

Cross-cultural Comparison of Family Education in China and the West: A Study Centered on Ang Lee's Film Trilogy

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Abstract: Each ethnic group has its own cultural identity and cultural values, and education of different countries will have different characteristics accordingly. The theoretical construction of this essential is a cross-cultural and cross-border combination of pedagogy, such as dimensions of G-Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, John Bailey's acculturation, the classical theory of pedagogy and multicultural education theory, main research method is comparative analysis and case analysis. Through Ang Lee's "the family trilogy" storyline, contrast analysis: first, the differences between the Chinese and western family education is mainly manifested in the purpose of family education, content, way three aspects. Secondly, in the comparative study, we get a deeper understanding of education. In general, the western developed countries of advanced ideas and methods of family education, requires that we in the new era of China makes the family education to absorb the essence of multicultural education, namely can reveal the essence of traditional family education, we can stand in the world. It is hoped that this study will be conducive to solving some practical problems for the development of China's future education concept, and also provide a theoretical reference for Chinese parents who choose to immigrate to education blindly.

Keywords: family education; multi-culture; aims of family education; contents of family education; methods of family education

1. Introduction

Family education is closely related to family construction and the direction of social development. As a student majoring in Home Economics, the author conducted a feasibility study on integrating home economics education into primary school classrooms during the summer social practice in the first year. In the second semester of the sophomore year and the second semester of the junior year, surveys and research were conducted on personalized plans for home economics education classes in urban primary schools. Two undergraduate academic papers were published based on the findings. In the second semester of the junior year, the author participated in the "Challenge Cup - Extracurricular Academic Science and Technology Works Competition" in the philosophy and social sciences category. They carried out personalized exploration of promoting home economics experiential education in rural primary school classrooms under the core literacy education plan. The research was based on the investigation and analysis of the attitudes of students' families in three primary schools in Shuangpai County, Yongzhou, Hunan. The study found the importance of family education to individuals and society, and that family education has a significant impact on school education and social education. It also has distinct timeliness, as the traditional models of family education in the older generation's thinking seem no longer applicable to the present. It is the contradiction between the current state of education and insufficient development in terms of economy, politics, culture, and other factors that has led to the popularity of quality education, which is the cornerstone of educational reform. More parents are investing more effort in their children's education. Due to differences in historical traditions, local customs, and cultural heritage, there are significant differences between Eastern and Western family education. With a deep sense of responsibility, the author chooses to explore the purpose, content, and methods of family education through mainstream media such as film, hoping to optimize the significance of family education in China's new era.

2. Core Concepts and Theoretical Constructs

2.1. Definition of Core Concepts

2.1.1. Family Education

The family is the fundamental and most important place for an individual's activities, serving as the foundation for family construction and all forms of education. As the starting point and cornerstone of education, each individual within the family is not only the target of family education but also an active participant in it. From a horizontal perspective of cultural diversity, the methods of family education have become rich and varied, each with its own unique strengths. From a vertical perspective of historical progress, the content of family education undergoes changes due to various factors of the times. Scholar Zhai Bo defines family education as follows: "Good family education and harmonious family relationships are the collective results of the interaction between each individual and the subject of family education. They are not only the important foundation for shaping an individual's correct worldview, values, and outlook on life but also hold significant importance for societal stability and development." Regarding the content and methods of family education, I believe that its content is a science, while its methods are an art. The scientific nature of the content lies in its adherence to objective laws, while the artistic nature of the methods manifests in the need for flexibility and adaptability in the process of parenting, considering the ever-changing conditions and diverse individuals being educated. Therefore, implementing education requires seizing opportunities and exploring innovations. In terms of the development of family education towards a better direction, scholar Chen Ming suggests that establishing the correct concept of family education, grasping scientific methods of family education, and creating a positive family environment and atmosphere are the prerequisites for successful family education[1].

2.1.2. Impact of Cross-cultural Perspectives on Family Education

"Colors blend harmoniously, enhancing each other; Eight sounds play together, creating harmony and balance." The so-called cross-cultural perspective is an inclusive attitude that seeks comprehensive understanding and knowledge of different cultures from various ethnic groups, rather than being blind and ignorant. This article respects all cultural phenomena, customs, and habits. In the context of the new era, conflicts are inevitable, and the cross-cultural perspective is meant to responsibly embrace and incorporate all factors that contribute to personal development in the field of family education.

Cross-cultural understanding can connect the environment and concepts of family education to achieve diversity in educational goals, content, and methods, keeping pace with the trends of the times. In this article, the primary goal is to achieve "using foreign resources for China's needs" in the new era. Cross-cultural perspectives are an important branch of globalization, and their influence on politics and economics in the new era manifests as win-win cooperation. It is believed that there will be fascinating differences at the educational and cultural levels as well. Currently, many Chinese families choose to send their children abroad for study or immigration. It is hoped that the cross-cultural perspective discussed in this article can provide Chinese parents with ideas and solutions, offering inspiration for family education in our country's new era[2].

2.2. Interculturalism and the Theoretical Construction of Family Education

2.2.1. Cultural Adaptation Theory

John Berry's theory of cultural adaptation is an important branch of cross-cultural studies. Its main research areas include cross-cultural contact and psychological adaptation, cross-cultural family beliefs, and culture and cognition. Whether we can achieve cultural adaptation depends on how we change ourselves and integrate with different cultures. Globalization has reached a new stage, where family education is relevant to each individual and influences the development of the entire nation. Cultural adaptation, in essence, is about finding a balance between our traditional culture and identity while also integrating with other ethnic cultures. It is not about resisting, avoiding, or attempting to dominate others.

2.2.2. Family Education Theory

Classic theories of family education are systematic academic theories that provide clear educational goals, condensed educational content, and academic references for specific educational methods as a whole. The theories discussed in this article include the "Rosenthal Effect" that recognizes and expects

strengths, the "Broken Window Theory" that states excessive protection fosters disorder, the "Clock Law" that advocates for the scientific and organic unity of educational principles, and the "Overload Effect" that points out the negative consequences of criticism, nagging, and lack of communication. These theories are reflected in the details of the film's plot, making it easier for us to understand them in theory. The purpose of quoting these theories is to support the argument from a positive or negative perspective, aiming to effectively prevent the emergence of problems in providing models suitable for the development of family education in modern China[3].

3. Comparative Analysis of Family Education in China and the West

3.1. A Comparison of the Purposes of Home Education from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

3.1.1. Points of convergence - developing good habits

Famous Western philosopher and educator Plato was the first to propose the idea of "pre-school society" education. He emphasized the careful selection of fairy tale materials and highlighted the unique educational significance of storytelling and singing songs. Plato also pointed out that playing games with young children is an important methodology for pre-school education. Through repeated play, parents reinforce desired behaviors, help children develop good thinking habits, learning habits, social etiquette, and more. It is generally believed that Plato was the first to propose a systematic educational theory in the history of Western education. He focused on the harmonious development of virtues, intellect, and the body, as well as early education, emphasizing that cultivating good habits is the main purpose and direction of family education.

China's "Yan Family Instructions" is a well-structured and extensive work that discusses important guidelines such as self-cultivation, family management, and pursuing knowledge. One significant point is that family education should start early to minimize the possibility of deviating from the right path in a child's development. The author of "Yan Family Instructions" is the ancient Chinese scholar and educator Yan Zhitui [Yan Zhitui. "Yan Family Instructions," Vol. 3 - Diligent Learning. Shanghai: Zhonghua Book Company, 2016]. Yan believed that parents should start educating their children as early as possible, even from the prenatal stage. Why should family education be conducted early? Yan Zhitui believed that "when people are young, their minds are focused. Once they grow up, their thoughts become scattered. Therefore, early education must be prioritized to seize the opportunity and not miss it."

In the film "The Wedding Banquet", the conflicts between the elderly father-in-law, who enjoys the happiness of family life in America, and his American daughter-in-law unfold gradually through Lee Ang's directorial approach. The conflicts are rooted in cultural differences, but both parties value the education of their child. For example, during family meals, both the grandfather and the mother establish "rules" for the children, such as not speaking while eating. From another perspective, the grandfather teaches his mixed-race grandson Chinese calligraphy and how to write with a brush, while the mother tells her child Native American fairy tales as bedtime stories. During the early years, children are naturally curious and parents understand their innate innocence. They take advantage of this highly formative period to provide education in various areas such as cultivating interests, logical thinking, and general life knowledge (today, many parents consciously teach their children abacus mental arithmetic, Peking Opera face-changing, skiing, big data memory, etc., based on their pure curiosity). This aligns with modern developmental theories in psychology[4].

3.1.2. Points of difference - family-based vs. individual-based

Family-centeredness represents collectivism, while individual-centeredness represents individualism. Chinese parents tend to prioritize family-centeredness and place importance on family values. They often disregard the wishes of their children, emphasizing that children should listen to their elders. Parents often prioritize their own goals over their children's intentions and don't focus on cultivating their children's independent thinking abilities and levels. In the film "Eat Drink Man Woman," the father's mastery of food reaches a state of transcendence. In his deep-rooted mindset, food is not just food. A sumptuous dinner symbolizes a sense of family ritual and a moment for a father to take charge in front of his three daughters. The art of food is infused with a person's vitality and spirit, as well as the purpose of family education. Many parents hold the viewpoint that the interests of family members and the family itself are inseparable from the achievements of their children. The father in the film also takes the time spent dining with his daughters to understand their plans and forcefully puts forward his own ideas.

Western parents tend to prioritize individual-centeredness and focus on personal development. When setting goals for their children, parents take into account the child's wishes. In the journey of a child's growth, parents play more of a role as collaborators and supporters, rather than decision-makers and leaders. This aligns well with the "Rosenthal effect" in classical education, where implicit and explicit expectations are conveyed to children through attitudes, expressions, and praise, resulting in positive feedback. In the film "The Wedding Banquet," the older father is a person who cares about his reputation. His level of attention towards his son's wedding is evident. Parents have become the sole decision-makers in their child's marriage, and the son can only passively accept it. Western family thinking is more open-minded. In the ending of "The Wedding Banquet," the father allows his son's free choice in marriage, raising his hands in a gesture reminiscent of flying, as if calling for love and tolerance to resolve all difficulties. This scene signifies the father's tacit approval of his son's homosexuality. In the beginning of "The Wedding Banquet," the mixed-race son returns home and shows his mother the picture book he made for her. The content is imaginative, yet the son's creativity shines through. The mother doesn't show any strange reaction but constantly praises her son's creativity and encourages him to learn drawing. These examples are powerful evidence of respecting a child's individual development[5].

3.2. Comparison of the contents of family education from a cross-cultural perspective

3.2.1. Points of convergence - focus on moral education

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato, who had the greatest influence on the Western world [Plato. "The Republic," translated by Xie Zujun. Beijing: Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2013], emphasized various aspects of education in his work "The Republic" under the name of his teacher, Socrates. Young people should be respectful when they see their elders and should stand up and offer their seats as a sign of respect. They should also demonstrate filial piety to their parents and pay attention to their hairstyle, attire, and footwear. In short, they should pay attention to their posture and behavior, as well as other similar matters.

Confucius, the great ancient Chinese educator, philosopher, and statesman who was born more than 100 years before Plato [Confucius. "The Analects," translated and annotated by Yang Bojun. Shanghai: Zhonghua Book Company, 2006] had already expressed similar educational ideas in the collection of his disciples' sayings called "The Analects." Confucius said: "The student who is respectful at home and reverential outside, who studies carefully and earnestly, who looks after the welfare of all, and is kind-hearted." Confucius believed that the most basic virtue for children was to be filial to their parents at home and respectful to their elders outside. At the same time, they should think before speaking, be honest, and care for and love those around them.

In the films "Eat Drink Man Woman" and "The Wedding Banquet," Chinese and Western family and dining etiquette are well presented. In China, the round table has a head seat, even when the three daughters in "Eat Drink Man Woman" return home after work, they assist their father in cooking and setting the table before everyone starts eating after the father has taken his seat. In the West, the rectangular table also has a head seat, and even in the presence of the cultural clash between the foreign daughter-in-law and the Chinese father-in-law in "The Wedding Banquet," the elderly are still invited to start eating first. Moral education runs through a person's development, and both the Chinese and Western cultures attach great importance to "virtue," including ethical, social, and professional aspects. This is a reflection of a nation's character, a cultural portrait, and these two can learn from each other.

3.2.2. Points of difference - education for how to be a human being vs. education for personality development

Chinese family education tends to focus on specific behavioral education, where children do as their parents say and follow their instructions. The most important aspect is that Chinese family education actively incorporates education on "how to be a person," reflecting a significant power distance between elders and juniors. For example, in terms of cultivating kindness, Chinese parents emphasize teaching children to love family members and others. This is mainly manifested in instilling filial piety in children and educating them to actively care for and help not only family members but also those in need outside the family. To some extent, this may involve connections and a certain utilitarian aspect. In the film "The Wedding Banquet," when Gao's father is preparing for his child's wedding, he coincidentally visits a restaurant opened by his former subordinate in the United States. As soon as the subordinate heard Gao's father's words, he immediately offered to take charge of the wedding banquet and send invitations to their comrades who have settled in the United States, emphasizing the need for a grand occasion. This illustrates that even when living in a foreign country, Chinese people's

bureaucratic nature can still manifest at specific moments[6].

Western family education tends to focus on individual development. For example, American parents emphasize nurturing their children's individuality, not only in terms of behavior and thinking but also by allowing children to engage in activities they enjoy. It also reflects the importance given to children's unique physical characteristics. This type of education demonstrates a smaller power distance. In the ending part of the film "Pushing Hands," the traditional Eastern-style extended family, represented by the Chinese father-in-law, is broken and deconstructed in the confrontation with the Western nuclear family, represented by the American daughter-in-law. After moving out of the family home, the father-in-law chooses to cut off contact with his son. The film presents a new family model at the end, where the core family unit is still centered around the children, and everything revolves around their wishes. Similarly, in "The Wedding Banquet," the foreign same-sex partner who is "in love" with the male protagonist does not face opposition from his mother but instead believes that her son's happiness is the most important thing.

4. Implications for Family Education in China in the New Era

4.1. Aspects of the aims of education - adultization, synthesis

Take the cultivation of children's practical skills as a starting point to achieve comprehensive development. The development of good practical skills is the main pathway for children to become "social individuals" and the ultimate goal. In the process of "hands-on" activities, children should learn to use their eyes, brains, and hearts. In the continuous river of a 5,000-year-old culture, we should extract its essence and eliminate the dross, distinguishing between true and false, and integrating Western family education to absorb and learn from it, in order to lay a solid foundation for cultivating more talents in our country's family education. Therefore, parents need to change traditional concepts of family education and abandon the following notions: "following parents' wishes as the standard" and treating children as property, lacking respect for their individuality. Parents should respect and trust their children, respect their personalities and abilities, and give them more space.

Value building is the core task of guiding children's comprehensive development. General Secretary pointed out that it is the responsibility of the family, schools, Young Pioneers organizations, and the whole society to cultivate socialist core values among children and youth. To build values in family education, it is necessary to liberate children from the shackles of exam-oriented education as soon as possible, allowing them to develop comprehensively. It is also important to respect the laws of family education and children's growth, providing them with appropriate, personalized, and diverse education, allowing them to grow up healthy and happy.

4.2. Aspects of educational content - comprehensive and developmental

Emphasizing the comprehensive development of children, transforming utilitarian knowledge education into holistic quality education, Western parents tend to prioritize the comprehensive development of their children, whereas Chinese parents, while expressing encouragement for holistic development, often fall short in practice. For a considerable period of time, the reformation of China's family education system needs to be implemented, with concrete and feasible plans formulated to achieve the comprehensive development of children, such as cultivating interests and social skills[7].

The realization of human liberation and comprehensive development is the pinnacle of historical value for humanity and the pinnacle of Marxist theory in terms of values, theory, and practical purpose. The essential requirement and highest realm of socialist society is the comprehensive development of individuals. As Marx pointed out, "The future new society is a social form based on the fundamental principle of the comprehensive and free development of every individual." Incorporating the essence of comprehensive and free development into the content of family education is a fundamental requirement for achieving the social development goals of individuals.

5. Conclusion

As a mode of existence, the family turns family education into an action with existential significance. By analyzing and comparing the purposes, content, and methods of family education, we can observe the differences between Eastern and Western education and understand the profound

influence of family education on learning skills, communication skills, and ways of understanding. Taking film as the main object of investigation, the comparison between representative American family education and Chinese family education helps to improve the healthy development of current family education in China to some extent.

Lastly, this article attempts to analyze the cultural differences in family education between China and the United States from a cultural perspective reflected in film and television. It aims to deduce the relationship between culture and family education, as well as the impact of ethnic culture on education. Traditional cultural differences give rise to different forms of family education, and different forms of family education reflect different social and cultural connotations. This enlightens us to pay attention to the construction of modern families, contribute to the cultivation of more outstanding talents for the nation and society, and strive to create an atmosphere of equal and democratic family education, enhance the quality of parents themselves, and foster children's confidence and creativity.

During the process of writing and researching this article, due to personal limitations in level and conditions, there are many shortcomings in the exploration and research of some issues, mainly including the following points: First, this study is based on the perspective of family education, but the application of professional theories related to parenting is not sufficiently comprehensive. Second, in terms of citing samples, there is no connection with elements in the films and only selected clips for discussion. Third, there was no questionnaire specifically designed for the topic, and only textual analysis was conducted, resulting in relatively shallow research content. Fourth, if conditions permit, it is hoped to study the combination of film works and family education-related topics. The above issues need further improvement in future studies.

After the completion of the paper, the author has further expanded thinking on related research ideas, such as the integration of family education theory with other theories (such as art theory, film theory), how to better integrate primary and secondary home economics education into family education (countermeasure research), comparative studies of family education and social education in China's new era, comparative studies of the development process and implications of family education in Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan from a film perspective, etc. At the same time, it is hoped that this paper can inspire more like-minded scholars to participate in research related to family education in film, allowing more people to truly experience the unique charm of film works and contribute their own efforts to the future of education in our country.

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