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Huadong Yang, Evert Van de Vliert and Kan Shi
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INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP AND LAY THIRD PARTIES' SIDE-TAKING PREFERENCE A Cross-Cultural Study Among Chinese and Dutch

HUADONG YANG

University of Twente, The Netherlands

EVERT VAN DE VLIERT

University of Groningen, The Netherlands

KAN SHI

Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China

In two comparative studies, both conducted in China and in the Netherlands, we investigated the effect of an asymmetric relationship on lay third parties' side-taking preference in an interpersonal dispute. The first study shows that a perceived close relationship with one of the disputants motivates both Chinese and Dutch lay third parties to side with that disputant. The second study complicates the interpersonal relationship and side-taking link by taking account of contrasting information (either legitimacy or negative sanctions) about the other disputant and cultural dimensions (horizontal and vertical individualism-collectivism). The results suggest that contrasting legitimacy information has a decisive effect on lay third parties' side-taking preference, especially among Dutch lay third parties who highly value vertical individualism. In addition to legitimacy criteria, Chinese lay third parties, whether individualistic or collectivistic oriented, seem to also consider interpersonal relationship and sanction information when making their side-taking decision.

Keywords: interpersonal relationship; lay third party; negative sanctions; perceived legitimacy; side taking

A lay third party is often called on to intervene in a conflict if disputants themselves are unable to get their way through negotiation. Unlike professional third parties, who have a clear purpose to help disputants out and act as impartially as possible, those lay third parties are not generally constrained by specialized training and certain regulations and do not feel any a priori obligation or responsibility to solve the conflict. They seem to have a larger set of options available for conflict intervention (Kolb & Sheppard, 1985). As a result, siding with a disputant as one of the salient reactions is often chosen by those lay third parties (Black, 1993; Van de Vliert, 1981, 1997). For example, an employee faced with a heated dispute between two colleagues usually may not have any preference for how to deal with it in the very beginning. However, with the development of the dispute, especially when both disputants expect the employee to coalesce with them so as to win out, this employee in the role of lay third party usually takes sides with one of the disputants.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Huadong Yang, Organizational Psychology and Human Resource Development, University of Twente, P.O. Box 217, 7500 AE Enschede, Netherlands; e-mail: H.Yang@utwente.nl.

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Many factors, such as legitimate rights and sanction power, have been proposed to underlie lay third parties' side-taking intention (Gross, Mason, & McEachern, 1958; Ury, Brett, & Goldberg, 1988). In this article, we aimed at exploring cultural differences with regard to side-taking preference, giving special attention to a culturally sensitive factor, interpersonal relationship. It is generally believed that it is culturally universal that lay third parties prefer to stand up for the disputant with whom they have an agreeable or close relationship. As the American sociologist Black (1993) observed, in many societies, from tribal societies such as the Arusha of Tanzania to modern societies such as the American society, an asymmetric relationship with the principal conflict parties (close to one disputant and distant to the other) tends to lead lay third parties to support the close party and oppose the distant party. As a result, the conflict escalates.

However, the relevance of interpersonal relationship is not insensitive to the cultural context of the conflict. Cross-cultural studies on conflict management have shown that the function of interpersonal relationship for how individuals handle conflicts varies across national cultures (Adair & Brett, 2004; Triandis, 1995). The relationship consideration is more salient for conflict management in collectivistic Asian cultures than in individualistic European and North American cultures. People from collectivistic cultures tend to think about conflict in terms of interpersonal relationships, whereas people from individualistic cultures tend to think about conflict in terms of interests or outcomes. Therefore, we decided to investigate and compare the effect of interpersonal relationship on lay third parties' side-taking preference in the prototypically collectivistic Chinese culture and the prototypically individualistic Dutch culture.

Specifically, this article reports two studies, each conducted both in China and in The Netherlands. In the first study, we tested the basic assumption that an asymmetric relationship leads lay third parties, especially Chinese lay third parties, to have an intention to side with a close disputant. In the second study, we examined how contrasting information derived from the other disputant in a conflict dilemma and cultural dimensions of horizontal-vertical individualism and collectivism influence lay third parties' siding with a close disputant. Finally, we discuss lay third parties' side-taking preference in relation to the impact of interpersonal relationship and of relevant cultural differences.

STUDY 1

HYPOTHESES

Asymmetric interpersonal relationship and side-taking preference. If party A and party B have an antagonistic attitude toward each other, and a third party has a bonding relationship with party A, the classic social balance theory (Heider, 1958; see also Pruitt & Kim, 2004) predicts that the third party tends to develop an antagonistic feeling toward party B so as to maintain a balanced state. In the same vein, when faced with an interpersonal conflict, a lay third party usually perceives an antagonistic attitude between the disputants. The bonding relationship with the close disputant drives the lay third party to develop a positive feeling toward the close disputant, so that the positive feeling toward the distant disputant becomes weaker and may even turn negative to keep the internal state balanced. This tendency further leads the lay third party to react to the conflict in a distributive way—side with the close party and keep distance from the antagonist.

Besides, the positive attitude inherent in a close relationship impels the lay third party to process information in a conflict situation through selective perception and selective memory (e.g., Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993; Pruitt & Kim, 2004). Once the positive attitude toward a close party has taken shape, selective perception and memory will lead a lay third party to recall or interpret information in ways that confirm the original attitude. As a result, the lay third party accepts the arguments or evidence held by the close party more easily than by the distant party. For example, when a lay third party is faced with a disagreement between a family member and a stranger, selective perception and selective memory will make the lay third party more willing to support, and thus side with, the family member rather than the stranger. Therefore, we hypothesize that an asymmetric relationship with the disputants leads a lay third party to side with the close disputant rather than the distant disputant (Hypothesis 1).

Culture, interpersonal relationship, and side taking. As mentioned in the introduction, in collectivistic Asian societies, such as the Chinese society, in-group harmony is highly valued. Keeping a favorable relationship with in-group members is considered one of the important strategies to maintain in-group harmony. Once a favorable relationship is built, an individual will be more likely to strengthen it, even at the cost of sacrificing one's own interests. Yan and Sorenson (2004) pointed out that when Chinese people face interpersonal conflicts, "rational" thinking to satisfy one's own desire may give way to the consideration of maintaining good long-term relationships (among in-group members). By contrast, in individualistic Western societies, such as the Dutch society, an individual is seen as an independent, self-contained entity, and social relationships between individuals are generally characterized by uniplex and weak ties (Gelfand & Cai, 2004). People in such Western societies are more concerned about their own interests or joint outcomes in a conflict and care less about harmonious relationships in negotiation (e.g., Triandis, 1995). Therefore, we expect that compared with Dutch lay third parties, the preference of maintaining a favorable relationship with in-group members leads Chinese lay third parties to side more with the close party (Hypothesis 2).

METHOD

Participants. A total of 45 Chinese and 53 Dutch university students voluntarily participated in this study. Chinese students were recruited from the management department of Renmin University in Beijing, China. Chinese was their first language. Dutch students were recruited from psychology and management departments of the Groningen University in The Netherlands. Dutch was their first language. The two samples were comparable with regard to demographic variables. In the Chinese sample, the age ranged from 19 to 22 with a mean of 21.3, and 33% were male. In the Dutch sample, the age ranged from 19 to 25 with a mean of 23.4, and 43% were male.

Procedure. Participants were asked to fill in a Web-based questionnaire during their free time. The questionnaire was developed in English, translated from English into Chinese and into Dutch by bilinguals, and then translated back into English by another pair of independent translators. Subsequently, a group of researchers was asked to correct distortions in the translations by comparing the original version with the back-translated versions. The back-translation procedure ensured the equivalence of the linguistic meaning between the

Chinese and Dutch versions. In the questionnaire, we described a scenario in which three students in a project group are selecting another member to form a four-member project team. Candidates A and B both want to join this team, and their competences and skills are more or less equivalent. Two students in the group (called Zhang and Li in Chinese, and Arca and Barc in Dutch)¹ disagree on which candidate should be recruited. Arca strongly prefers candidate A whereas Barc strongly prefers candidate B. The third student in the team (the focal person in the role of lay third party) is confronted with their disagreement.

We described an asymmetric relationship by assigning to Arca the position of a family member of the focal person and to Barc the position of an unfamiliar person. This part of the scenario read as follows:

Arca, by chance, is a cousin of yours, and you have known Arca all your life. You meet Arca regularly on family meetings, although you do not often engage in other social activities together. Barc is studying at the same department as you are and you know Barc only by name. Until now, you have never had any contact with Barc, let alone that you have ever engaged in social activities together.

Measures. The dependent variable of this study was the participants' side-taking preference. We constructed four pairs of items to measure the preference for siding with Arca and siding with Barc on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Examples are "I am going to support Arca's (Barc's) choice" and "I am going to help Arca (Barc) strengthen the strong points of candidate A (B)." Cronbach's alpha for siding with Arca was .84 for the Chinese group and .85 for the Dutch group, and for siding with Barc, it was .80 for the Chinese and .82 for the Dutch.

RESULTS

Checks on participants' understanding of the scenario. The item "I am confronted with opposite expectations from Arca and Barc" was used to check whether the participants understood the conflict situation (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Only those respondents who scored at least 3 on this item were considered to have understood the case correctly. Two questions, "Who is a family member of yours in the case?" and "Who is an unfamiliar person in the case?" were used to check the perception of an asymmetric relationship with Arca and Barc. Only those respondents who identified Arca as a family member and Barc as an unfamiliar person were retained for further analysis. In total, 7 Chinese and 4 Dutch respondents failed to pass the manipulation checks. Thus 38 Chinese and 49 Dutch participants were left for testing the hypotheses.

Tests of the hypotheses. To test Hypothesis 1, we conducted a paired-sample *t* test on the lay third party's preference for siding with Arca and Barc in the overall sample. The result was in line with Hypothesis 1 (siding with Arca, $M = 3.30$, $SD = .79$; siding with Barc, $M = 2.60$, $SD = .75$, $t = 5.26$, $p < .01$), showing that the lay third parties did prefer to take a side with Arca, the disputant with a close relationship.

Next, we conducted a MANOVA to examine the national cultural differences in respondents' side-taking preference. The results indicated that there was a significant difference between the Chinese and the Dutch lay third parties on the combined dependent variables, $F(2, 84) = 5.57$, $p < .05$, Wilks's Lambda = .87, partial $\eta^2 = .12$. When the two side-taking intentions were considered separately, the results showed that there was no difference in

siding with the family member Arca between the Chinese ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .66$) and the Dutch ($M = 3.16$, $SD = .86$). Thus, both Chinese and Dutch lay third parties preferred to side with a close disputant. There was no cultural difference, thus Hypothesis 2 was not confirmed. Unexpectedly, for siding with Barc, the unfamiliar person, the results revealed a significant difference of nationality, $F(1, 85) = 10.67$, $p < .025$ (Bonferroni adjusted p level), partial $\eta^2 = .11$. An inspection of the mean scores showed that the Chinese lay third parties reported a higher score on siding with an unfamiliar person ($M_{\text{Chinese}} = 3.01$, $SD = .56$) than the Dutch lay third parties ($M_{\text{Dutch}} = 2.39$, $SD = .77$). Thus, compared to their Dutch counterparts, the Chinese lay third parties were less willing to turn down the coalition requests from an unfamiliar person.

Finally, we also included gender and age as covariates and conducted a MANCOVA, but neither of these demographic variables had an influence on lay third parties' side-taking preference.

DISCUSSION

In summary, Study 1 empirically illustrated that lay third parties did take account of interpersonal relationships with disputants when handling a dispute. Although the finding that the Chinese lay third parties reported a stronger preference for siding with an unfamiliar person than the Dutch seems against our presumption, it indeed makes some sense from the perspective of collectivists. In the scenario, one disputant is a cousin and therefore part of an in-group, whereas the other disputant is unfamiliar and therefore part of an out-group. By doing the unfamiliar person a favor, a new ally might be won who could be useful for the in-group including the cousin in the long run. As long as a decision or action such as side taking benefits the group, the individual interests (i.e., those of the lay third party and of the cousin) are subordinate to the group interests.

However, several shortcomings in Study 1 limit the generalization of these findings. First, we did not check whether the two student samples were representative of their national cultures in terms of individualism and collectivism. If university students were not representative of their national cultures, the results from Study 1 might have been confounded and thus might have led to the unsuccessful test of Hypothesis 2. To obviate the possible problems of young-student samples, in Study 2, we chose a sample of employees from various Chinese and Dutch organizations and explicitly measured their cultural orientations toward individualism and collectivism.

Second, by assigning to Arca the position of a family member and to Barc the position of an unfamiliar person in the scenario, we manipulated the close versus distant relationship in an indirect way. One may argue that a cousin is not necessarily associated with a close or favorable relationship. So, it might be that the manipulation itself attributed to the disconfirmation of Hypothesis 2. In response, we used a more straightforward manipulation of the close and favorable relationship in Study 2.

Third, we oversimplified the conflict situation in Study 1. Information other than interpersonal relationships might have restrained the lay third parties from siding with a close-relationship party. As an improvement, we therefore presented a conflict dilemma to the respondents in Study 2 in which one disputant has a close relationship with them whereas the other disputant holds a strong legitimacy argument or can sanction them. We expected that lay third parties had to compare relationship information with other kinds of information, which will certainly complicate the lay third parties' decision-making

process and leave more room for relationship information and information inherent in national culture to demonstrate their side-taking functions.

STUDY 2

HYPOTHESES

Influence of contrasting information on side-taking preference. When faced with a conflict dilemma between two disputants A and B, a lay third party will collect information not only from the close-relationship party A but also from the distant-relationship party B. Given that a close relationship with A indeed tends to lead lay third parties to side with A, it is still an open question to what extent the lay third party's side-taking preference is also dependent on information collected from B (henceforth, *contrasting information*). The theory of role conflict management (Gross et al., 1958) and the theory of conflict escalation toward outsiders (Van de Vliert, 1981) both proposed that two elements—perceived legitimacy and expected negative sanctions—have a significant influence on an individual's side-taking decision. Perceived legitimacy helps a third party decide which disputant is right or has a reasonable claim. Negative sanctions provide information about what kinds of punishment disputants will apply if the third party refuses to conform to their expectations. When a lay third party who has a close relationship with A perceives stronger legitimacy for B's claims or expects more negative sanctions from B, the lay third party will also have an inclination to side with B. As a result, the intention to side with the close party A will certainly decrease. Previous empirical studies (Van de Vliert, 1981; Yang, Van de Vliert, & Shi, 2005) further suggest that the effect of perceived legitimacy outweighs the effect of negative sanction expectancies on side taking. Therefore, we expect not only that legitimacy or negative sanctions as contrasting information collected from B decreases a lay third party's intention to side with the close party A but also that legitimacy information decreases the lay third party's intention of siding with a close party to a greater extent than expected negative sanctions will (Hypothesis 3).

Culture, contrasting information, and side taking. Cultural values and beliefs seem to also influence individuals' weighing of information about legitimacy and sanctions. Notably, debating legitimacy judgments of right or wrong as a strategy of conflict management is more pervasive in egalitarian individualistic cultures, such as the Dutch culture, than in hierarchical collectivistic cultures, such as the Chinese culture (Hofstede, 1991; Tinsley, 2001). In egalitarian individualistic cultures, people tend to believe that preestablished regulations or legitimate rights should be equally and universally applied to everyone and hold true across situations. Therefore we expect that legitimacy as contrasting information will strongly influence the Dutch lay third parties' side-taking preference. In contrast, sanction or power strategies tend to be used more in hierarchical collectivistic cultures than in egalitarian individualistic cultures. Expedient decisions made by high-status people or relying on a specific conflict situation are more acceptable in hierarchical collectivistic cultures than in egalitarian individualistic cultures (e.g., Adair & Brett, 2004; Tinsley, 2001). So, negative sanctions as contrasting information are expected to have a stronger influence on side-taking intention among Chinese lay third parties than among Dutch lay third parties. Hence, legitimacy information decreases the Dutch lay third parties' intention of siding with a close party to a larger extent than the Chinese lay third parties' intention (Hypothesis 4a), and negative-sanction information decreases the

Chinese lay third parties' intention of siding with a close party to a larger extent than the Dutch lay third parties' intention (Hypothesis 4b).

METHOD

A 2 (conflict dilemma: relationship vs. legitimacy or relationship vs. sanctions) \times 2 (culture: Chinese or Dutch) between-subjects design was used to test the hypotheses. Within the Chinese and Dutch subsamples, respondents were randomly divided into two equally large groups. In one group, participants were provided with a scenario in which legitimacy information served as contrasting information; in the other group, the participants read a scenario in which the expectation of negative sanctions was manipulated as contrasting information.

Sample and procedure. We sampled employees from five organizations in China (one nonprofit organization and four commercial companies) and three organizations in The Netherlands (one nonprofit organization and two commercial companies). A total of 147 Chinese employees and 115 Dutch employees participated in this study. In the Chinese sample, 64% of the participants were male, age ranged from 21 to 66 with a mean age of 33, 52% reported that they had received more than 1 year of college or university education, and 32% reported performing managerial functions in their position. In the Dutch sample, 55% of the participants were male, age ranged from 20 to 63 with a mean age of 36, 76% had received a higher education, and 18% were performing managerial functions. Overall, the two samples were comparable with regard to the demographic variables.

In seven organizations, a paper-and-pencil questionnaire was sent to the participants through internal organizational agencies. In one Dutch organization, participants completed a Web questionnaire. Random checks of the distributions of Dutch paper-and-pencil responses and Dutch Web-based responses revealed no systematic difference, which suggests that the different ways of presenting the questionnaire did not influence the participants' response modes. We asked participants not to write down their name in the questionnaire so as to guarantee anonymity. In the introduction of the questionnaire, we assured them that their responses would be used for scientific research only.

The questionnaire for the Chinese participants was in Chinese, and the questionnaire for the Dutch participants was in Dutch. Translation/back-translation technique was used to ensure that the instruments were linguistically equivalent. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of a 16-item scale measuring horizontal-vertical individualism and collectivism and some questions about personal information, including gender, age, education, and occupation. In the second part, a scenario about an interpersonal conflict was presented, followed by a series of questions for the manipulation checks and the side-taking preference.

Scenario stimulus. We asked 8 Chinese employees working in different organizations to report two or three conflicts that occurred in their work surroundings. In total, we collected 18 conflict cases. We then presented the four cases that were most frequently reported by Chinese employees to 5 Dutch employees and asked them to identify whether those cases also take place in their organizations. Through this procedure, a case about making a controversial selection decision was adopted as a cross-nationally appropriate scenario stimulus. The case described an event in which a personnel officer confronted with opposite recommendations from two functional managers, Arca (Zhang in Chinese)

and Barc (Li in Chinese), has to make a selection decision. After a general introduction of the situation, the core part of the case read as follows:

Right now you are selecting a trainer for the Computer Department. According to the job description, at least 5 years of experience as a trainer in a similar job is necessary for that position. Additionally, in a meeting, the general manager has suggested that it would be a great success of personnel planning if the trainer selected had the potential to become the director of the Computer Department in the future. Three candidates A, B, and C, have sent their applications to the Personnel Department. Arca strongly recommends candidate A, but Barc strongly recommends candidate B.

Manipulation. After the scenario stimulus, we manipulated two conflict dilemmas, relationship versus legitimacy (R&L) and relationship versus sanctions (R&S). In the R&L manipulation, we associated Arca with a close relationship but less legitimacy judgments, whereas Barc was associated with a distant relationship but more legitimacy judgments. The manipulation part read as follows:

Arca, who comes from the same town as you do, has been your supervisor over the past 10 years. In your working relationship, Arca has taught you a lot, not only in your work but also in your life. Arca likes A and wants to use A to change the Computer Department's work approach. But A has only 1 year of relevant experience and has little potential to become the next director.

Barc strongly recommends candidate B because B has six years of relevant experience and also because Barc thinks that B certainly has enough managerial potential to become the director of the Computer Department. You hardly know Barc, who moved to your department just six months ago. Before that, you had heard about Barc but never had any contact.

In the R&S scenario, the relationship information was manipulated in the same way as in the R&L scenario, but the legitimacy information was replaced by sanction information. The contrasting information about negative sanctions was described as follows: "Based on your past experience you know that Arca will respect your decision if you don't select A, and that there will be no retaliation in the future." The contrasting information about sanctions from Barc was manipulated as follows: "Based on information you got from others, you know that Barc will be very unhappy if you don't select B, and might do things that make you regret your decision in the future."

Measures of side-taking preference. After reading the scenario, respondents were asked how likely they were to side with Arca or with Barc, respectively (1 = *very unlikely* to 5 = *very likely*). Four items were used to measure side-taking preference, two items for siding with Arca and two items for siding with Barc. Items were "I am going to select candidate A/B" and "I am going to tell Arca/Barc that candidate B/A is a better choice than candidate A/B." The Cronbach's α coefficient for siding with Arca was .76 in the Chinese sample ($r = .62, p < .01$) and .85 in the Dutch sample ($r = .75, p < .01$). The Cronbach's α coefficient for siding with Barc was .71 in the Chinese sample ($r = .54, p < .01$) and .85 in the Dutch sample ($r = .73, p < .01$).

Measures of horizontal-vertical individualism and collectivism. A 16-item individualism-collectivism (IC) questionnaire derived from Triandis and others' work (e.g., Soh & Leong, 2002; Triandis, 1995, 1996; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) was used to measure horizontal-vertical IC orientations. Responses were measured on a 9-point Likert-type

scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 9 = *strongly agree*). According to Triandis (1995), horizontal individualism (HI) emphasizes self-reliance and being unique, but people with this orientation are not interested in becoming distinguished and acquiring status (a typical item in the scale is “I rely on myself most of the time; I rarely rely on others”). Vertical individualism (VI) values being unique but emphasizes individual competition as well. It encourages the members to be distinct from others and to worship heroes (a typical item in the scale is “Winning is everything”). Horizontal collectivism (HC) emphasizes common goals with others and high equality but low freedom (a typical item in the scale is “If a coworker gets a prize I would feel proud”). Vertical collectivism (VC) emphasizes the integrity of in-groups and the acceptance of authorities from in-groups (a typical item in the scale is “It is my duty to take care of my family, even when I have to sacrifice what I want”).

We used structural equation modeling (Cheung & Rensvold, 2000) to check whether the Chinese and Dutch responses to the IC scale were influenced by acquiescent bias or extreme response bias. In a preliminary test, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis on all 16 items in the Chinese group and in the Dutch group, respectively. The factor loadings of “I often do my own things” (HI) and “When another person does better than I do, I get tense and aroused” (VI) were nonsignificant in the Chinese group, with the consequence that they were eliminated.

Table 1 shows the results of the tests for structural equivalence of the remaining 14 horizontal–vertical IC items across the Chinese and Dutch groups. The invariance test of overall form (the first row) indicated that the four-factor structure was applicable to both groups (comparative fit index [CFI] = .90, Tucker-Lewis index [TLI] = .89, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .057); the test for factor invariance (the second row) showed that the factor loadings were not significantly different between the two groups ($\Delta\chi^2 = 9.71$, $\Delta df = 10$, *n.s.*, CFI = .89, $\Delta TLI = .00$, $\Delta RMSEA = -.004$), indicating that there is no difference in extreme response scoring between the Chinese and Dutch groups. However, the invariance test for overall intercept (the third row) indicated the existence of a between-group difference in acquiescence response bias ($\Delta\chi^2 = 86.76$, $\Delta df = 10$, $p < .05$, CFI = .73, $\Delta TLI = -.15$, $\Delta RMSEA = .024$). When scrutinizing the measurement of the individual constructs of HI (the fourth row), HC (the fifth row), VI (the sixth row), and VC (the seventh row) for intercept invariance, we discovered that except for the HI construct, the HC, VI, and VC constructs were noninvariant across the two groups. Apparently, the HC, VI, and VC constructs were biased more by the acquiescence response style than was the HI construct.

To discount the acquiescence bias, we applied the within-subject standardization procedure (e.g., Fischer, 2004; Smith, 2004). For each respondent, we first subtracted the grand mean of all 14 items in the IC scale from the individual item scores and then divided these centralized scores by the standard deviation of the grand mean. The resulting scores ranged from -1.16 to 1.45 for HI, from $-.98$ to 1.25 for HC, from -1.41 to 1.17 for VI, and from -1.37 to 1.11 for VC. To check whether the two employee samples were representative of their national culture in terms of horizontal–vertical IC, we compared the means of HI and VC dimensions between the Chinese and the Dutch by ANOVAs. The results revealed that there is a significant difference between Chinese and Dutch participants in VC orientation ($F_{1,198} = 7.60$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .04$). The Chinese participants reported a higher score on the vertical-collectivism orientation than their Dutch counterparts ($M_{\text{Chinese}} = .03$, $SD = .51$; $M_{\text{Dutch}} = -.17$, $SD = .49$). On the HI dimension, although the Dutch scored

TABLE 1
Results of Tests for Structural Equivalence of the Horizontal (H)–Vertical (V)
Individualism (I)–Collectivism (C) Scale

<i>Invariance Test</i>	χ^2	df	$(\Delta\chi^2)$	Δdf	CFI	TLI	ΔTLI	RMSEA	$\Delta RMSEA$
1. Overall form	202.99	142	NA	NA	.90	.89	NA	.057	NA
2. Factor loading	212.70	152	9.71	10	.89	.89	.00	.053	-.004
3. Overall intercept	299.46	162	86.76	10	.73	.74	-.15	.077	.024*
4. Intercept invariance construct HI	220.18	154	7.48	2	.88	.88	-.01	.055	.002
5. Intercept invariance construct HC	238.06	155	25.36	3	.83	.84	-.05	.060	.007†
6. Intercept invariance construct VI	233.11	154	20.41	2	.84	.85	-.04	.063	.010*
7. Intercept invariance construct VC	246.70	155	34.00	3	.82	.83	-.06	.065	.012*

NOTE: CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker and Lewis’s nonnormed index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation. Δ = calculation of differences of *df*, χ^2 , TLI, and RMSEA, respectively. Three criteria were used to evaluate the structure noninvariance: Significant $\Delta\chi^2$, $\Delta TLI > .05$, and a significant value of $\Delta RMSEA$ (Cheung & Rensvold, 2000). P value: †*p* < .10; **p* < .05; ***p* < .01.

higher than the Chinese ($M_{\text{Chinese}} = .20, SD = .50; M_{\text{Dutch}} = .25, SD = .45$), ANOVA did not reveal any significant difference between the groups ($F_{1,198} = .55, ns, \eta^2 = .003$).

RESULTS

Checks on scenario and manipulations. To check whether respondents felt that they were confronted with an interpersonal conflict situation, two questions were asked on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The first question concerned their understanding of the incompatible expectations: “Arca advised me to select a candidate other than the candidate Barc suggested.” The second question addressed the extent of incompatibility: “I am confronted with opposite expectations from Arca and Barc.” We removed the respondents who had one or two ratings below the level of 3, leaving 200 participants (114 Chinese and 86 Dutch) for further analysis.

For the R&L scenario, two pairs of questions were used to check the relationship manipulation on a 5-point scale: “I have a close relationship with Arca/Barc” and “There is an emotional positive relationship between Arca/Barc and me going beyond work” ($\alpha = .77; r = .63, p < .01$ for the relationship with Arca; $\alpha = .70; r = .54, p < .01$ for Barc). To check whether the legitimacy information had its intended effect, two pairs of questions were used: “It is reasonable that Arca (Barc) expects me to choose candidate A (B) because Arca likes A (because B has more experience)” and “It is correct that Arca (Barc) suggests that I select candidate A (B), given that Arca wants to use A to change the Computer Department’s work approach (given that Barc thinks B has managerial potential)” ($\alpha = .73; r = .57, p < .01$ for the perceived legitimacy concerning Arca; $\alpha = .68; r = .50, p < .01$ for Barc).

We conducted paired *t* tests to check whether participants understood the information associated with Arca and Barc correctly. As shown in Table 2,² respondents reported that the relationship with Arca was closer and more favorable than the one with Barc ($t_{\text{Chinese}} = 7.80, t_{\text{Dutch}} = 10.70; ps < .01$), but they felt more legitimacy in Barc’s claims than in Arca’s claims ($t_{\text{Chinese}} = 7.54, t_{\text{Dutch}} = 13.72; ps < .01$). Thus, the information manipulations in the R&L scenario were successful in both the Chinese group and the Dutch group.

TABLE 2
Means and Standard Deviations of the Information Checks in
Two Conflict Dilemmas for Two Countries

	R&L (n = 105)				R&S (n = 95)			
	Relationship		Legitimacy		Relationship		Sanctions	
	Arca	Barc	Arca	Barc	Arca	Barc	Arca	Barc
Chinese (n = 114)	3.75 (.87)	2.21 (.70)	2.75 (.85)	4.05 (.60)	3.74 (.76)	2.34 (.77)	2.53 (.71)	3.50 (.74)
Dutch (n = 86)	3.63 (.76)	1.97 (.59)	1.84 (.65)	3.72 (.69)	3.76 (.67)	1.80 (.74)	2.00 (.71)	3.39 (.68)

NOTE: Values in parentheses represent standard deviations. R&L = relationship vs. legitimacy; R&S = relationship vs. sanctions.

For the R&S dilemma, we repeated the manipulation check on the experienced relationship by asking the same questions as in the R&L dilemma ($\alpha = .70$; $r = .54$, $p < .01$ for the relationship with Arca; $\alpha = .73$; $r = .57$, $p < .01$ for Barc). Three pairs of questions were employed to check the manipulation of sanction information (e.g., “I expected that Arca/Barc will give me a hard time if I refuse to select candidate A /B” and “A decision in favor of Barc/Arca will damage my cooperation with Arca/Barc”). The responses to the items were highly intercorrelated ($\alpha = .76$ for the negative sanctions expected from Arca; $\alpha = .75$ for Barc). Results in Table 2 show that the respondents reported the relationship with Arca was more positive than the one with Barc ($t_{\text{Chinese}} = 8.15$, $t_{\text{Dutch}} = 10.60$; $ps < .01$) but expected that Barc had more negative sanctions than Arca ($t_{\text{Chinese}} = 7.26$, $t_{\text{Dutch}} = 8.68$; $ps < .01$). Thus, the information manipulations in the R&S scenario were successful as well.

Descriptive analysis. Table 3 lists the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the horizontal–vertical IC orientations and the side-taking preference in two conflict dilemmas broken down for two nations. For the side-taking preference, the results without parentheses show that both the Chinese and the Dutch tended to side with the legitimacy party, Barc, whereas the results in parentheses show that the tendency of choosing sides became less manifest when the Chinese and the Dutch expected negative sanctions from Barc. Within each of the conflict dilemmas, correlations between siding with Arca and with Barc were significant (in R&L: $r_{\text{Chinese}} = -.47$, $r_{\text{Dutch}} = -.30$; $ps < .05$; in R&S: $r_{\text{Chinese}} = .45$, $r_{\text{Dutch}} = .54$; $ps < .05$), which is in line with the theoretical view that siding with Arca and siding with Barc were dependent on each other.

Global tests of the hypotheses. Our hypotheses assumed that the type of conflict dilemma (R&L vs. R&S) and nationality (Chinese vs. Dutch) both affect the preference of siding with a close-relationship party. Thus, we coded those variables as dummy variables (R&L was coded as 0, R&S as 1, Chinese as 0, and Dutch as 1) and included them as independent variables in a MANOVA of siding with the close-relationship party, Arca. Relying on Wilks’s criterion, the combined side-taking preference was significantly affected by the type of conflict dilemma ($F_{2, 194} = 59.82$, $p < .01$, Wilks’s Lambda = .62, partial $\eta^2 = .39$), nationality ($F_{2, 194} = 4.88$, $p < .01$, Wilks’s Lambda = .95, partial $\eta^2 = .05$), and their interaction term ($F_{2, 194} = 5.32$, $p < .01$, Wilks’s Lambda = .96, partial $\eta^2 = .06$), which suggests

TABLE 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Horizontal (H)–Vertical (V)
Individualism (I)–Collectivism (C) and Side-Taking Intentions in Two Conflict
Dilemmas for Two Countries

	M_{CH}	SD	M_{DU}	SD	1	2	3	4	5 ^b	6 ^b
1. HI ^a	.20 (6.02)	.50 (1.17)	.25 (7.06)	.45 (1.24)	—	-.38** (.04)	.06 (.31**)	-.32** (.20*)	.02 (-.27*)	-.07 (-.42*)
2. HC ^a	.34 (6.84)	.41 (1.26)	.14 (6.21)	.44 (0.93)	-.47** (.15)	—	-.15 (.23*)	.10 (.19*)	-.04 (.17)	.17 (.26 [†])
3. VI ^a	-.36 (6.14)	.50 (1.29)	.21 (5.62)	.53 (1.24)	-.01 (.13)	-.12 (.54**)	—	-.20 [†] (.09)	-.08 (-.15)	.03 (.02)
4. VC ^a	.03 (6.99)	.51 (1.46)	-.17 (4.87)	.49 (1.39)	-.10 (.30**)	-.10 (.28*)	-.22** (.36**)	—	-.06 (-.14)	.04 (.09)
5. Siding with Arca ^b	2.53 (2.97)	.86 (.82)	1.90 (2.93)	.82 (.68)	-.05 (-.03)	.12 (-.05)	.32* (-.12)	.07 (-.03)	—	-.47** (.45**)
6. Siding with Barc ^b	3.61 (2.89)	.81 (.73)	3.96 (2.80)	.71 (.61)	-.03 (-.08)	.14 (.12)	-.20 (-.08)	-.16 (-.06)	-.30** (.55**)	—

NOTE: CH represents the Chinese group; DU represents the Dutch group. Correlations in the upper right half of the table refer to the Chinese group; correlations in the lower left half of the table refer to the Dutch group.

a. Values without parentheses are based on the within-subject standardized scores. Values in parentheses are based on the raw scores.

b. Values without parentheses represent the scores in the relationship-versus-legitimacy conflict scenario; values in parentheses refer to the scores in the relationship-versus-sanctions conflict scenario.

P value: [†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

that the type of conflict dilemma and national culture in concert influence lay third parties' side-taking preference.

Next, we checked whether contrasting information (legitimacy or expected sanctions) affects lay third parties in their siding with Arca, the close-relationship party. Results (in the first set of columns of Table 4) showed that lay third parties' siding with Arca was not only significantly different across the type of conflict dilemma ($F_{1, 195} = 39.73, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .17$) and across nations ($F_{1, 195} = 8.27, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$) but was also significantly influenced by the interaction term between the type of conflict dilemma and nationality ($F_{1, 195} = 6.15, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$). It means that legitimacy and expected sanctions as contrasting information have different impacts on lay third parties' siding with a close party and that these different impacts are further qualified by lay third parties' national culture.

Inspection of the two-way interaction through contrast analysis (as shown in Figure 1) indicated that the lay third parties were less willing to side with the close party when legitimacy served as contrasting information ($M_{R\&L} = 2.26, SD = .90$) than when sanctions served as contrasting information ($M_{R\&S} = 2.95, SD = .76$), which is in line with Hypothesis 3. Particularly, in the R&L conflict dilemma, the Dutch lay third parties reported a significantly weaker intention of siding with the close-relationship party than their Chinese counterparts ($M_{Dutch} = 1.90, SD = .82; M_{Chinese} = 2.53, SD = .86$), which further supported Hypothesis 4a. However, in the R&S conflict situation, the results did not reveal any significant difference between the Chinese lay third parties and the Dutch lay third parties regarding their intention of siding with the close-relationship party ($M_{Chinese} = 2.97, SD = .83; M_{Dutch} = 2.93, SD = .68$), which disconfirmed Hypothesis 4b.

TABLE 4
Multivariate Analysis of Variance for Siding With a Close-Relationship Party

Main Sources	Model 1: MANOVA ^a				Model 2: MANCOVA ^b			
	df	F	η^2	p	df	F	η^2	p
Nationality	1	8.27	.04	.004	1	5.65	.03	.018
Conflict dilemma (CD)	1	39.73	.17	.000	1	18.32	.09	.000
Nationality \times CD	1	6.15	.04	.023	1	1.33	.01	.251
<i>Covariates</i>								
Horizontal individualism (HI)					1	1.37	.01	.243
Horizontal collectivism (HC)					1	.19	.00	.664
Vertical individualism (VI)					1	.04	.00	.853
Vertical collectivism (VC)					1	.26	.00	.610
Nationality \times HI					1	.98	.01	.323
Nationality \times HC					1	.60	.00	.441
Nationality \times VI					1	3.78	.03	.051
Nationality \times VC					1	1.01	.01	.316
CD \times HI					1	1.58	.01	.210
CD \times HC					1	.61	.00	.438
CD \times VI					1	3.94	.03	.048
CD \times VC					1	.49	.00	.484
Nationality \times CD \times HI					1	.36	.00	.548
Nationality \times CD \times HC					1	1.44	.01	.232
Nationality \times CD \times VI					1	2.68	.02	.104
Nationality \times CD \times VC					1	.32	.00	.575
Error	196	(126.50) ^c			180	(115.54) ^c		

a. Global test of hypotheses without IC variables as covariates.

b. Refined test of hypotheses with IC variables and the relevant interactions as covariates. Because the matrices derived from the within-subject standardized data have no regular inverse, it is advisable not to use the within-subject standardized data in MANCOVA (e.g., Fischer, 2004). Therefore the raw IC scores are included as the covariates in the MANCOVA.

c. Represents mean square of error.

Using the horizontal–vertical IC cultural dimensions to refine the hypothesis tests.

Although the analyses above indicated the impact of national culture on lay third parties' siding with the close-relationship party, they did not demonstrate which cultural dimensions actually contribute to those differences. To gain more in-depth knowledge of cultural differences as antecedents of side-taking preference, we included the four horizontal–vertical IC cultural dimensions and their interaction terms with nationality and conflict dilemma as covariates in a MANCOVA.

Although the type of conflict dilemma still retained its significant influence on the combined side-taking preference ($F_{2, 179} = 21.62, p < .01$, Wilks's Lambda = .80, partial $\eta^2 = .20$), the effects of nationality and of the interaction between nationality and conflict dilemma now were only marginally significant (for nationality: $F_{2, 179} = 2.81, p = .07$, Wilks's Lambda = .97, partial $\eta^2 = .03$; for the interaction term: $F_{2, 179} = 2.69, p = .07$, Wilks's Lambda = .96, partial $\eta^2 = .03$). In addition, the interaction terms of nationality and VI ($F_{2, 179} = 2.82, p < .05$, Wilks's Lambda = .90, partial $\eta^2 = .03$) and of conflict dilemma and VI ($F_{2, 179} = 2.47, p = .08$, Wilks's Lambda = .97, partial $\eta^2 = .03$) both had a significant impact on the combined side-taking intentions. These results suggest that the

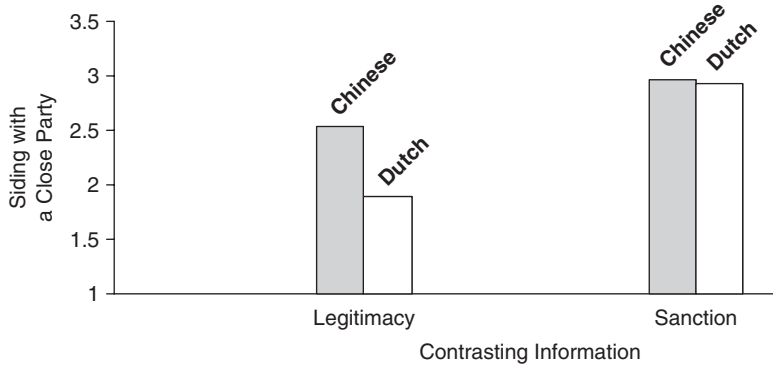


Figure 1: Joint Effect of Contrasting Information and National Culture on Lay Third Parties' Siding With a Close Party

interactions between nationality and VI and between conflict dilemma and VI take over the variance initially explained by the interacting independent variables.

Following the same procedure as in the global tests of hypotheses, we further examined the influence of the covariates on siding with the close-relationship party, Arca. The results shown in the second set of columns of Table 4 indicated that the significant interaction between nationality and conflict dilemma reported in the global tests disappeared ($F_{1,180} = 1.33$, *ns*, partial $\eta^2 = .01$). Instead, the two-way interactions between nationality and VI ($F_{1,180} = 3.78$, $p < .05$; partial $\eta^2 = .03$) and between conflict dilemma and VI ($F_{1,180} = 3.94$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$) showed a significant impact on siding with Arca. Those two-way interactions tended to be further qualified by a three-way interaction of nationality, conflict dilemma, and VI ($F_{1,180} = 2.68$, $p = .10$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$).

Further exploration of the three-way interaction depicted in Figure 2 revealed that when legitimacy served as contrasting information (R&L), in The Netherlands, VI had a negative impact on siding with a closer party ($b = -.47$, $p < .05$, for the solid line with square marks), which suggests that for the Dutch vertical individualists, legitimacy information rules out relationship information in making a side-taking decision. In China, vertical individualism did not show a significant impact on side-taking ($b = -.20$, *ns*, for the solid line with triangle marks), which suggests that the Chinese vertical individualists take account of both legitimacy information and relationship information when taking sides. By contrast, when sanctions served as contrasting information (R&S), VI did not have significant influence on siding with a close party either in The Netherlands ($b = -.12$, *ns*, for the dotted line with square marks) or in China ($b = -.18$, *ns*, for the dotted line with triangle marks). This suggests that for both Dutch and Chinese vertical individualists, the impact of sanction information cannot rule out the impact of interpersonal relationship on side taking.

Together, the results visualized in Figure 2 suggest that Chinese lay third parties are always concerned about the close interpersonal relationship with one disputant, irrespective of contrasting information from the other disputant and irrespective of whether they themselves have a vertical-individualistic orientation. The Dutch, by contrast, are also concerned about the close interpersonal relationship with one disputant unless they themselves have a vertical-individualistic orientation and the other disputant defends a legitimate standpoint.

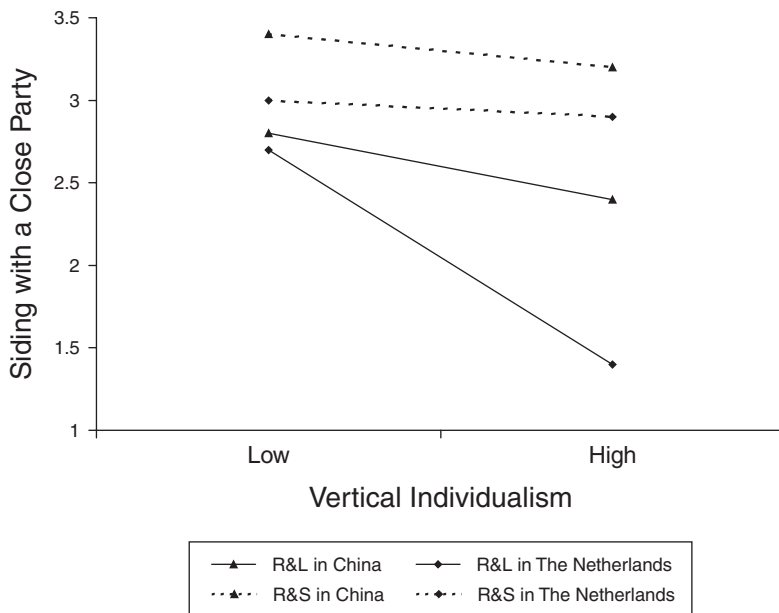


Figure 2: The Impact of Vertical Individualism on Lay Third Parties' Siding With a Close Party, Broken Down for Two Nations (China, The Netherlands) and Two Conflict Dilemmas (Relationship vs. Legitimacy, Relationship vs. Sanctions)

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The aims of this research were to integrate the dimension of interpersonal relationship into the research field of side taking (e.g., Black, 1993; Gross et al., 1958; Van de Vliert, 1981) and to explain the impact of interpersonal relationship on lay third parties' side taking from a cross-cultural perspective. In Study 1, in which only interpersonal relationship is taken into account, the findings confirmed that both Chinese and Dutch lay third parties tend to side with the disputant with whom they have a close relationship. However, in Study 2, where legitimacy or sanction as a kind of contrasting information is set against interpersonal relationship in a conflict dilemma, we detected some significant differences between the Dutch and the Chinese lay third parties on siding with the close-relationship party. These differences are explained by the cultural dimension of VI. As specific contributions of this research, we will discuss the impact of interpersonal relationship, global national culture, and specific cultural dimensions of horizontal-vertical individualism and collectivism on side taking.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP, NATIONAL CULTURE, AND SIDE-TAKING PREFERENCE

Relational criteria have recently been considered as one of the main elements for the parties in conflict management, particularly in collectivistic East Asian cultures, where maintaining harmonious relationships with in-group members is highly valued (e.g.,

Leung, 1988; Ohbuchi & Tedeschi, 1997; Tyler, Lind, Ohbuchi, Sugawara, & Huo, 1998; Yan & Sorenson, 2004). As one of its most important results, the present research evidenced that the impact of interpersonal relationship on side-taking preference prevails not only in the Chinese cultural context but also in the Dutch cultural context. Indeed, it is defensible that interpersonal relationship may be one of the universal dimensions taken into account by lay third parties in a conflict. Just as the sociologist Black (1993) claimed, "Relational distance with the principal parties is one of the most salient factors for a third party to choose the side. To support the closeness and oppose the remoteness is a universal phenomenon across national culture and history" (p. 126).

However, when we complicated the conditions of the relational effects by exploring the more refined collateral function of contrasting legitimacy and sanction information, the potentially universal impact of interpersonal relationship on side taking was subject to change according to national culture. In the R&L situation, perceived legitimacy of the other party's claim weakened the Dutch lay third parties' side taking with the close-relationship party to a greater extent than the Chinese lay third parties' side taking. The Dutch unanimously sided with the legitimacy party and left almost no room for interpersonal relationship to play an additional part. In contrast, although the Chinese also paid attention to legitimacy information and tended to side with the legitimacy party, they did not neglect their interpersonal relationship with the close disputant. Indeed, they still considered information about interpersonal relationship a great deal, at least more than the Dutch did. From the perspective of side taking, this finding strengthens the theoretical argument about the cultural differences between East Asians and West Europeans regarding conflict management (Hofstede, 1991; Nisbett, 2004; Triandis, 1995; Van de Vliert, Ohbuchi, Van Rossum, Hayashi, & Van der Vegt, 2004): Easterners strongly feel embedded in their in-groups and strive for interpersonal harmony with in-groups. They try to maintain a dynamic balance between harmonious relationships on one side and rational criteria such as legitimate rights and sanction power on the other. However, Westerners tend to be more concerned with knowing the truth and are prepared to sacrifice harmony for fairness.

The results of the R&S dilemma refined this picture by showing that both Chinese and Dutch lay third parties have no priority for taking sides with either disputant.³ We suspect that this nonsignificant result may have reasons different for the Chinese and for the Dutch. In the Chinese culture, characterized by harmonious relationships with in-groups and hierarchical social structures, members are sensitive to both interpersonal relations and authority sanctions. So once they are confronted with a conflict between those two elements, their best way is to come up with a solution that can satisfy both disputants or to avoid the dispute altogether if the win-win solution is too difficult to approach. In contrast, in the Dutch culture, characterized by individualism and horizontal social structuring, members are not so keen on both interpersonal relationships and authority sanctions (Emans, Laskewitz, & Van de Vliert, 1994). Therefore they are not very responsive to disputants' expectations. The best way for them may be to just ignore the dispute. They are hardly willing to help disputants out. "It is their problem and has nothing to do with me," remarked a Dutch respondent at the end of the questionnaire. Certainly, further empirical studies are necessary to examine and clarify the above theoretical assumptions.

Horizontal-vertical IC dimensions and side-taking preference. When the cultural dimensions of HI, HC, VI, and VC and their interactions with nationality and conflict dilemma were considered, we found that the initial joint impact of nationality and conflict dilemma on side-taking preference disappeared. This finding provides empirical evidence

that the side-taking differences between the Chinese and the Dutch observed in this study can be attributed to the cultural dimensions of horizontal–vertical individualism and collectivism. It once again demonstrates the function of IC for third parties' conflict-handling behavior.

More specifically, we further found that the dimension of VI played a significant role in shaping lay third parties' preference for siding with a close-relationship party. Those Dutch lay third parties who embrace VI showed a strong reluctance to side with the close-relationship party, particularly when they perceived a strong legitimacy claim from the other party. This finding can be explained with the help of Triandis's classification of horizontal–vertical individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1995; Triandis & Suh, 2002). In his opinion, vertical individualists tend to stress their own interests or self-gains and to highly value competition. Therefore, a ground on which they can play a fair game might be essential for competition. If any other factor impedes fair play, those vertical individualists cannot bear it at all. When the legitimacy information serves as contrasting information against relationship information, those vertical individualists tend to believe that legitimacy information potentially increases fair play and that interpersonal relationship potentially impedes fair play. In The Netherlands, this tendency may be further reinforced by the horizontal structure of the Dutch society; thus Dutch vertical individualists put extra emphasis on legitimacy information. As a consequence, they may strongly dislike to side with the close-relationship party. In China, the same tendency of vertical individualists may be counterbalanced by the relationship-oriented characteristic of Chinese culture. Those Chinese vertical individualists highly value legitimacy information; however, they tend to agree less that interpersonal relationship impedes fair play. As a result, although they support the legitimacy party, they are not willing to put down the relationship party as well.

Although the present research demonstrates the function of individualism and collectivism for side-taking preference, one should be aware that it does not rule out possible contributions of cultural dimensions other than individualism and collectivism. Especially given the fact that the impact of VI on side taking needs to be in concert with nationality, there is still a black box full of national cultural characteristics left for further exploration. Other cultural dimensions, such as universalism versus particularism (Trompenaars, 1993), uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1991), and dialectic both-and thinking versus logical either-or thinking (Nisbett, 2004) might even interact with IC dimensions in explaining side-taking differences between Easterners and Westerners.

Possible limitations. A weakness of both studies is the neglect of responses other than side taking, such as avoiding a dispute or making a compromise between disputants. We left those reactions out of consideration because the main purpose of this research was to call more attention to lay third parties' escalatory reactions to an interpersonal conflict. Indeed, future research should balance side taking and non-side-taking reactions and picture culture differences on lay third parties' reaction to a conflict dilemma from a more comprehensive perspective (cf. Van de Vliert, 1981).

As a second limitation, one should also keep in mind that this research relied on two very specific scenario studies. In a real-life situation, organizational constraints other than legitimacy and negative sanctions may also qualify the impact of interpersonal relationship on side taking. For example, if the appointed candidate turns out to be a failure, all individuals involved in the selection procedure may be accountable for it. This anticipated regret (Zeelenberg, 1999) might cause everyone to be very careful with their recommendation.

In addition, selecting an inferior candidate has potentially negative consequences for an organization. This constraint probably leads employees to hold back the consideration of interpersonal relationships and to give priority to organizational goals instead.

A third shortcoming regards the relationship manipulation employed in Study 2. One may question whether the manipulation of the close relationship with Arca referred not only to familiarity but also to seniority, because the scenario stated that “Arca has been your supervisor over the past 10 years.” Our intention was that familiarity and seniority reinforce each other, thus causing an extra close and favorable relationship with Arca. In contrast to the description of Arca, Barc was introduced as a “freshman” of the department, having few contacts with the respondents. As a result, the manipulation checks did show that the relationship with Barc was more distant and less favorable than with Arca, even though both were depicted as functional managers of the department. Nonetheless, it would be interesting for future cross-cultural research to take seniority or even relative status of the two disputants into account, for example, by stating that Arca is the respondent’s superior, whereas Barc is a workplace friend. The seniority or hierarchy of status would probably modify the functions of legitimacy, sanctions, and interpersonal relationship for side taking differently in vertical collectivistic cultures and in horizontal individualistic cultures.

A final limitation concerns the research design used in Study 2. A close relationship was combined with a relatively weak legitimacy claim or with less negative sanctions, whereas a distant-relationship party was presented with a relatively strong legitimacy claim or with more negative sanctions. An advantage of this design was to sharpen the informational contrast between the two disputants so as to make the conflict dilemma more difficult and realistic. At the same time, however, this combination of information confused the distinct effect of each factor. For example, one may argue that a lay third party may have sided with Arca not because of the close relationship but because of less negative sanctions. In the future, a 2×2 factorial design might give a more detailed and precise answer to the query of how each of the three elements influences lay third parties’ side taking.

Implications for disputing. The findings uncover the need to broaden the study of conflict by considering the importance of noninstrumental criteria in conflict management, especially in cross-cultural conflict management. Traditional literature on disputing has been too concerned with rational and instrumental criteria (for detailed information, see Bazerman, Curhan, Moore, & Valley, 2000). However, more and more evidence shows that the rational or instrumental criteria are only a subset of what drives disputing behavior (cf. Tyler et al., 1998). Other noninstrumental criteria, such as the relationship criterion highlighted in the research reported here, might also affect individuals’ intention to intervene in a particular way, certainly in Chinese culture.

NOTES

1. We had two criteria for choosing those names. First, the names should reflect the different customs of giving a person a name in the Chinese and Dutch cultures. Second, the names should avoid gender discrimination. In China, it is common to call a person by one’s last name. Zhang and Li are commonly used family names and can be female or male. For the Dutch, using a person’s first name is common. Arca and Barc are two fictional first names without any gender connotation. For reasons of clarity and comparability, in the remainder of this article, *Arca* includes *Zhang* and *Barc* includes *Li*.

2. The results on the basis of the raw scores in Table 2 revealed that for the manipulation checks, all values in the relationship-versus-legitimacy (R&L) situation and three of the four pairs of values in the relationship-versus-sanctions (R&S) situation, the Chinese reported higher means than the Dutch. One may suspect that the extreme response and acquiescence response styles may be responsible for this finding. To discount potential response bias, we also standardized the raw scores within each respondent before conducting *t* tests. The results after the within-subjects standardization confirmed the conclusions from the raw scores. Thus, we are confident that the participants' response styles did not significantly influence the results and that the information manipulations in both R&L and R&S realized their intended effect in the two groups.

3. A paired *t* test showed that both the Chinese and the Dutch lay third parties were reluctant to take sides with either party ($t_{\text{Chinese}} = .73$, $t_{\text{Dutch}} = 1.13$, *ns*) in the R&S conflict dilemma.

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Huadong Yang received his PhD in organization psychology from the University of Groningen, Netherlands. He is currently an assistant professor at the University of Twente, Netherlands. His research interests include conflict management and cross-cultural organizational psychology.

Evert van de Vliert is professor emeritus of social and organizational psychology at the University of Groningen, in The Netherlands, and holds a research professor position at the work and organizational psychology group at the University of Bergen in Norway. In 2005, he received a "lifetime achievement" award from the International Association for Conflict Management. The focus of his recent research is on cross-national organization psychology, with an emphasis on the impact of atmospheric thermoclimate on organizational culture (e.g., Climate and cash rock the cradle of culture, forthcoming).

Kan Shi is a professor of human resource management at the Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing. His research interests include leadership, managerial competence, job satisfaction and commitment, and cross-cultural human resource management.