

An Analysis on Cultural Values of *The Love Eterne* and *Titanic*: Based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

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Abstract: *The Love Eterne* in China and *Titanic* in the United States are both very classic love movies in history. The background of the two love stories do have something in common, but due to the characters' different choices, the end is entirely different. This paper attempts to make a comparison between Chinese value orientation and American ones based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, so as to find out the cultural differences between the two countries.

Keywords: Hofstede; Cultural dimensions; *The Love Eterne*; *Titanic*

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1. Introduction

The two romantic films, *The Love Eterne* and *Titanic*, are both famous tragic love stories and has gained worldwide recognition. The film *The Love Eterne* depicts a love story between the noble girl Zhu Yingtai who disguises herself as a boy to attend school and the poor student Liang Shanbo who studies with Zhu Yingtai for three years. When Liang Shanbo knows the true identity of Zhu Yingtai, he goes to her home to propose a marriage, but her father forces her to be married with Ma Wencai, a nobleman. Soon after, Liang Shanbo dies, and Zhu Yingtai jumps into his tomb at her wedding. Finally, they turn into two butterflies. The film *Titanic* depicts a love story between the poor painter Jack and the noble woman Rose who abandon the secular prejudice and fall in love with each other on the Titanic cruise. In the end the Titanic strikes the iceberg and Jack gives the chance of survival to Rose. Though somewhat alike in the theme, the characters and the plots stand for two totally different cultural values between China and America. In the era of globalization, intercultural communication has played an increasingly crucial role, especially the Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, which makes people from different cultures get rid of the negative stereotypes and enhance mutual understanding and mutual respect.

Based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, this thesis tries to explain the distinctions between the Chinese and American cultural values as well as their origins from *The Love Eterne* published by Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) Limited in 1963 and *Titanic* published by 20th Century Fox Film Corporation in 1997. It focuses on the question: To what extent do Chinese cultural values differ from American cultural values in accordance with the Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory?

2. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

Hofstede^[1-2] compared work-related attitudes over forty different cultures and found four consistent

dimensions of cultural values held by over 160000 managers and employees: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity and uncertainty avoidance. In around 1985, the fifth dimension, long-term orientation/short-term orientation, was identified through Michael Harris Bond's study [3]. In 2010, he put forward the sixth dimension, Indulgence/restraint [4].

Hofstede's cultural dimension theory has a significant meaning to the field of cross-cultural communication. It provides people with a coordinate system to observe the cultural differences, so that people can understand different cultural values and deal with cultural conflicts in accordance with different cultural dimensions. Like Kulich once said, "Hofstede's use of orthogonal factor analysis, comparison to an incredible variety of real-world economic, social and productivity data, and his wizardry with multi-dimensional scaling to show inter-country regional relationships were all new and significant milestones in the field [5]."

3. Analysis and Discussion

According to the latest data released on the website of ITMI, a cross-cultural management consulting company. The corresponding values of the cultural dimension indexes of China and the United States in the above six cultural dimensions are obtained, as shown in **Figure 1**. In this figure, PDI means Power Distance Index, IDV means Individualism Index, MAS means Masculinity Index, UAI means Uncertainty Avoidance Index, LTO means Long-term Orientation Index, and IVR means Indulgence Versus Restraint Index.

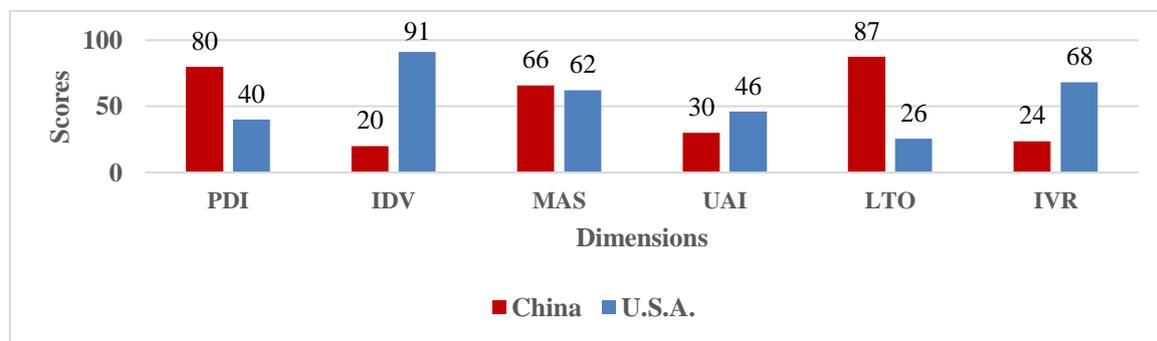


Figure 1. The Six Dimensions Model of Geert Hofstede

As is shown in the **Figure 1.**, the differences between Chinese and American culture in the dimensions of MAS and UAI are not great. However, there are huge differences in the dimensions of PDI, IDV, LTO and IVR. Thus, this paper makes an analysis from these four dimensions (PDI, IDV, LTO and IVR) which demonstrate the great cultural differences between China and America.

3.1. Power distance

A high-power-distance society emphasizes obedience and respect for authority. China is a typical high-power-distance society. In the school, the teacher is the absolute authority that students must obey the teacher's orders and rarely dare students challenge the teacher. At home, parents have dominance of almost every aspect over their children, and children have to act in unquestioning obedience to the orders. While the United States belongs to typical low-power-distance culture, the children from an early age are encouraged to challenge the authority of education. Parents in the United States rarely intervene in children thinking and tend to let the child make their own decisions.

In *Titanic*, the fiancé does not seek for Rose's advice, and orders lamb chops by self-assertion, which makes her very unhappy. Rose is a lady but she smokes. Her mother forbids her from smoking, but she smokes in the mother's face. Despite being born into an aristocratic family, she is dismissive of the upper class and their money worship orientation. Luxury Titanic in her eyes is no big deal. What's more, the

valuable diamonds Carl gives her also cannot conquer her heart. There is a yearning for the freedom in her heart. At last, she doesn't take her mother's advice and chooses to stay with Jack, which reflects low-power-distance culture in America.

In China's traditional culture, parents have always been in a dominant position, peremptory and arbitrary. Besides, women in ancient China have to conform to three obediences and four virtues. No matter how reluctant Yingtai is, she does not dare to take the initiative to fight against her father. Chinese culture featured filial piety which Yingtai cannot violate but to follow the marriage arrangement, which reflects the high-power-distance culture in China.

3.2. Individualism versus collectivism

Individualism considers individual interests to be the most important determinant of behavior, emphasizing the importance of individual liberty and individual rights, as well as self-independence. In an individualism-oriented society, people make decisions based on personal interests, and the relationship between people is relatively weak. In short, people tend to care for themselves. Hofstede's finding indicates that the United States belongs to the individualistic culture.

Titanic, directed by Cameron, tells the love story of a wealthy young lady Rose falling in love with a drifting handsome guy Jack. The film is well received by the audience for the love between Jack and Rose is beyond the limits of life and death. However, from another point of view, the film also praises Jack and Rose's persistent pursuit of freedom and love regardless of different social status. The heroine Rose is a woman who has the courage to break the traditional thinking. She is individualistic and bold enough to pursue the life she wants. From a lot of details in the film can we see her desire of insistence on her own will and resistance of any interference, no matter from her mother or her fiancé.

In contrast to an individualism-oriented society, a collectivism-oriented society advocates a combination of personal interests and social interests where the nature of human beings is determined by society, and individuals belong to collectives. Individual needs and goals should be subordinated to the needs of the community, and individuals should be ready to sacrifice individual needs and goals for the collective.

Yingtai indicates that she would be married to Liang Shanbo when they parts. However, after coming back home, she does not make it clear to her parents. Later, when his father informs her the marriage arrangement, she refuses in a hesitating way, and only goes on a hunger strike for three days to protest the marriage arrangement. At last, she chooses to follow her parents' advice. As China's patriarchal clan system prevailing, people generally have high sense of family responsibility. China's deep-rooted traditional attitudes make it impossible for her to consider only for herself, regardless of her family's reputation.

3.3. Long-term orientation versus short-term orientation

The long-term orientation and short-term orientation refer to the extent to which a member of a culture can accept the delay in satisfying their material, emotional, and social needs. Long-term orientation means nurturing and encouraging the quality of pursuing future reward-oriented. In the past 5,000 years, China has been influenced by the Confucian culture and Chinese people pay attention to tradition, honoring their parents and tend to view the problem from a long-term perspective. The United States, influenced by Christian culture, often pay more attention to the current life and enjoyment, not willing to sacrifice for the future at present.

The mainstream of Chinese traditional culture Confucianism stresses the doctrine of the mean, not going to extremes, drawing a line and emphasizing the combination of the reason and sensibility. During the three years of Liang and Zhu's career, Yingtai strictly sticks to feudal ethical code. In her father's arranged marriage, she just goes on a hunger strike to show refusal. Because she could not only take into account her

current happiness, but also consider from the long-term, taking into account the filial piety, the woman's chastity and the family's reputation. However, Rose is quite different. She says to Jack "when the ship docks, I am getting off with you." In order to pursue the free love, Rose is bold enough to take a risk of eloping with Jack. Not taking the long-waiting future into consideration, Rose just wants to get immediately what she wants. She does not take into account the huge debt of family, her mother's worries as well as the uncertain future. Whether the love of Jack would last forever or not? It seems to be nothing important. What Rose cares is just the present. From the different choices of two heroines, it is clearly to see that the Chinese people are long-term oriented, while the Americans are short-term oriented.

3.4. Indulgence versus restraint

The dimension of "Indulgence versus restraint" refers to the degree to which a society allows people's basic needs and desires to enjoy life. The higher the index, the greater the degree of release of the society. On the contrary, the lower the index, the greater the degree of self-restraint in the society. Obviously, China is a highly restrictive culture while America is a self-indulgent culture.

In *Titanic*, Jack falls in love with Rose at first sight, and he never conceals his love for her. Soon, they are passionately in love though they have just known each other for only two days. There is a scene that Jack takes Rose to the third-class cabin to take part in a real party. Rose pays no attention to her personal identity and image, dancing barefoot with Jack, laughing loudly, smoking and drinking. Also, she is warmly welcomed by other people in this cabin. They don't know her, and she don't know them. But they dance together, full of happiness and freedom. It can be concluded that Americans advocate the value to live in the moment, and enjoy the moment.

In *The Love Eterne*, Zhu Yingtai and Liang Shanbo have studied together for three years. Though they have special feelings for each other, they never confess the love. When Yingtai departs for home, she uses a variety of metaphors to suggest that she is a girl who is fond of him. However, Liang Shanbo fails to understand that. It can be concluded that the love for someone is often expressed implicitly in China, especially for girls who are taught to restrain their love and not to take the initiative.

4. Conclusion

Based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, some cultural difference between China and America are analyzed through two films, *Titanic* and *The Love Eterne*. The world is diverse, so are the cultures. Therefore, we should try our best to do the following in intercultural communication: First, we should understand and respect the cultural differences. Intercultural communication on this premise will help to reduce many unnecessary misunderstandings. Second, we should understand and tolerate foreign cultures, find a balance between the conflicts, and seek common ground while reserving differences.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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