

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE CONCEPT “PRIVACY” IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE LINGUOCULTURE

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Abstract: The current article is devoted to the study of the linguophilosophical concept “Privacy” in English and Chinese linguocultures, which plays a vital role in the formation of the meaning of life for any individual and the major axiological functions of personality.

The aim of the study is to give a complete characteristic of the philosophical concept “Privacy” in English linguocultures.

The novelty of this work is determined by representing the construction of the model of as a linguocultural concept, as well as defining its socio-psychological, cultural, philosophical and linguistic characteristics. This study is also important in identifying the ways of expressing “Privacy” in the lexical-phraseological system of language and communicative behavior.

The material for the study is presented by linguistic units, found in dictionaries, reference books and popular literature.

Keywords: privacy, concept, linguophilosophy, intimacy, freedom, property, personality.

In today’s modern society the linguophilosophical term “Privacy” is intermittently used in various fields of scientific investigations such as linguistic, political, philosophical, legal as well as culturological studies, yet scientists have not found any single definition or a thorough analysis of the term that will contain the whole semantic elements of the term.

The origin of the term “privacy” could be traced in ancient well-known philosophical discussions, most notably in Aristotle’s works with the distinction of public sphere of political activity and the private sphere deeply associated with one’s domestic and family life (*Privacy*, 2018).

Starting from the second half of the twentieth

century, philosophical debates concerning definitions of linguophilosophical concept “privacy” became prominent and have been deeply affected by the emergence of privacy protection (private rights protection) in Western and American laws.

American scientist Alan F. Westin defines privacy as “The claim of individuals, groups or institutions to determine for themselves when, how and to what extent information about them is communicated to others”. Meanwhile Ch. Fried defines privacy as “The control we have over information about ourselves”. Veletzky suggests that privacy should be defined as “The state of a person who, in pursuit of the good, jus-

tifiably can choose the nature and duration of contact with others” (Schafer, 2011, p. 5).

As Arthur Schafer (2011) mentions “Despite innumerable attempts by contemporary philosophers and jurists to formulate a definition, the concept has remained elusive” (p. 5).

Schoeman (1992) points out that the question of whether or not privacy is culturally relative can be interpreted in two ways (p. 113). One question is whether privacy is deemed valuable to all peoples or whether its value is relative to cultural differences. A second question is whether or not there are any aspects of life that are inherently private and not just conventionally so. Most writers have come to agree that while almost all cultures appear to value privacy, cultures differ in their ways of seeking and obtaining privacy, and probably do differ in the level they value privacy (Westin, 1967, p. 76).

In modern society human interaction is an integral part of social activity. People interact with each other, stay alone, feel the protection and assistance of surrounding people. Meanwhile, human beings try to preserve their relatively comparative privacy and independence from others and the society as a whole.

The interwoven interrelation of an individual and society has been defined by historical facts in different aspects of science. Collective interests mainly prevail in primitive societies; people usually work together, they live in big families (the form of extended family is highly appreciated), meals are special forms of family union, sharing a bedroom with other members of the family is considered a normal phenomenon (the results of anthropological investigation of primitive communities have been thoroughly illustrat-

ed in scientific literature).

Throughout the history under diverse circumstances primitive societies transformed into another community where physical privacy turned into a major way of human interaction.

In modern society the physical aspect of privacy has become indispensable for life. For example, modern Western perception of physical privacy has become a fundamental aspect of child upbringing. Children in modern Western societies have their private rooms (private space). From early childhood they learn to be independent both emotionally and economically from their parents. They start earning money earlier, and many of them live separately after leaving school. Through this way the philosophical concept of privacy becomes a necessary part of upbringing in Western cultures.

In linguocultural studies scientist often utilize models for in-depth perception of different transnational concepts. These cultural models are often investigated from the viewpoint of cultural dimensions. The basic conception of cultural dimension is actually based on the idea that different nations have the same values systems on different levels (Rokeach, 1973, p. 3). Those cultural dimensions are mainly evaluated on a scale according to their importance. Therefore, it is quite possible to discuss various cultures in the same dimension aspect and study the degree of reflection of this or that value there. One of such dimensions is considered to be individualism and collectivism.

In the early 2000’s some culturologists conducted a research about the role of privacy in individualistic and collectivistic linguocultures.

Table 1. (Hofstede et al., 2011)

Individualism	Collectivism
Everyone is supposed to take care of him or herself and his or her immediate family only “I”-consciousness	People are born in extended families or clans which protect them in exchange for loyalty
Right of Privacy	“We”-consciousness
Speaking one’s mind is healthy	Stress on belonging
Others classified as individuals	Harmony should always be maintained
Personal opinion expected: one person one vote	Others are classified as in-group or out group
Transgression of norms leads to guilt feelings	Opinions and votes predetermined by in group
Languages in which the word “I” is indispensable	Transgression of norms leads to shame feelings
Purpose of education is learning how to learn	Language in which “I” is avoided
Take prevails over relationship	Purpose of education is to learn how to do
	Relationship prevails over task

As the column illustrates scientist Hofstede (2011) the concept privacy dominates in individualistic culture societies, while in collectivistic culture societies the concept is more suppressed (Hofstede, 2011, p. 9).

Individualism tends to prevail in developed and Western countries, while collectivism prevails in less developed and Eastern countries; Japan takes a middle position on this dimension (Hofstede, 2011, p. 9).

For many years, the Chinese-majority society like PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore were classified by Hofstede as “low individualism” or “collectivism” had a relatively high degree of collectivism (Wong, 2001, p. 2).

However, the geographical map of the perception of the linguophilosophical concept “privacy” has drastically changed a lot. Nowadays people from Asian cultures highly appreciate the concept “Privacy”. Lots of people in China have started to attach much importance to privacy. Chinese people regard privacy as freedom. In modern China people want to possess their own apartments and live apart from their families.

After examining there is the apparent evolution in work values among young Chinese managers in Shanghai over a 2½ - year period, Ralston et al. (1995) suggested a growing spirit of “Chinese -style” individualism and more Western ways of thinking are being adopted by these young Chinese managers in China.

“Privacy” belongs to the group of concepts, that according to Yu. S. Stepanov “wander over words” (Karasik, 2001, p. 112). In addition, it should be mentioned that this kind of linguophilosophical concepts are by and large expressed not explicitly, but implicitly, with the help of associations. The very peculiarity of this concept is that it does not have an objective perception. Everybody perceives privacy in their own way.

During the end of the last century there have been many attempts by scholars of different disciplines to define the linguocultural concept “Privacy”. For instance Lillian Be Vier writes that privacy is a chameleon-like word, used denotatively to designate a wide range of wildly disparate interests - from confidentiality of personal information to reductive autonomy -

and connotatively to generate goodwill on behalf of whatever interest is being asserted in its name (Solove, 2006, p. 478).

Perhaps the most striking feature about the right to privacy is that actually no one seems to have any clear and distinct idea what it is. It seems like the only possible way to totally understand this “strange” concept is to look up in the dictionaries, find out the etymological base and bonds, as well as see what meanings and connotations are observed in the large semantic field of “Privacy”.

The English words “private” and “privacy” originated from the Latin “privatus”, meaning “withdrawn from public life, deprived of office, peculiar to oneself” and the generally negative sense is continued into the early understanding of the English word “private” (whose first recorded appearance goes back to 1450).¹ By the end of the 19th century the linguophilosophical concept “privacy” had deeply related to legal and political rights, associated with modernization of the civilization, and attributed relatively or very high value. Synonyms (semantically close words) for “private” as a descriptor in English in different contexts include “individual”, “personal”, “familiar”, “family”, “domestic”, “secret”, “confidential”, “secure”, “inner”, “interior” and “intimate”. According to Magnusson (1999) an Elizabethan equivalent term for privacy “avant la letter” is “contemplation” (p. 75). Many European languages do not have exact equivalents of the terms “private” and “privacy”. For example, in Dutch, the words “eigen” (cognate with “own”) and “openbaar” (cognate with “open”) are used with reference to property or access where English would use “private” and “public”. Swedish has a close equivalent for “private” (“privat”), but not for privacy. The Finnish words related to privacy, such as “yksityisasia” (private or intimate affairs) and “yksityinen” (private as opposed to public) are derived from the word “yksi” meaning “one” or “single”.

The Chinese word privacy “yinsi-隐私” implies something secret which should be hidden and kept secretly from others. It is made by the combination of two characters: “yin” (hide) and “si” (secret).

¹ See www.etymologicaldictionary.com.

It is worth mentioning that differences in denotational or connotational meanings do not disprove the rationalization that concepts of privacy exist in relatively equivalent ways among different linguo-culturological groups. In the late 20th century as rights to privacy have come under menace through technological, legal, economic and political changes, privacy has acquired some new semantic elements, functions and value patterns. Nowadays modern English dictionaries identify mainly the following meanings of the concept “privacy”. E.g. 1) *Referring to a particular person*, 2) *Being a part of somebody’s property*, 3) *Separate, isolated*, 4) *Unofficial, non-state*, 5) *Belonging to certain group*, 6) *Secret*.

Therefore, before we proceed with an analysis of philosophical-semantic fields of “Privacy” we may compose preliminary list of conceptions associated with privacy. These are mainly *individuality and interaction between people, freedom, intimacy, loneliness, secretness, property*, etc.

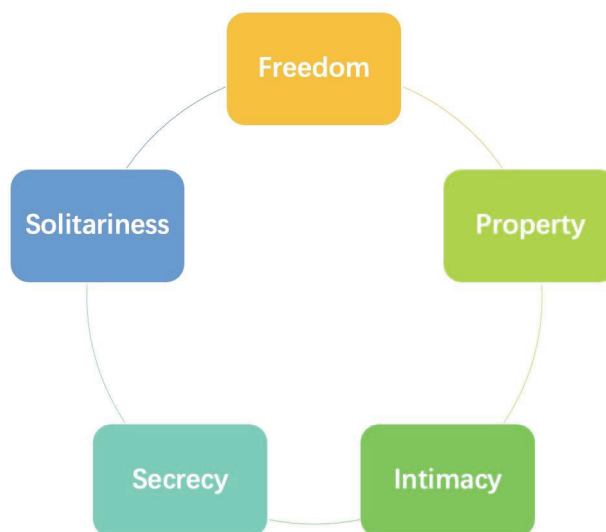
In the works of many scientist the linguophilosophical concept “privacy” often finds its realization through the following expressions, e.g. *“to violate somebody’s privacy”, “an invasion of one’s privacy”*. It is often used in such typical contexts as *“unacceptable invasion of people’s privacy”, “better privacy protections online”, “the release of photographs violates a privacy provision in the state constitution”, “the*

government’s too much on our privacy” and so on.² It is easy to come to the conclusion from the following examples, that privacy is often realized when it is violated. Thus, the importance of the study of privacy through its violation is often confirmed by examples where violation (as well as negation) is mentioned. E.g. *“privacy is when no one else reads your diary”, “it is freedom from unauthorized intrusion”*.

Therefore, the linguistic circle of semantic patterns of privacy can be represented as a frame formed at the expense of conceptions deeply associated with privacy. Here privacy-related notions can be mentioned (*freedom, secrecy, intimacy, loneliness, ownership*), as well as those notions that include privacy as their important characteristics, e.g. *individual and interpersonal relations*. Besides, as we have mentioned above, privacy is connected with violations due to which a number of semantic fields are shaped within the frame. They are: 1) actions assuming violation of privacy, 2) personal characteristics that violates others’ privacy, 3) personal characteristics that excessively react to violation of privacy.

Each of the above mentioned important conceptions form their semantic field which receives certain lexical completion. Here are the main conceptions that complete the lexical frame of the concept “Privacy”.

² See *Washington Post*. (The above-mentioned words and expressions related to the concept “Privacy” are taken from different articles published by Washington Post).



The Semantic Field “Freedom”

For human beings deprivation of freedom frequently entails a violation of privacy. So, the nucleus of freedom is interconnected to privacy. It is important to emphasize that the semantic field of freedom as the right and privilege is constantly illuminated as the national-specific understanding in many cultures. It is not an abstract entity or absolute philosophical category but a privilege which should be protected by the state while preserving individual autonomy. By and large, the concept “freedom” plays a crucial role in the national consciousness of the representatives of Western, Armenian and Chinese cultures which is actually conditioned by the spiritual-historical heritage. Western typical cultural symbols of freedom are *Wings*, *Marianne* (especially in France), *Bird in Flight*, *Broken Chains*, *Bonnet Rouge*, *Vindicta*, *Statue of Liberty* and so forth. For Americans typical cultural symbols are *the Declaration of Independence*, *Independence Day*, *Independence Hall*, *Liberty Bell*, *Statue of Liberty*, etc. These examples show actually prove the essential place that freedom has in the individualistic culture of US. In the world lots of people perceive America as the cradle of democracy and equality. For Armenians the major symbol for freedom is *Broken Chains*. For many Armenians broken chains stand for freedom and independence. For Chinese mentality dragon stands as a symbol of freedom because in Chinese mentality dragon

has the power to control cosmic forces.

Synonymic field of freedom includes; *liberty independence, self-determination, self-government, self-reliance, autonomy, license*. The sign of “freedom” is expressed explicitly or implicitly in these words;

Liberty - freedom from rules, control, interference, obligation, restriction, confinement.

Independence - the state of being independent (independent - free, showing a desire for *freedom*).

Self-determination - freedom to as one chooses, or to act or decide without consulting others.

Autonomy - independence or *freedom* of one’s will or actions.

License - permission to act, *freedom* of action.

Self-government - condition of being self-governed (self-governed - not influenced or controlled by others (so we can say freedom from external influence, control).

Self-reliance - reliance on one’s own efforts and abilities (in other words - *freedom* from external help). According to dictionary of synonyms self-reliance “expresses confidence in one’s own resources, independently of other’s aid” (Funk and Wagnalls Standard handbook of Synonyms, Antonyms and prepositions).

Limiting one’s freedom or depriving him of it presupposes violation of “privacy”. This violation can be represented via group of verbs with two aspects;

1. Physical limitation of freedom: *confine* (shut or keep in, prevent from leaving a place be-

cause of imprisonment, illness, discipline); *imprison* (confine in or as if in prison); *enclose* (hold in confine); *detain* (keep under restraint), *restrain* (deprive of liberty) and others.

2. Restraining one’s actions, behaviour i.e. control, e.g. *restrain* (to hold back from action, check or control), *bound* (to set limits or bounds to), *repress* (to hold in check), *check* (to restrain or diminish the action or force of; control).

The semantic field of privacy of the given verbs can be sorted out as associative. It actually belongs to implicational meaning and is explained in contexts or transitional meanings.

The Semantic Field “Intimacy”

An indisputable connection between privacy and intimacy has been marked. The semantic field of intimacy contains at least three group of words, that possess associative signs of intimacy.

1. Close friend relationship, which as a rule presupposes high degree of privacy and good will to its violation;
 - a) words having signs of intimacy in denotational meaning: *intimacy, closeness, familiarity, friendly relationships, tenderness, affection, fondness, dearness, warmth, endearment, friendship* etc. (James, 2009, p. 47).

Intimate relationships, as a rule, are characterized by intimate distance of socializing and are basically associated with freedom:

Now however she was thinking about her son... The marvellous intimacy could not last. He had withdrawn first from Blaise, now from her. Blaise said it was natural and proper. He had become un-touchable (Murdoch, 1984, p. 114).

- b) Words where the sign of intimacy is associative, e.g. *friendliness, fraternity, brotherhood, sisterhood, fellowship, companionship*.
2. The associative list of words describing sexual behaviour.
3. Associative list of words outlining intimacy (privacy), which partially intersects with the field of secrecy: *secrecy, privacy, retreat, seclusion, retirement*, that are characterized

by the signs of seclusion (*secluded, isolated place*), security (*a place of refuge*), privacy (*private or secluded place*).

She sought the privacy of her own apartment after her interview with her sister. She had for the moment time to think (James, 2009, p. 264).

The Semantic Field “Secrecy”

The linguophilosophical concept “Privacy” is closely connected with the human right to process private information: e.g. *to hide some private information*. In one of its meanings the noun secrecy includes the meaning of privacy in denotational meaning, e.g. *secrecy - the habit or practice of keeping secrets or maintaining privacy or concealment*. At the same time secrecy can be represented as a state of privacy and as a means of achieving it.

Em, kid, you won't ever, will you, tell Harriet about, you know, our special word? That's private, such things have to be. An outsider wouldn't understand. Harriet would just be upset. That's our secret, isn't it?

(Murdoch, 1984, p. 98).

Synonyms of secrecy make up the field of secrecy: *confidentiality, covertness, stealth, silence, mystery, underhandedness, concealment*, etc. Privacy is predominantly expressed in the semantic interpretations of nouns and the majority of these word-expressions possess negative connotations.

Confidentialty (confidential) - spoken, written, or acted on in a strict confidence, secret, private way.

Clandestine - held or done in secrecy or concealment, especially for the purposes of subversion or deception.

The government carries on clandestine activities like spying.

Stealth - secrecy, especially with a plan to harm.

The robber approached the house with stealth.

Surreptitiousness (surreptitious) - done secretly to avoid discovery:

He was watching her surreptitiously while she wasn't looking.

Covert - secret, concealed disguised:

Spies had a covert plan to steal secrets.

Furtive - hidden from public view, secret and possibly deceitful:

We were suspicious of his furtive manners.

The sign of “Privacy” can be optionally expressed in the verbs within the semantic field of “to hide”: *hide, conceal, obscure, cover, veil, screen, cloak, curtain, shroud, shadow, confuse, misrepresent*, etc. Actually, the denotative meaning of the following verbs doesn’t have signs of “Privacy”, but these verbs can easily obtain that quality in certain contexts. In the same way, they can associatively express sign of privacy in the meaning “to hide”.

The antonyms of the word “to hide” have the common meaning of “opening up, revealing secrets”, which presupposes both voluntary and involuntary intrusion into other people’s personal spaces: *confide, reveal, disclose, impart, divulge, confess, entrust, unbosom*.

The Semantic Field “Solitariness”

The concept “Privacy” presupposes a sort of balanced distinction between individual and public. In this aspect two types of situations are basically analyzed: situations where necessary loneliness, voluntary seclusion is needed and situations of obligatory isolation of individual, his/her intentional deprivation from society. Thus, the frame of solitariness will include two groups of words:

1. Situations characterized by undue degree of privacy (against the wish of a person): verbs *ostracize, exclude, shut, bar, boycott, exile, reject, eject, evict, shun, spurn, avoid, ignore, snub, neglect, abandon, isolate, forsake, estrange, banish, expatriate, alienate, isolate, segregate, maroon* (in a figurative meaning).

Verbs belonging to this group mainly obtain negative connotation as the actions themselves are considered negative.

2. Situations characterized by lack of privacy.

This aspect can more or less be characterized with the help of concept “*crowd*”. In Modern English this concept to a great degree is represented with the group of synonyms: *throng, press, crush, swarm, jam, mob, rout*.

The word “*crowd*” in English evokes negative associations. The following concept is first of all interesting as crowd always brings to viola-

tion of physical privacy. It obviously erases all the boundaries of personal space and people experience the feeling of discomfort.

She turned towards her seat. A large elderly lady shifted a little to make room. Feeling fet and hot in the smart featureless coat and skirt which she hadn’t worn since the spring, Dora squeezed herself in. She hated the sensation of another human being wedged against her side. Her skirt was very tight. Her high-heeled shoes were tight too. She could feel her own perspiration and was beginning to smell that of others. It was a devilish hot day...

(Murdoch, 2001, p. 103).

The Semantic Field “Personality”

In so far as we are aware the linguophilosophical concept “privacy” on the whole refers to personal space of human beings and their perception as individuals. For example, in one of its meanings adjective *private*” is defined as “*pertaining to or affecting a particular person or a small group of persons*”. At the same time adjective “*personal*” has the meaning “*of pertaining to, or concerning a particular person, individual; private*”. Thus the concept of “Privacy” is associated with concepts “Person”, “Self”, “Personality”. It is worth mentioning, that concept “Self” occupies a crucial role in Western and American system of values. In Modern English one can come across to lots of word-units starting with “self” (self-praise, self-love, self-pride, self-knowledge, self-made, self-confidence and so on).

Concept “Self” in its turn lies at the basis of “individualism”. It goes on without saying that “Individualism” is basically viewed as a positive value in Western culture: For Asian culture individualism is mainly viewed a wanted value which is hard to achieve.

It is important to note, that “self” is opposed to concept “Others”. For instance, self/others opposition is the contrast of private/public opposition. This is why the semantic field of “personality” can be presented with the following groups of words:

1. *Self, ego, person, personality, individual, individualist, individuality, personal, private,*

selfish, egoistic

2. *People, group, society, company, community, social, communal, collective, public.*

The first group distinguishes the opposition man/other men. In the first group, especially in the meanings of nouns personality and individuality the semantic trace of uniqueness is observed; personality - distinction or excellence of personal and social traits, individuality - a *total character peculiar to an individual*. In the second group the words are united under the general meaning “people”.

The Semantic Field “Property”

In one of its meanings the adjective “private” appears as “belonging to some particular person or persons”, which bind the concept “privacy” with the concept “property”. Oftentimes people evaluate some objects as their own continuation and these objects obtain private symbolic meaning (*property, private letter, personal belongings, etc.*) Later the sense of privacy expands itself over the private territory of people. Objects and their referents can acquire private status in a particular context: *personal letter, my house, her own room, his private study, etc.* In the given contexts the shades of meaning of privacy are gained via possessive pronouns and adjectives *private, personal, own, individual*. It is important to mention that the symbolic meaning of privacy gained in the context is manifested implicitly and not explicitly.

She remembered that once, in a borrowed car, after kissing Franny for a half hour or so, he had kissed her coat lapel, as though it were a perfectly desirable, organic extension of the person herself... (Salinger, 2001, p. 76).

In the given context, the object obtains symbolic meaning; the speaker expands its meaning over its owner showing his attitude towards the owner. However, in other cases, the words have “seeds” of privacy in their denotational meaning. E.g.

Diary - a personal record written about one’s daily activities and feelings or with accounts of important events.

Dossier - a file containing detailed records on a particular person or subject.

There is incredibly large amount of verbs describing the violation of personal space: *intrude,*

interlope, interpose, accost, encroach, infringe, squat, occupy, trespass, poach, invade, impinge, break in, butt in, overstep, transgress. We can find the following traces of meaning these verbs:

- Contravention of privacy (*trespass - encroach on a person’s privacy, time, etc: invade - intrude upon: to invade someone’s privacy*).
- Violation of other’s personal space (*trespass - commit a trespass; e.g. That is a wrongful entry upon the lands of another; encroach - trespass upon the property, domain, or rights of another; squat - occupy property or settle land as a squatter*).
- Illegality of actions (*intrude - come in without permission or welcome; squat (squatter) - a person who occupies property without permission, lease or payment of rent; overstep, transgress - go beyond boundaries or limits*).
- Manners for fulfilling actions (*encroach - trespass upon the property, especially gradually or stealthily; occupy - take possession or control of a place, as by military invasion; break-in - enter a house or building by force*).
- Infringing the rights of other people (*infringe - encroach upon in a way that violates law or the rights of another; impinge - encroach, infringe: e. g. to impinge on another’s rights*).

It is worth mentioning that in some verbs (trespass, squat) the action is described as illegal and unlawful (“No trespassing”, “Private property”, “Keep out”, “Violations will be prosecuted”).

I regard your blundering kindness and officious desire to “understand” me simply as a rude trespass upon the fastidious integrity of my being (Murdoch, 1984, p. 89).

“It’s no business of his anyway”, said Monty. “I have put up with this fantastic invasion of my privacy. Must I have my private concerns discussed as well?”

Conclusion

The philosophy of “Privacy” as a social, philosophical, linguistic and cultural phenomenon finds numerous manifestations in language, especially in the semantics of lexical and phraseological units as an attribute. The specificity of this attribute is the uniqueness of the combining models. The attribute of privacy accords with other units of similar meaning, namely with free-

dom, loneliness, property, privacy, intimacy, privacy violation, territory, status, politeness, regulatory.

The conceptualization of privacy, which mostly refers to abstract concepts, to a large extent takes place metaphorically, i.e. it finds figurative expression in the language, most evidently observed in the phraseological system of English. In comparison to English, the Chinese phraseological system is not rich of the concept "Privacy". Analyses of phraseological units show that combinations of "Privacy" with such concepts as "Personal space", "Territory", "Physical space perception" (biological conditions the phenomenon of "privacy") are fundamental for understanding the essence and nature of "Privacy".

Being a chameleon-like concept, "Privacy" has a very subjective perception and people may carry different imagination about it. However, there is still something in common in perceiving "Privacy". In this respect the factors of culture and mentality are of paramount importance. People who share the same culture and mentality are more likely to have the same understanding about it. Particularly the bearers of Western and American culture share the common "belief" that privacy is something that should not be violated. Whenever there is intrusion into other's privacy, it is always estimated negatively. The representatives of individualistic culture highly value the collective activities, when they are connected with family and home. In this case collectiveness is not considered as intrusion or violation of privacy.

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