

# Exploration of the Cultural Differences and Fusion between China and America from the Movie *A Grandson from America* Based on Hofstede's Value Dimension

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**Abstract:** Culture is the accumulation of all nationalities in the long history, and each culture has its own characteristics. Because of the great differences between different cultures, misunderstandings often occur in the process of intercultural communication, which may cause unnecessary troubles. Therefore, it is self-evident that intercultural communication is important. From the perspective of cross-cultural communication, this paper will take the cultural differences in the film *A Grandson from America* as a starting point, and use Hofstede's Value Dimension Theory to carefully analyze the cultural differences and fusion between China and America reflected in the film, aiming to explore the countermeasures to the cultural conflict between China and America, and eventually to promote the cultural development and prosperity of Chinese and Western cultures in the current international environment.

**Keywords:** intercultural communication; Hofstede's Value Dimension; cultural differences; globalization

## 1. Introduction

The film *A Grandson from America*, directed by Qu Jiangtao, takes the inheritance and protection of shadow play as the theme. The protagonist of the film, Yang, is the inheritor of Shaanxi shadow play art. One day, his son, Yang Dongliang suddenly returned home, accompanied by an American girlfriend and her child Brooks. While the four were in an awkward atmosphere, Yang Dongliang and his girlfriend urgently received a notice that they needed to go to Hoh Xili to participate in the protection of Tibetan antelope, and they entrusted Brooks to Yang and left in a hurry. As a traditional Chinese old man, Yang has a sharp tongue but a tender heart, while Brooks is a typical American child with a bold personality and strong curiosity. Due to the great cultural differences and the language barrier, the two people often had conflicts with each other at the beginning. However, as time went on, they overcame the cultural differences, and then to tolerance and acceptance. This story ended with the great success of intercultural communication between China and the west countries.

The film is produced at a small cost, but it is warm and moving. Deeply thinking about the content of the film, it talks about cross-cultural communication. In the context of globalization, this film is helpful for us to straighten out our cultural mentality and explore the countermeasures when facing the cultural conflicts by analyzing the manifestations of cultural conflicts between China and the West in different aspects.

## 2. The Concept of Intercultural Communication

### 2.1. Culture

There are many ways to understand "culture". A typical definition of culture is: "The sum of the material and spiritual wealth created by human beings in the process of social and historical development."<sup>[1]</sup> And another conception is that culture is defined as a social domain that emphasizes the practices, discourses and material expressions, which, over time, express the continuities and discontinuities of social meaning of a life held in common.<sup>[2]</sup>

Culture can be divided into three levels, namely artifacts and behavior, norms and values and underlying assumptions. Artifacts and behavior refer to what we see and what a newcomer, visitor or

consultant would notice. (e.g. dress, organization charts, physical layout, degree and formality, logos, and mission statement.) Norms and values refer to what people say and what people would be told is the reason things are the way they are and should be, such as company philosophy, norms and justifications and so on. Finally, the third level of culture, underlying assumptions, refer to what people deeply believe in and act on unconsciously, taken for granted beliefs about the organization and its work / purpose, about people, rewards etc.

Culture plays an extremely important role in every country and nation. Culture can increase people's understanding of history, understanding of culture and enrich their knowledge. In addition, it can cultivate national pride and increase national cohesion. The development of things has something in common. Thousands of years of cultural history, people's thoughts and behavior evolution, can improve the depth and breadth of our thoughts.

## **2.2. Interculture communication**

There are all kinds of different countries, nations and cultures in the world. If we want to communicate with people with different languages and cultural backgrounds, we must know what to pay attention to and how to communicate appropriately. Communication means using language to express, but there are a wide range of communication problems in the process of language expression. As for "intercultural communication", it describes the wide range of communication processes and problems that naturally appear within an organization or social context made up of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds.<sup>[3]</sup>

The study of intercultural communication requires intercultural understanding, which is an ability to understand and value cultural differences. In the process of intercultural communication, we must know our own field of intercultural communication very well, so that we can be well prepared. Generally speaking, in the intercultural communication, we should pay attention to various taboos in each country, and know the actual situation of the country in advance, but also pay attention to the relevant etiquette of each country, so that we can respect for each other. Moreover, when we in a cross-cultural communication situation, we must not blindly worship other cultures. We have to love our own culture, and at the same time we have to understand and respect the culture. Language is an example of an important cultural component that is linked to intercultural understanding.

## **3. Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory**

### **3.1. High power distance & low power distance**

Power distance refers to how members can accept or reject the unequal distribution of power among organizations and institutions. Members in high power distance cultures believe that power inequality is a basic fact of society. People with high status are different from people with low status. Age, knowledge, money, etc. all constitute a clear social hierarchy. However, those in low power distance cultures seek to minimize the power inequality. People with high status try to narrow the power distance and people with low status think that they are equal with those with high status. According to the survey in Hofstede Insights, China's power distance ranks 12th among 74 countries and regions, while the United States ranks 57th.

### **3.2. Masculinity & femininity**

Hofstede (2010) pointed out that: "When there are obvious differences in emotional gender roles: men are considered to be decisive, tenacious and attach importance to material achievements; women are considered to be modest, gentle and attach importance to the quality of life, such a society is called a society of masculinity. On the other hand, cultures with high femininity weaken gender characteristics and believe that all people should be modest and favor the quality of life." According to the survey in Hofstede Insights, China scored slightly higher on the masculinity index than the United States, ranking 11th and 19th respectively.

### **3.3. Individualism & collectivism**

These values mainly describe the relationship between individuals and collectives in a particular society. Individualism refers to a society where people are loosely connected and they only take care of

themselves and their immediate family members. More emphasis is placed on “self-consciousness”, i.e. the individual is the most important unit. In contrast, collectivistic cultures grant the group priority and “we-consciousness” is highly valued. Collectivism refers to the integration of people into a strong and close group from birth. At the same time, the group provides protection and support for people, and emphasizes the individual's loyalty to the collective. According to the survey, the United States ranks first among 74 countries and regions in the individualism index, while China ranks 56th.

### ***3.4. Uncertainty avoidance & uncertainty accepting***

This refers to the degree to which members of a certain culture feel easy in unknown and unusual situations; the degree to which they accept risks and challenges. The culture of high uncertainty avoidance tends to establish more rules and regulations to enhance the stability and order of life, and it is difficult to tolerate unconventional thoughts and behaviors, hoping to seek consensus and identity of the group. In contrast, an uncertainty accepting culture has a high tolerance for uncertainty in life, and is willing to take risks and less constrained by rules and regulations. According to the survey, the uncertainty avoidance index of the United States is slightly higher than that of China, ranking 62nd and 68th respectively.

### ***3.5. Long-term orientation & short-term orientation***

Because the concepts involved in this dimension, such as sense of shame, maintaining face, respect for tradition, and so on, are advocated by Confucianism, this dimension is also called "Confucian motivation". What's more, value orientation, the narrow concept, which refers to the values that people usually understand, the values are based on the certain senses of the person and the behavior of cognition, understanding, judgment or choice. Long-term orientation culture focuses on tenacity and frugality, and hopes that individuals can attach importance to establish long-term goals and encourage children to strive for better academic performance. In contrast, short-term orientation culture focuses on consumption, cares about short-term effects and rapid satisfaction of needs, and pays attention to the personalized development of children. According to the survey data, China's long-term orientation index ranks first among 39 countries and regions, while the United States ranks 31st.

### ***3.6. Indulgence & restraint***

These two terms refer to the degree to which social members control their desires and instincts. A society with indulgent culture tends to allow people's basic and natural desires, such as enjoying life, finding fun, etc. Meanwhile, people believe that freedom of speech and leisure are important. In contrast, a society with restraint culture tends to use strict standards to manage the desires of people. Freedom of speech and leisure are not very essential and it's vital to observe social order. Out of 93 countries and regions, the United States ranked 15th with a tolerance index of 68, while China's tolerance index was only 24.

## **4. Analysis**

Based on Hofstede's value dimension, the following section will analyze and understand the cross-cultural phenomena that appear in the film, analyze the cultural differences between China and America, as well as the cultural fusion of Chinese and American.

### ***4.1. The embodiment of Chinese and American cultural differences in the film***

#### ***4.1.1. Differences between Chinese and American power distance***

According to Hofstede's survey, China tends to have a high power distance culture, while America tends to have a low power distance culture. In *A Grandson from America*, Yang's behavior embodies the characteristics of high power distance in Chinese culture. When Yang saw Brooks shake his head in confusion, he shouted: "Do you understand?" Brooks was shocked and nodded hurriedly, and then Yang locked his grandson at home and hurried off. Moreover, when Brooks wet his bed and dried his quilt in the yard alone, instead of praising Brooks for being sensible, Yang mocked his grandson and said, "You should be ashamed to wet your bed." Brooks was embarrassed and left angrily. However, he was carried into the house by Yang. No matter how hard he struggled, he could not get out. In the letter left by Yang's son before leaving, he specifically told that Brooks is a little grumpy, but don't hit the child, and be patient

to him, which reflected the differences of communication way between parents and children in Chinese and American culture.

The harmony and tranquility of traditional Chinese society are based on unequal human relations. Confucian culture emphasizes the principle which is ruler guides subject, father guides son and husband guides wife. What's more, Filial piety is the foundation of benevolence. For a long time, those in lower positions have become accustomed to respecting and obeying those in higher positions, and those in higher positions also believe that protecting and caring for those in lower positions is a natural thing. Therefore, respecting the elderly is one of Yang's demands towards Brooks.

#### ***4.1.2. Differences between Chinese and American individualism & collectivism***

According to Hofstede's survey, China tends to collectivism culture, while America tends to individualism culture. In the collectivist culture, people often communicate in a high context. In the film, Yang scolded his son for marrying a foreign drag and humiliating his ancestors, and tried to hide Brooks' existence. On weekdays, Yang locked Brooks at home, but one night, he put a headband on Brooks and hurried to the county to dye Brooks' hair into black. When Wang discovered the existence of Brooks, Yang lied that Brooks came from Xinjiang ethnic minority. All these reflected the value of personal face to some extent. In addition, when Wang repeatedly requested Yang to open a shadow puppetry training course, Yang always avoided discussing it due to his doubts about the durability of the government's cultural protection policies and the vitality of shadow play. It also reflects the value of personal face to some extent and pursuing a harmonious relationship between the two.

In the individualistic culture, personal self-realization is the primary goal, and people often show strong self-confidence and initiative. In the film, Brooks confidently told his mother that his Chinese is the best in the class. Instead of reminding the children to be modest like Chinese parents, his mother praised: "You are my pride." In addition, people with individualistic values often communicate in a low-context. When Yang accidentally opened Brooks' schoolbag and looked at his Spiderman, Brooks rushed down from the upstairs and shouted, "Don't touch it! This is mine." In terms of diet, Brooks is always outspoken, telling Yang: "I want to drink milk." This is in sharp contrast with collectivism culture.

#### ***4.1.3. Differences between Chinese and American long-term orientation & short-term orientation***

According to Hofstede's survey, China tends to long-term orientation culture, while America tends to short-term orientation culture. Long-term culture-oriented society is more inclined to social stability and long-term benefits; short-term oriented cultural society is more inclined to meet current needs. In the film, Yang still keeps the shadow play after retirement. Wang ran around the village to coax the old artists come back to help open the shadow puppet training class. The protection and inheritance of cultural heritage is not a cause that can achieve results in a short time. However, Wang does not focus on short-term returns, he hopes to arouse people's love for traditional culture through the revitalization of shadow play.

In the short-term orientation culture, both husband and wife pursue common interests and hobbies. When Yang Dongliang took Aihua home for the first time, he used "love at first sight" to describe their love. Later, when the two returned to pick up Brooks and returned to America, Yang Dongliang confessed to Yang that he had broken up with Aihua because "the interests were not the same". Yang didn't understand this, and felt that his son took marriage as a joke, because marriage under the influence of long-term orientation culture did not require both people to have common interests, and was more pragmatic.

#### ***4.2. The embodiment of Chinese and American cultural fusion in the film***

The cultural differences between China and the West are inevitable, but with the passage of time and the improvement of psychological acceptance, cultural conflicts will inevitably converge from opposites. In the film, Yang asks his grandson, Brooks, to go to see the shadow puppet together and says in English: "Let's go!" Booth eats with chopsticks and eats Yangrou Paomo with relish. This is the embodiment of culture from collision to fusion. When Brooks asked Yang who was the best of Sun Wukong and Spiderman, Yang replied, "Why should they fight? Let Sun Wukong and Spiderman become good friends and protect our planet together". At the Spring Festival, Yang replaced the door-god with Sun Wukong and Spiderman. These all reflect that as long as we take positive and effective intercultural communication to deal with the tide of multiculturalism, we will surely move towards cultural integration.

## 5. Conclusion

This film is a cultural introduction and an intangible cultural heritage feature story. By describing the story between Yang and Brooks, *A Grandson from America* artistically shows the integration of China and America. In the film, in order to better communicate with Brooks, Yang took the initiative to ask Wang for English. When Brooks described the "phoenix" as "bird", Yang patiently talked about the meaning of "prosperity brought by the dragon and the phoenix". Later, Brooks fell in love with the shadow play under the influence of Yang, and babbled to imitate the tone of the play. What's more, Yang accidentally broke his grandson's Spiderman toy. In order to appease his grandson, Yang made a Spiderman shadow puppet overnight. The fine pattern is full of love for Brooks, which is the embodiment of the blending of Chinese and American cultures. At the end of the film, the family of four took a group photo in gorgeous clothes, while the door-god behind them was Sun Wukong and Spiderman.

Culture is the accumulation of various nationalities through a long history, each national culture has its own characteristics due to regional differences.<sup>[4]</sup> In the era of globalization, the cultures of all countries and nationalities in the world spread and blend with each other. As Ashley Montagu pointed out the importance of learning about human society: "Undoubtedly, we are born with the potential of genes to give to all kinds of behaviors, but the way these potentials become practical. It depends on the training we receive, depending on the study."<sup>[5]</sup> Only in this way, the formation of you and me, I have your community of destiny, and our human society will not be forgotten by the times. Therefore, everyone needs to respect each other and learn from each other's strengths. In terms of cultural mentality, all ethnic groups must abandon cultural prejudices, treat cultural differences with an inclusive mind and appreciation, and achieve true cultural coexistence.

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