



EAST ASIAN COMMUNICATION

INDIRECT COMMUNICATION: AN INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLE

A Hong Kong Chinese woman working in Korea reported to a Japanese American woman (born and raised in Japan who worked and resided in the U.S.). One evening the Hong Kong woman called at a time when the Japanese American woman was busy with family. The timing of the call was unusual. The Japanese woman knew to try to figure out what was going on. She began asking open ended questions, knowing that one difference in the Korean office was a new Korean male manager who the woman reported to. She asked, "How is everything in the office there? How are you doing? Is everything OK?" The woman replied, "Yes", a couple of times even after I asked her the same question in different ways. Oddly, the Hong Kong woman wanted to discuss various other topics and prolonged the call as if she did not want to end the conversation. This was unusual as the Hong Kong woman knew how impolite it was to keep her boss busy late at night. The Japanese American woman asked, "Is the new manager saying or doing anything to make you feel uncomfortable." The answer was, "Not sure". She then asked, "How about the other women?" "Are they uncomfortable?" The answer was, "Yes!" The Japanese American woman flew to the office, discovered what was going on, and removed the new manager before his three month trial period ended.

A white woman (or mainstream U.S. Anglos generally) would not only have missed picking up on the request that was implicit within the call but also the other cultural piece: that, contrary to U.S. mainstream telephone protocols and discourse style that require the caller to be direct and explicit and, given the late hour, quick, in giving the reason why they are calling, the East Asian protocol requires that the person called -in this case the Japanese woman-- try to figure out what was behind the call. The Japanese woman, knowing the East Asian protocol, did just that also knowing that something important was going on for the call even to have been made.