an organizational environment in which culture is a factor to be considered. He concluded that some Asian countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore with relatively low scores (i.e., 17, 25, and 20 based on 0 to 100 scale) of individualism-collectivism should be categorized as collectivist cultures. In comparison to these kind of collectivist cultures, Western countries, such as the Unites States and Australia, which scored relatively high (i.e., 91, 90), are categorized as individualist cultures.

However, Ting-Toomey and Gudukunst (1988) propose that the applicability of Hofstede’s research has several limitations. For example, they mention that Hofstede’s survey was conducted on the basis of the organizational communication dimension and was not about interpersonal communication. Further, it may be argued that the data was drawn from multinational corporations and may not, therefore, be an accurate representation of other members of the culture. But Ting-Toomey and Gudukunst (1988) bring forth other evidence (e.g. Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986: Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988) showing that Hofstede’s dimensions are useful in explaining cross-cultural communication with respect to the interpersonal phenomena.

In addition, the Chinese Culture Connection (1987) conducted a study in order to test whether Hofstede’s four dimensions are over generalized because they were
developed from a Western point of view. In order to study this possibility they created a Chinese value survey including a Chinese bias. They concluded that power distance and individualism are correlated to Hofstede’s basic dimension of cultural value.

Furthermore, findings of other studies also support the dimension of individualism-collectivism, indicating that it is one of the major dimensions that differentiate cultures (Chua & Kudykunst, 1987; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986; Hui & Triandis, 1986). Hui and Triandis’s (1986) research also supports that “collectivists are judged to be higher in concern than individualists in their relationships with all others.” (p. 240) Similarly, Gudykunst and Nishida’s (1986) research also provides evidence that the dimension of individualism-collectivism is consistent with the understanding of the communication style in the perception of interpersonal relationships.

Accordingly, collectivism is concerned with group needs, interests, and goals that are more group-oriented, whereas individualism is focused on individual interests, needs, and goals that are more individual-oriented. For example, Triandis (1988) mentioned, “the most important dimension of cultural difference in social behavior is individualism and collectivism.” (p. 60) In a statement of individualistic culture from Triandis (1988), he stated:

Countries high in individualism have many individuals high in internal control, who emphasize private goals, who pay attention to what the person does rather than who the person is... and where one finds more alienated and rootless individuals, where people think that decisions made by individuals are better than decisions made by groups... where going on one’s way and not paying attention to the views of others is acceptable, where personal enjoyment is emphasized, where friendship is a matter of personal choice. (p. 65)

Compared to individualistic cultures, Triandis (1988) described collectivistic
cultures in the following terms:

There is the assumption that maintaining a strong group is the best guarantee of individual freedom, there is a strong emphasis on doing what the in-group specifies… shame and loss of face are mechanisms of social control, … people tend to think that planning is a waste of time, goals tend to be group rather than individual goals, who does something is more important that what she/he does. (p. 66)

Considering these definitions, it seems that the individualism-collectivism dimension has been used for cross-cultural communication. Ting-Toomey (1988) offered a conceptualization of individualism and collectivism, “While individualistic cultures draw upon the “I” identity as the prime focus, collectivistic cultures draw upon the “we” identity. Individualistic cultures are concerned with the authenticity of self-presentation style. Collectivistic cultures are concerned with the adaptability of self-presentation image.” (p. 224)

However, the individualism-collectivism dimension is also the means to distinguish and determine the style of handling conflict. Some of these explanations are discussed below.

Cushman and King (1985) found that, based on a national and organizational approach, each culture has its own preferred strategies of managing conflict. They reported that Japanese would tend to maintain an individual’s face and prefer to use a collaborative strategy in managing conflict in order to cohere with their collective cultural values. On the other hand, a competing strategy is the preferred manner in the U.S. with respect to its individualistic cultural values.

Similarly, Morris, Williams, Leung, Larrick, Mendoza, Bhatnagar, Kondo, Luo and Hu (1998) explained that Asian managers prefer to use the avoiding strategy in handling
conflicts. Compared to Asians in general U.S. managers tend to use a competing strategy in order to see if one is able to convince another in a conflict resolution. Furthermore, in their research, Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, and Lin (1991) found that the collectivistic culture of Taiwanese explains why they tend to rely on an indirect avoiding style more than Americans who belong to an individualistic culture.

Another important study done by Leung (1988) compared Chinese and American conflict styles, and mentioned that collectivists tend to focus on the in-group’s harmony; however, they may show more animosity toward out-group members.

Accordingly, cultural variability is significant in conflict management during the communication process. Therefore, the results of these studies have revealed that in general people who are from collectivistic cultures prefer to use a non-confrontational conflict strategy whereas people who are from individualistic cultures prefer to use a confrontational conflict strategy.

After the brief discussion of possible preferred conflict strategies by individualistic cultures and collectivistic cultures, the next section will also delve into the relationship between cultural variability and high vs. low-context and conflict styles.

**Cultural Variability: High-Context vs. Low-Context and Conflict Styles**

Although many studies have focused on the concept of individualism-collectivism, others also suggest that direct and indirect verbal communication have a linear connection with individualistic and collectivistic cultures. (Hall, 1981; Ting-Toomey, 1985, 1988). Originally, it was Hall (1976) that differentiated cultures into two dimensions: low-context vs. high-context culture. He indicated that although no culture
exactly falls into either one of these two dimensions, the culture of the United States falls on the low-context end, whereas most Asian cultures, such as Chinese, Japanese, fall on the high-context end. For example, Hall's (1981) dimension of low-context and high-context culture offers a theoretical view for different communication levels in terms of cultural variability. In addition, Ting-Toomey (1988) pointed out that "while the individualism-collectivism dimension points to the underlying values of different clusters of cultures, the low-context culture and high-context culture dimension points to communication style differences across a set of cultures." (p.225)

Although many people may be concerned that the conceptual relationship between individualism-collectivism and low-context vs. high-context is not straightforward, Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) point out that individualism-collectivism and low-high-context communication can be explained similarly. Furthermore, they show that this idea was clarified by Levine (1985) as they held that consistency does exist between the two concepts, as there is clearly, "cultural variability in the use of directness versus indirectness and certainty versus ambiguity in communication." (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 44). Therefore, they contend that "individualistic and collectivistic can be substituted for low- and high-context." (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 45). On the other hand, this means that low- and high-context communication is a function of individualism-collectivism.

In addition to the argument discussed above, communication itself also plays a salient role in a conflict resolution environment. First of all, Ting-Toomey (1985) discusses the relationship of conflict and culture based on Edward T. Hall's low- and
high-context cultures. She points out that in a low context culture people are more likely to fight and scream at others in terms of a specific task; however, people in high context culture may feel it to be an extreme insult or “lose face” to have a direct confrontation.

Chua and Gudykunst (1987) conducted a study in order to examine how culture influences styles of interpersonal conflict resolution. They found that their survey results strongly reflected the nature that the preferred conflict style in high-context cultures is largely an indirect and passive form, while the preferred conflict style in low-context cultures is a direct and active form. Their research reflects the communication style of Hall’s (1981) dimension of low-context culture and high-context culture. It is stated by Hall (1981) that “A high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code. (p. 91)” Therefore, it was supported by Chua and Gudykunst (1987) that members from low-context cultures prefer using solution orientations, whereas members from high-context culture prefer using non-confrontational conflict styles.

**Hypotheses**

From the literature, some of the research done thus far has been focused on the handling of interpersonal conflict and discussing what the conflict resolution behaviors are that individuals adopt (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Rahim, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1992). In addition, a large amount of research also adopts the dual concern models: concern for self and concern for others to examine conflict style with respect to individualism versus
collectivism; and, generally, their findings resemble those of the studies on individualism-collectivism cultural communication values.

It was also mentioned in the literature that Chinese and Americans may have different preferences in handling interpersonal conflicts. For example, Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, and Lin's (1991) research shows that people from Western countries may have a higher propensity to use a dominating style to handle conflicts than people from Asian countries. In addition to the higher frequency of use of the dominating style, it is considered that Americans tend to use a more direct and active communication style i.e., they are more explicit while having conversations.

Moreover, Americans may tend to apply some intermediate strategies in order to resolve certain conflict situations. For example, the compromising style, which includes an intermediate level of concern for self and others and seeks a middle-ground solution. A similar style that may be employed is the integrating style; high in concern for self and others and concerned with collaboration between parties.

Contrary to the American tendencies, Chinese might use more moderate conflict resolutions strategies to solve conflicts. As mentioned earlier, people who are from high-context cultures, such as Chinese, tend to use a physical context that is very limited in the amount of coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message (Hall, 1981). Moreover, Chinese will generally prefer to focus on the in-group's harmony (Leung, 1988). For example, Chinese tend to adopt the obliging style showing a low level of concern for self and a high level of concern for others. It involves a smoothing of differences and the satisfying of other people.
According to Chua and Gudykunst (1987), the preferred conflict style in high-context cultures, like the Chinese culture, is the indirect and passive form. Similarly, Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, and Lin’s (1991) research found that Taiwanese rely on an indirect *avoiding style* more than Americans. They also indicated that Taiwanese respondents, who belong to a collectivist culture, scored higher on the use of the *obliging* and *avoiding styles* than respondents from the United States.

Overall, the five hypotheses of the study were posited as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Caucasian-Americans will have a higher preference for a *dominating style* than Chinese.

Hypothesis 2: Caucasian-Americans will have a higher preference for an *integrating style* than Chinese.

Hypothesis 3: Caucasian-Americans will have a higher preference for a *compromising style* than Chinese.

Hypothesis 4: Chinese will have a higher preference for an *obliging style* than Caucasian-Americans.

Hypothesis 5: Chinese will have a higher preference for an *avoiding style* than Caucasian-Americans.

**Demographic variables**

In this study, I examined the way in which demographic variables in terms of ethnicity and gender might affect an individual’s conflict management preferences. Some studies have showed that gender differences are relevant to one’s conflict resolution preference (Hofstede, 1980; Kilmann & Thomas, 1977; Kumagai & Straus, 1983; Lee &
According to Rahim (1983), women tend to be more integrating, compromising, avoiding, and less obliging than men. Similarly, Kumagai and Straus (1983) also point out a significant finding that wives in India and Japan are more likely to use a lower degree of violence toward their husbands than husbands exhibit towards their wives. In other cross-cultural research, such as Ting-Toomey’s (1986) research on black and white subjective cultures, she found that gender contributed significantly to differences in conflict management styles. She pointed that both black and white males tended to use more non-confrontational strategies such as avoidance and withdrawal, whereas black and white females tended to use more solution-oriented strategies. From the discussion mentioned above the following research question was presented.

Research Question 1: Does gender by ethnicity interaction make a difference in people’s conflict resolution preferences?
CHAPTER 3
METHOD

Design

Data collection for this study was limited to the availability and convenience of the sample of participants, however, the researcher tended to distribute the questionnaire to potential participants who corresponded to the focus of this study. Therefore, it was possible to control for extraneous variables by matching respondents on demographic characteristics such as ethnicity and geographic background. A 2X2 factorial design was utilized in this research. The ethnicities considered were Chinese and Caucasian-American. Both ethnicity and gender were used as independent variables and the five conflict behaviors dominating, compromising, avoiding, obliging, and integrating were used as dependent variables.

Participants

There were a total of 113 respondents who voluntarily participated in this research. The two major groups of participants, 54 Chinese students and 53 Caucasian-American students at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, were selected as research subjects. However, six out of 113 participants did not indicate their ethnicity and gender and were considered as missing variables. Therefore, only a total of 107 respondents were counted as this study.

As for gathering the Chinese samples, the membership list from the Taiwanese
Student Association and Chinese Student Association were considered as two major research groups in identifying the ethnic Chinese group. In order to distribute the information regarding this research, e-mail messages were sent out via the Taiwanese Student Association’s and the Chinese Student Association’s e-mail list. Similarly, e-mail messages were passed out through access to a number of departments in the university with the consent of department secretaries.

Therefore, those whose status corresponded with the categories mentioned above were expected to participate in this research and were free to contact the researcher in order to receive a copy of the survey. Besides the recruiting techniques indicated above, the primary sampling procedure was purpose sampling as the study depends on a large pool of Chinese students and Caucasian-American students; therefore, e-mail based lists were sent out through certain focus targets such as Taiwanese Student Association and Chinese Student Association, and interpersonal connections were used in order to identify some participants’ characteristics who matched the focus of this study. Some of the surveys were distributed, for example, to Dr. Fontaine’s classes for class activity, and others were delivered to participants personally.

In this research, Chinese subjects who were from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, were categorized if they were of Chinese ethnic ancestry and were raised in a Chinese culture. However, North American subjects who were identified as Caucasian-American were
designated if they were raised in the United States and were not of Asian Ethnic ancestry.

The respondents consisted of 60 females (36 Chinese and 24 Caucasian-Americans) and 47 males (18 Chinese and 29 Caucasian-American). Between these two ethnicities, it was indicated that 30 participants were from Taiwan, 15 from Mainland China, 10 from Hong Kong, 47 from the U.S. mainland, and 6 from Hawaii. However, 5 people did not report their homeland. Most of the participants were students in School of Communication, Department of Second Language Studies, Business Administration, and Travel Industry Management. Moreover, the remaining 37% of the participants were from a variety of departments, but most from the field of natural science.

As for the participating students' current status, 41.1% were undergraduate students and 58.9% were graduate students. With regards to age distribution 42.6% of the students were under 25 years old, 35.2% were within the range of 26-30, and about 22.2% were over 35.

**Composition of the Sample by Ethnicity, Age, Gender, Major, Students Status, Length of staying in Hawaii, and the Place where people from**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1 By Ethnicity</th>
<th>By Ethnicity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Percentage</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caucasian-American</td>
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### Table 3.2

**By Age**

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<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 and up</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Table 3.3

**By Gender**

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<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>Female</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>47</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
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### Table 3.4

**By Major**

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<th>Major</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>Second Language Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Industry Management</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>106</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.5  
By Student Status  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Status</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.6  
By Length of Stay in Hawaii  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year - 2 years</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years - 3 years</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 3 years</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.7  
By the Place Where People are from  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Mainland</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Instrument**

The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI), originally created by Rahim (1983), was used in this study. All items in the ROCI were adopted for the survey of this current study. Although it was noticed that Rahim’s (1983) measurement of handling conflict found that only 28 of 35 items have factor loadings greater than 0.40 (p.371), this study still insisted on applying the original 35 items because it was considered that every single question would have strong influence on and relate to the situations occurring in Hawaii and the results might have been different from the revised version using only 28 items.

According to the discussion above, the original ROCI-II consists of 35 items in terms of the five dimensions of organizational conflict styles-dominating, compromising, avoiding, obliging, and integrating. Each item used a five-point Likert scale from 1= "strongly agree" to 5= "strongly disagree". The higher scores represent a higher preference for using conflict strategies, and lower scores represent a lower preference for using conflict strategies. An example of dominating style is: “I sometimes use my power to win a competitive situation.” An example of compromising style is: “I usually propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.” Next, the avoiding style is: “I attempt to avoid being put on the spot and try to keep my conflict with my peer to myself.” Then, the obliging style is: “I usually accommodate
the wishes of my peers." Finally, the style of integrating is: "I try to work with my peers for a proper understanding of a problem."

Because the target participants were Chinese and Americans, it was considered that the Chinese subjects might have a language barrier in reading the survey in English. Therefore, the back translation (Brislin, 1970) strategy was applied in order to ensure that the participants would comprehend the content of the questionnaire without any misunderstanding.

In order to have better results from the translation procedure, two Second Language Study majors from Taiwan who speak Chinese and English fluently were involved in this scheme. The first student translated the questionnaire into Chinese literally based on the knowledge we had from the Chinese point of view. After the first student was done with the translation procedure, the other student tried to translate the Chinese version of the questionnaire back into English. This procedure intended to ensure that the meanings in the survey of the Chinese copy did not convey incorrect information from the original English copy. After completing the translation procedure, the two students and the researcher examined the results to see whether there was any misunderstanding or misinterpretation between the two versions.

**Pretest**

The instrument was given to the first group consisting of five Chinese students and five Caucasian-American students. However, the copy of the questionnaire in the pretest
procedure was an English version. The purpose of this procedure intended to exam whether the pretest groups were able to comprehend the entire survey from their own knowledge and to ensure the reliability of the survey was consistent with the Rahim's ROCI.

Once they completed the survey, the pretest respondents were asked to offer some comments on the content and format of the instrument. For example, they were asked, “Are there any inappropriate items? Do the items make sense to the respondents? Are there any misspelled items? Are there items that are confusing to Chinese respondents? Is the flow of the instrument sufficiently clear for each of the respondents?” The instrument was later revised based on those suggestions. However, it was found that the major issue was that the Chinese students had difficulties in interpreting some of the questions. Hence, the procedure of the interpretation was then considered necessary in order to accommodate the Chinese respondents.

According to Brislin (1986), the issue of wording and translation of research instruments should be examined and indicated that some of the instruments should be modified into appropriate language in order to accommodate alternative cultural backgrounds. It is mentioned in Brislin (1986) “In back-translation, one bilingual translated from the source to the target language, and another blindly translates back to the source.” (p.159) Therefore, the translation procedures are repeated for several rounds. For instance, item 23 states, “I avoid an
encounter with my peers”; however, the final back-translated version was, “I avoid to meet with my peers.” Discussion with translators yielded the fact that it was difficult to present the idea of “encounter”. Therefore, it was considered necessary to utilize the back-translation strategy.

Rather than only offering the English version of the survey, the translators and the researcher determined that the survey should contain both the English and Chinese version. After having the instrument revised, the revised instrument was then given to the second group for validation. Thus, the Chinese students would be able to read the two versions at the same time. If they had the difficulties in understanding the meaning of the English, they were encouraged to read the Chinese version at the same time.

As mentioned earlier, there are five types of conflict resolution styles: dominating, compromising, avoiding, obliging, and integrating. Each type has seven items that convey each conflict scenario in assorted ways. They are all described in the following patterns:

The avoiding style includes a low level of concern for self and others. It is described as having the desire to withdraw from a conflict situation. According to Rahim (2001), the avoiding style is defined as “an unconcerned attitude toward the issues or parties involved in conflict.” (p. 29) Conflict avoiding style will be examined by using Rahim’s (1983) Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI). In order to measure avoiding style, the five-point
scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree will be measured. There are 7 questions that fall into this category:

Q3: I attempt to avoid being “put on the spot” and try to keep my conflict with my peers to myself.

Q7: I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with my peers.

Q22: I try to stay away from disagreement with my peers.

Q23: I avoid an encounter with my peers.

Q32: I try to keep my disagreement with my peers to myself in order to avoid hard feelings.

Q33: I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with my peers.

Q34: I generally avoid an argument with my peers.

The obli...
Q16: I sometimes help my peers to make a decision in his/her favor.

Q17: I usually allow concessions to my peers.

Q25: I often go along with the suggestions of my peers.

Q30: I try to satisfy the expectations of my peers.

Similarly, the compromising style includes an intermediate level of concern for self and others. It is similar to a ‘give-and-take’ or sharing approach in order to seek a middle-ground situation. Based on Rahim’s (2001) explanation, the compromising style can be defined as “a way of splitting the difference, exchanging concession, or seeking a quick, middle-ground position.” (p.30) The respondents were asked the following questions:

Q5: I give some to get some.

Q9: I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse.

Q14: I win some and I lose some.

Q19: I try to play down our differences to reach a compromise.

Q20: I usually propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.

Q21: I negotiate with my peers so that a compromise can be reached.

Q26: I use “give and take” so that a compromise can be made.

The dominating style includes a high level of concern for self and a low level of concern for others, indicating a win-lose orientation that forces behavior. It is defined by
Rahim (2001) that “dominating may mean standing up for one’s rights and/or defending a position that the party believes to be correct.” (p.29) The seven items asked were as follows:

Q8: I usually hold on to my solution to a problem.

Q10: I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.

Q11: I use my authority to make a decision in my favor.

Q18: I argue my case with my peers to show the merits of my position.

Q24: I use my expertise to make a decision in my favor.

Q27: I am generally firm in pursuing my side of the issue.

Q31: I sometimes use my power to win a competitive situation.

The integrating style includes a high level of concern for self and others in which there is a win-lose orientation that forces behavior. According to Gray’s (1989) description, the conflict integrating strategy is defined as “a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible.” (p.5)

The respondents were asked the following questions:

Q1: I try to investigate an issue with my peers to find a solution acceptable to us.

Q4: I try to integrate my ideas with those of my peers to come up with decision jointly.

Q6: I try to work with my peers to find solutions to a problem which satisfy our
Q15: I exchange accurate information with my peers to solve a problem together.

Q28: I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved in the best possible way.

Q29: I collaborate with my peers to come up with decisions acceptable to us.

Q 35: I try to work with my peers for a proper understanding of a problem.

Besides the 35 survey questions, seven other demographic questions were included for the participants to answer. These seven questions included concepts such as the participants’ ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, duration of staying in Hawaii, students’ status, and students’ major. It was considered that from those demographic questions we would be able to discover whether these factors would have any effect on an individuals’ conflict resolution style preference.

Moreover, the formation of those demographic items was based on similar previous studies and a review of specific literature topics such as Kumagai & Straus’ (1983) research on conflict resolution tactics in Japan, India, and the U.S. with a focus on the study of how spouses react to various conflict situations. Other items were created by thoroughly examining a various number of handbooks, textbooks, some other relevant materials on cross-cultural communication. Additional items were created based on the investigator’s personal
experiences and knowledge. Forty-two questions were designed as only one appropriate answer for each respondent. However, there was no correct or incorrect answer for the survey.

**Procedure**

There were several requirements for conducting this research. An initial requirement was the instrument. The second requirement was a means of distribution of the instrument. The last was regarding how to obtain a list of individuals at each department in the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa.

Upon meeting the previous requirements, the means to obtain the optimal group of participants was briefly discussed in the participant section. The other issue regarding the approach to distribution was through e-mail and phone calls to contact participants in order to assure that participants would be able to receive the surveys successfully.

Because it was a self-administrated survey, all subjects were asked to take the questionnaire independently. Before answering the questionnaire, the subjects were required to fill out consent forms indicating that all their information would be kept confidential. If the subjects felt intimidated, they were allowed to withdraw at anytime. Then, the subjects were required to answer the survey in their home or in their classroom, depending on subjects’ availability.

During the experiment, the experimenter would give each subject a booklet containing
the experimental materials. They were required to read the instructions in the very beginning. If they agreed to participate in this research, they had to sign the agreement to ensure their participation. When they completed the questionnaires, they would hand the booklets to the researcher in person. In order to appreciate the subjects' participation, each of them received a highlighter marker as incentive.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Reliability Tests

The integrating dimension consisted of 7 items with a Cronbach Coefficient alpha for reliability was .90. The avoiding dimension consisted of 7 items with a mean of 3.03 and a standard deviation of .84. Coefficient alpha for reliability was .87. The obliging dimension consisted of 7 items with a mean of 3.30 and a standard deviation of .56. Coefficient alpha for reliability was .74. The dominating dimension consisted of 7 items with a mean of 3.11 and a standard deviation of .63. Coefficient alpha for reliability was .77. The compromising dimension consisted of 7 items with a mean of 3.67 and a standard deviation of .59. Coefficient alpha for reliability was .77. In this case, an acceptable level of reliability coefficients were yielded from those five factors and all of them were distributed normally based on this analysis.

Tests of Hypotheses and Research Question

The data were analyzed using two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the differences between Chinese and Caucasian-Americans and males and females (See Table 4.1 and 4.2). Tables 4.3-4.8 present the analysis of variance for each conflict style.
Table 4.1
Means and Standard Deviation by Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th></th>
<th>Caucasian-American</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>2.98 .63</td>
<td>3.23 .61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>3.92 .71</td>
<td>3.96 .61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>3.56 .58</td>
<td>3.77 .58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>3.35 .57</td>
<td>3.26 .56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>3.36 .71</td>
<td>2.69 .84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2
Means and Standard Deviation by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>3.07 .60</td>
<td>3.15 .66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>4.00 .64</td>
<td>3.89 .69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>3.58 .53</td>
<td>3.79 .65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>3.26 .60</td>
<td>3.35 .52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>2.95 .79</td>
<td>3.12 .90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis 1 was that Caucasian-Americans would have a higher preference for a *dominating style* than Chinese. The results revealed that a significant main effect of ethnicity (p < .05) confirmed the hypothesis. The mean for Caucasian-Americans (M = 3.23) was higher than for Chinese (M = 2.98). There was no significant main effect for gender, or gender by
ethnicity interaction.

Table 4.3
F-Scores and Degrees of Freedom From
2-Way ANOVA for Dominating Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effects:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Way Interactions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender X Ethnic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis 2 was that Caucasian-Americans would have a higher preference for an integrating style than Chinese. The results showed no significant main effect for ethnicity, gender or gender by ethnicity interaction.

Table 4.4
F-Scores and Degrees of Freedom From
2-Way ANOVA for Integrating Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effects:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Way Interactions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender X Ethnic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothesis 3, predicted that Caucasian-Americans would have a higher preference for a *compromising style* than Chinese. The result revealed no significant main effect for ethnicity. However, it approached significant at (p< .10). Though other items were significant, such as, “I negotiate with my peers so that a compromise can be reached,” and “I win some and I lose some” both were at (p< .05), hypothesis 3 was not supported. There was no effect for gender or gender by ethnicity interaction.

| Table 4.5 |
|------------|------------|--------|
| **F-Scores and Degrees of Freedom From 2-Way ANOVA for Compromising Style** | | |
| Source | df | F | p |
| Main Effects: | | | |
| Gender | 1 | 1.66 | .20 |
| Ethnic | 1 | 2.74 | .10 |
| 2-Way Interactions: | | | |
| Gender X Ethnic | 1 | 1.18 | .27 |
| Error | 106 | | |

Hypothesis 4 was that Chinese would have a higher preference for an *obliging style* than Caucasian-Americans. Similar to Hypothesis 3, the finding showed no significant main effect for ethnicity and gender. However, it approached significant with respect to the effect of gender by ethnicity interaction (p < .08). Although other items were significant, such as “I give
in to the wishes of my peers,” “I usually allow concession to my peers,” and “I often go along
with the suggestions of my peers,” were all at (p < .05), hypothesis 4 was also not supported.

Table 4.6
F-Scores and Degrees of Freedom From
2-Way ANOVA for Obliging Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effects:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Way Interactions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender X Ethnic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for Hypothesis 5, it was predicted that Chinese would have a higher preference
for an avoiding style than Caucasian-Americans. The result revealed a significant main
effect for ethnicity, as the main effect for gender (p < .05) consisted with the hypothesis.
The mean in the main effect of ethnicity for Chinese (M=3.36) was higher than that for
Caucasian-American (M=2.69). The mean in the main effect of gender for males (M=3.12)
was higher than for females (M= 2.95). However, there was no significant effect on gender
by ethnicity interaction.
### Table 4.7
F-Scores and Degrees of Freedom From 2-Way ANOVA for Avoiding Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effects:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23.47</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Way Interactions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender X Ethnic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation**

Besides the discussion of the reliability test and tests of the hypotheses and research questions, it was found out that some of the dependent variables are correlated with each other. For example, the *obliging style* was positively related to both the *integrating style* and the *avoiding style*, and similarly, a pattern was observed that the *compromising style* is correlated to both the *integrating* and *obliging style*. However, the results revealed that the *dominating style* is negatively related to the *avoiding style* (See table 4.8).
Table 4.8
Inter-correlation of the Dimensions of
Conflict Management Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Behaviors</th>
<th>Integrating</th>
<th>Avoiding</th>
<th>Obliging</th>
<th>Dominating</th>
<th>Compromising</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrating</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.256**</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>.678**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>.517**</td>
<td>-.175*</td>
<td>.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obliging</td>
<td>.256**</td>
<td>.517**</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.383**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>-.175*</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>.185*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>.678**</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.383**</td>
<td>.185*</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

In addition, the participants’ length of stay in Hawaii and age were not found significant. However, length of stay in Hawaii mostly shows negatively correlated to the five conflict style (See table 4.9).

Table 4.9
Inter-Correlation of length of stay in Hawaii and age
with Dimension of Conflict Management Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Behaviors</th>
<th>Integrating</th>
<th>Avoiding</th>
<th>Obliging</th>
<th>Dominating</th>
<th>Compromising</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length of stay in Hawaii</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlations is significant at the .01 level (2 tailed).
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

**Accounting for Cultural Differences in Procedural Preference**

The objective of this study was to examine how ethnic based cultural values influence an individual's conflict resolution style. Building on Ting-Toomey's face negotiation theory, Hall's high-context vs. low-context, Hofstede's cultural variability of individualism-collectivism, Rahim and Bonoma's conflict management model as well as previous research, the Chinese participants in this study were predicted to prefer the *avoiding* and *obliging* style of conflict resolution more than the Caucasian-American participants. Likewise, Caucasian-American participants were predicted to prefer the *dominating*, *integrating* and *compromising* styles of conflict resolution more than Chinese participants. Besides the predictions mentioned above, a research question was proposed to examine whether gender by ethnic differences make a difference in people's conflict resolution preferences.

In general, this study provides evidence that the cultural values a person inherits do have an effect on an individual's conflict resolution preferences. Overall, the data indicates that Caucasian-Americans prefer to resolve conflicts by utilizing the *dominating style* whereas Chinese subjects prefer to resolve conflicts with the *avoiding style*. However, some unexpected
results were found and have posed challenges in this study as well.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that Caucasian-Americans would have a higher preference for a dominating style than Chinese. The results from this study fully supported the hypothesis and were consistent with previous research reports (Chu & Gudykunst, 1987; Cushman & King, 1985; Morris et al., 1998).

In terms of supported studies, it was found that Caucasian-Americans' preference for using the dominating style was drawn from the influence on the cultural variability differentiation. The result was also consistent with Elsayed-Ekhouly & Buda's (1996) finding in which they stated that Americans scored higher on the dominating style in handling interpersonal conflict. In addition, Trubisky, Ting-Toomey & Lin's (1991) indicated that the U.S. samples considered the dominating style to be an aggressive behavior in a small group communication class.

One interesting finding from this study was with respect to the hypothesis that Caucasian-American participants from the U.S. mainland in Hawaii would tend to have a higher preference of using the indirect conflict style because it is assumed that people residing in Hawaii are more likely to be influenced by Asian culture. Therefore, the assumption indicates that Caucasian-Americans exposed to an Asian-oriented culture, like Hawaii’s, might tend to adopt a more indirect communication style than those not exposed to this type of
environment.

However, this study did not find any significant effect from the length of stay in Hawaii on the preference of conflict resolution style. The other plausible reason for this is that the Caucasian-American participants consisted of 47 from the U.S. mainland and only 6 from Hawaii. Therefore, we may assume that most likely those students from the U.S. mainland remained under the influence of their native individualist culture in which they tend to accept the concept that one must be most concerned with personal achievement and enjoyment, and the need to be independent. Hence, this could be a plausible reason to support the result that Caucasian-Americans may view the use of dominating style as a viable option to handle conflict environments.

Hypothesis 2 stated that Caucasian-Americans would have a higher preference for an integrating style than Chinese. The finding from this study did not support the hypothesis. According to a previous study, Rahim (1992) suggests that the integrating style is high in concern for self and others, and in which there is a desire for collaboration between parties. However, the response from Caucasian-American participants in this study did not appear to be consistent with the hypothesis and therefore does not confirm Rahim's (1992) discussion.

Hypothesis 3 stated Caucasian-Americans would have a higher preference for a compromising style than Chinese. Although the finding does not support the hypothesis, there
is somewhat a trend, as the Caucasian-American participants still seemed to have a slightly higher preference for using the compromising style than Chinese. However, some of the unexpected directions for Chinese using a compromising style are discussed below.

First, based on the distinction of cultural variability, Ting-Toomey's face negotiation theory supports the concept that Chinese may tend to seek a mutual face-saving strategy and hold an intermediate level of concern for self and others in conflict. Similarly, Rahim (1992) suggests a compromising style includes an intermediate level of concern for self and others. It is also relevant to the 'give-and-take' or sharing approach used to seek a middle-ground resolution.

However, based on Putnam and Wilson (1982), the compromising style normally falls in the dimension of solution-orientation, which indicates an open and direct discussion, and the acceptance of compromise. According to other studies (Chua & Gudykunst, 1987; Hall, 1981; Ting-Toomey, 1985, 1988), members from low-context cultures prefer to use direct communication and solution orientations, a feature that seemingly belongs to the Caucasian-Americans group. Therefore, future studies must focus on this gray area.

The second reason can be explained through the Chinese Culture Connection (1987) findings. They found that the Confucian work dynamism did not correlate with any of the Hofstede dimensions. A possible explanation for this is the recent growth of the Chinese
economy, which has spurred material success in regions such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China. This may be a reason for why Chinese today would potentially become motivated, develop a sense of commitment, and be loyal to various institutions. Furthermore, this reason also indicates that Chinese may have a higher growth potential for characteristics such as living standards during an economic boom than in other cultures, showing that this rapid growth may be beyond that of Westerners’ expectations and their understanding.

Hypothesis 4 stated Chinese would have a higher preference for an obliging style than Caucasian-Americans. Although the findings from this study do not support the hypothesis, once again the pattern was not strong. It appears that Chinese still slightly tend to favor a higher preference level for using the obliging style than Caucasian-Americans.

Although, according to Rahim and Bonoma (1979), the obliging style has a low level of concern for self and high concern for others, involving the smoothing of differences and satisfying other people, we may assume that those with a Chinese cultural background learn to be aggressive and to regress from their extremes in cultural values to the middle or sometimes even to the other extreme when staying in a Western country. In other words, they may actually over-correct their behavior in order to assimilate to the local culture.

Although Ting-Toomey’s (1988) face negotiation theory is suited for people who wish to maintain others’ “face” while dealing with conflicts in social and personal relationships,
it is necessary for future studies to research if there are any strategies, such as mutual
face-saving and face-giving that people would opt to adopt based on the particular situational
and relational differences. Future theorists may have to discover and explore this gray area of
solution-oriented strategies beyond the individualism-collectivism dimension.

In terms of the previous discussion, we found that Chinese still generally prefer the
avoiding style when dealing with conflict situations. Overall, when encountered with conflict,
American students, who were from an individualistic culture, were less likely to adopt the
avoiding style than the collectivistic Chinese students. This finding is consistent with Cushman
and King (1985), Morris, Williams, Leung, Larrick, Mendoza, Bhatnager, Kondo, Lau and Hi
Ting-Toomey's face negotiation theory pointed, Chinese from collectivistic culture tend to use
avoidance style more than Caucasian-Americans from individualistic culture. Along with this
support, it is further indicated by using avoidance style and the relational harmony is preserved.
Another possible reason for this phenomenon, according to Leung (1988) and Ting-Toomey
(1985), is that people from a Chinese cultural background will typically seek group harmony in
order to save other peoples' "face," otherwise they may feel it an extreme insult to have a
direct confrontation.

The other reason was consistent with Leung's (1988) research. It was found that
Chinese tend to focus on the in-group’s harmony; however, they may show a more adversarial attitude toward out-group members. Specifically, Leung’s finding offered a precise explanation that is able to support why Hypotheses 2, 3 and 4 of this study did not confirm the predictions and why Hypothesis 5 was confirmed. In this study, participants were asked to think of disagreements they have encountered in situations with a person in a close relationship and indicate how they feel about each item by circling an appropriate answer. This scenario might have constructed a crucial guidance that Chinese still prefer using the avoiding style with a close person when experiencing a conflict. On the other hand, if Chinese encounter a conflict situation with strangers, they will tend to seek an active approach in managing the conflict.

**Gender Differences in Conflict Preference**

Male subjects in this study were found to show a greater preference for the *avoiding style* than did female subjects. This result was consistent with Ting-Toomey’s (1986) finding that black and white males tend to use more non-confrontational strategies. Lee and Rogan’s (1991) finding also found out that U.S. male subjects prefer using more *avoiding style* than the U.S. female subjects.

However, this study did not tend to explore whether it was Chinese females/males or Caucasian-American females/males have a higher preference on conflict styles. Therefore, there were not sufficient materials provided for this study, and the future studies may try to
discover this lacking.

In general, the findings from this study suggest that the “face” is rooted in all ethnic groups such as Chinese and Caucasian-Americans and also influences their preferences on conflict management. Face is also considered as “a projected image of one’s self in a relational situation.” (Ting-Toomey, 1988, p.215) Hence, concern for others and concern self determines one’s manners of managing conflicts.

As mentioned earlier, Chinese were found to have a higher preference for an *avoiding style* than Caucasian-Americans. However, the findings also suggest that Chinese have a tread of using *compromising style*. It is considered that Chinese may tend to maintain others’ face while focusing on the in-group’s harmony whereas they may seek adversarial attitude toward out-group members.

On the other hand, Caucasian-Americans were found to have a higher preference for a *dominating style* than Chinese. This result suggests that Caucasian-Americans remain focus on one’s own face on maintaining a person’s private and public self-image (Ting-Toomey, 1988).

**Suggestion for the Future Studies**

First, although the results from this study show an influence consistent with, for example, the cultural variability proposition of individualism-collectivism dimension, high vs. low context and face negotiation theory, future studies may have to explore concepts beyond
this dimension with relation to other influences, such as relational and situational impacts. For example, an individual may be influenced by a Western culture while residing in Western countries, and gradually display this influence through thoughts and behaviors that are similar to Westerners.

Secondly, as mentioned above, although we may describe individualism-collectivism as one way to distinguish cultures, the findings of this study also support the argument from Singelis and Brown (1995) that people may have the personal attributes of both an independent and interdependent self, which could be affected by social contexts and social constraints other than typical cultural norms. The independent and interdependent self may influence individual’s attitudes towards conflict management.

Finally, future theorists will have to examine whether any differences exist between Chinese males and females when managing conflicts. According to Kumagai and Straus (1983), Indian and Japanese females exhibit a lower level of violence than male counterparts, which contradicts the results of this study. Moreover, the results were not able to show whether Chinese females would have a higher preference of using the solution-oriented strategy and whether Chinese males would have a higher preference of using the avoiding strategy. It is suggested that future research should focus on the conflict preferences of Chinese males and females.
Limitations

Several limitations exist in this study. A comment on the sample used in this study may be necessary. The Chinese samples were selected from international students from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. However, these students might not be an accurate representation of the rest of the population in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Similarly, participants from the U.S. mainland and Hawaii cannot accurately represent the majority of the people in the U.S. as the participants selected could be unique cases and are all independent individuals. Moreover, these students might have gradually learned American culture and values and internalized how to interact and negotiate with Americans while attending school in the U.S. Overall, these assumptions can account for the reasons why some of the predictions were not supported by this research.

The next limitation is that the instrument was constructed from the Western point of view and all in English. Although we intended to use the back-translation process to ensure that the Chinese participants would have no difficulties in answering the questionnaires, some of the key words might have been misleading or have been misread by the participants. Furthermore, all translators on the study were from Taiwan, which could explain why certain key words involved in the study might have only utilized the Taiwanese point of view. However, we had participants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China, thus conceptually some of the key words could probably mislead those participants.
The other possible deficiency could have been unclear instructions for how participants were to take the survey. Although the participants were asked to describe a conflict situation that they had encountered with a person in a close relationship, it was not clearly indicated which specific relationship, such as a friendship or family relationship was desired. Hence, it was possible for the participants to imagine any possible 'close' relationship.

Finally, although this study intended to replicate some of the findings from the previous mentioned studies, some of the key outcomes appeared different from others. Overall, this study also contributes to the understanding of two bipolar cultures, Chinese and American in managing conflict situations.
Appendix A—Consent Form

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
The Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution Preferences
Investigator: Szu-Yin Liu M.A. Candidate
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Gary Fontaine
320 Crawford Hall University of Hawaiʻi at Manoa
2550 Campus Road Honolulu, HI 96822
(808) 956-8715

This research project is being conducted as a component of a thesis for a master’s degree. The purpose of this study is to investigate the facts if cultural differences may affect the conflict resolution preferences. The participants will be recruited from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. There will be two groups of students to participate in this study—Chinese subjects who are from Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, are categorized as they are of Chinese ethnic ancestry and are raised in a Chinese country, while North American (especially Caucasian) students are designated if they are raised in the United States and were not of Asian Ethnic ancestry.

Subjects of this study will be asked to answer the questionnaires. You will be reading the instruction in the beginning, and then answer the questions. This study will be lasting about 15 minutes. Approximately 100 people will participate in the study.

Research data will be confidential to the extent allowed by law. Agencies with research oversight, such as the UH Committee on Human Studies, have the authority to review research data. All research record will be stored in a file in the researcher’s office for the duration of the research project. All other research record will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time during the duration of the project with no penalty, or less or benefit to which you would otherwise be entitled.

Participating in this research may be of no direct benefit of you. However, it is believed that the result from this project will help the researcher earn more understanding in the cross-cultural conflict preferences.

According to researcher’s own knowledge, there is no risk in participating in this study.

If you have any question regarding to this research project, please contact the researcher, Szu-Yin Liu, at (808) 944-6186.

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If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the UH Committee on Human Studies at (808) 956-5007.

Participant:
I have read and understand the above information, and agree to participate in this research project.

__________________________   ___________
(print your name)             (date)

__________________________
(signature)
Appendix B—Questionnaire instruction

Dear participants,

I highly appreciate your kindness for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Listed below are kinds of information often associated with conflict resolution preferences. Please think of disagreements you have encountered in situations with a person in a close relationship and indicate how you feel about each item by circling the appropriate number. There are 35 items in this questionnaire, and each of them ranging from 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). You will be able to finish this survey in about fifteen minutes. Since this is not a test, there is no right or wrong for each question. Therefore, please speak your mind!

Your responses will be kept confidential and will be used only for research purposes.

Thank you very much for your participation!

Researcher

Szu-Yin Liu
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Score Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I generally try to satisfy the needs of my peers.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I attempt to avoid being “put on the spot” and try to keep my conflict with my peers to myself.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I try to integrate my ideas with those of my peers to come up with a decision jointly.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I give some to get some.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I try to work with my peers to find solutions to a problem which satisfy our expectations.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with my peers.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I usually hold on to my solution to a problem.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I use my authority to make a decision in my favor.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>I usually accommodate the wishes of my peers.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I give in to the wishes of my peers.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>I win some and I lose some.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
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</table>
15. I exchange accurate information with my peers to solve a problem together. (我會與他人交換意見以共同解決問題)  

<table>
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16. I sometimes help my peers to make a decision in his/her favor. (我有時會協助同儕作出對他們有利的決定)  

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17. I usually allow concessions to my peers. (我通常會對他人作出一些讓步)  

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18. I argue my case with my peers to show the merits of my position. (我會與他人爭論以顯示我的觀點比較好)  

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19. I try to play down our differences to reach a compromise. (我會試著降低自己與他在想法上的差異，以達成妥協)  

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20. I usually propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks. (我會提出折衷的方案以打破僵局)  

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21. I negotiate with my peers so that a compromise can be reached. (我會與他人共同探討以達成妥協)  

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22. I try to stay away from disagreement with my peers. (我會盡量避免與他人意見不合)  

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23. I avoid an encounter with my peers. (我會避免與人發生衝突)  

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24. I use my expertise to make a decision in my favor. (我會運用我的專業知識促成對我有利的決定)  

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<th>1</th>
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25. I often go along with the suggestions of my peers. (我通常會順應他人的建議)  

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26. I use “give and take” so that a compromise can be made. (我會採用相互妥協的策略以達成協議)  

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27. I am generally firm in pursuing my side of the issue. (我非常堅持自己的理念)  

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28. I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved in the best possible way. (我會努力把所有問題公諸於世，以便及時解決問題)  

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</table>
29. I collaborate with my peers to come up with decisions acceptable to us. (我會與他人合作，並討論出雙方皆可接受的決議)

30. I try to satisfy the expectations of my peers. (我會試著去迎合他人的期待)

31. I sometimes use my power to win a competitive situation. (在競爭激烈的場合上，我有時會運用自己
的權力以取得勝利)

32. I try to keep my disagreement with my peers to myself in order to avoid hard feelings. (我會嘗試將自己與他人之間的不同意見放在心裡，以免傷了彼此的和氣)

33. I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with my peers. (我會試著避免與他人有不愉快的溝通)

34. I generally avoid an argument with my peers. (我會盡量避免與他人爭論)

35. I try to work with my peers for a proper understanding of a problem. (我會與他人討論以了解問題所在)

Demographic Questions:
Please answer the following demographic questions by circling the appropriate letter. The researcher will insure that your confidentiality is maintained. Thank you!

A. What is your ethnicity?
   1) Chinese  2) Caucasian-American

B. Where are you originally from?
   1) Taiwan  2) China  3) Hong Kong  4) U.S. Mainland  5) Hawaii

C. What is your gender?
   1) Female  2) Male

D. Which age group do you belong to?
E. How long have you been staying in Hawaii?
   1) Less than 1 year  2) 1 year-2 years  3) 2 years-3 years  4) More than 3 years

F. What is your current student status?
   1) Undergraduate  2) Graduate

G. What is your major? ________________________________
REFERENCES


