

The Analysis of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory in the Novel *The Joy Luck Club*

XU Yue-han

School of Foreign Language, Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan, China, 430070

The cultural dimension refers to the five cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede and supplemented by later scholars. Its role is to serve as a framework for measuring the differences between cultures of various countries. *The Joy Luck Club* shows the cultural differences between China and America by describing the contradictions between four pairs of Chinese mothers and daughters. At present, most of the analysis of cultural differences in novels lack systematic summary and deep excavation. As we all know, the root of the contradiction between mothers and daughters is the cultural conflicts, and this paper will take Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory as a framework and use "the joy luck club" as the text to reveal the deeper cultural reasons for the contradictions between mothers and daughters through literature and theories.

Keywords: cultural dimension, Hofstede, *The Joy Luck Club*

Introduction

The author of the novel *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan, is a Chinese-American writer born in California in 1952. Her parents are both the first generation of Chinese Americans, so she has lived in the United States since she was a child and has been receiving mainstream American cultural education. She is a typical second-generation Chinese woman. Due to the environmental impact of growing up in the United States, she has always overlooked Chinese culture, but at the same time, she has also shown the excellent side of Chinese traditional culture to the world and spread the excellent culture to Western society.

The novel tells the story of four Chinese women who immigrated to San Francisco in the 1850s with their daughters, lovers and friends. The story is mainly based on the contradictions between the four mothers and their daughters. Mothers were influenced by the traditional Chinese high-context culture, while their daughters born in the United States grew up in a low-context cultural environment. These contradictions are also the collision of thinking under different cultural backgrounds. Finally, through mutual love and understanding, the contradictions are gradually resolved.

According to the cultural dimension theory put forward by the Dutch psychologist Hofstede in the late 1960s, the scale for measuring cultural differences has the following four dimensions: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity. Later, the Canadian Chinese scholar Michael H. Bond added a new cultural dimension to the original foundation of Hofstede, namely,

XU Yue-han, Master of Art, Master Student, School of Foreign Language, Wuhan University of Technology.

Long-term versus Short-term. This paper will evaluate the cultural conflicts between China and America in the novel *The Joy Luck Club* based on the basic concepts of Hofstede's five cultural dimensions, and from the perspective of cultural dimensions, re-examine the cultural differences behind the mother-daughter conflict in *The Joy Luck Club*, thus have a deeper understanding of the author's main ideas expressed in the novel.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

Hofstede is the earliest one trying to use extensive statistical data to examine cultural values, from 1967 to 1973, Hofstede conducted a large-scale survey of cultural values in the famous multinational company IBM (International Business Machines Corporation). He surveyed over a hundred thousand workers in multinational branch companies in over fifty countries to analyze the dimensions of national cultures. Next, this paper will analyze the conflict and integration between the four pairs of mother and daughter in the book *The Joy Luck Club* from these dimensions.

2.1 Individualism Versus Collectivism

Regarding the dimensions of individualism and collectivism, Hofstede's definition is that they measure whether a society as a whole is concerned about the interests of the individual or the interests of the collective. In an individualistic society, the relationship between people is loose, and people tend to care about themselves and their small families; However, a society with a collectivist tendency pays attention to intra-ethnic relations and cares about large families. Strong ethnic relations can give people continuous protection, and individuals must be absolutely loyal to the ethnic group. Whether a country is inclined to individualism or collectivism is determined by the individualism index, the higher the individualism index shows, it means that the country pays more attention to individualism, and aims at independence and "I" consciousness. The lower the individualism index shows, the more the country pays more attention to collectivism, at the same time aims at group harmony and "WE" consciousness. As shown in the Table 1, America and some north European countries tend to individual oriented society, have a loosely knit social framework. Asian countries like China tend to group oriented society, have a tightly knit social framework.

Table 1

Individualism vs. Collectivism

Country	Individualism Index (IDV)	Rank	Conclusion
United States	91	1	Strong individualism
Great Britain	89	3	Strong individualism
France	71	12	Quite strong individualism
Germany	67	16	Quite strong individualism
China	20	43	Quite strong collectivism
South Korea	18	45	Quite strong collectivism
Guatemala	6	54	Strong collectivism

In the novel *The Joy Luck Club*, Waverly was once a gifted chess champion, but because of her mother, she gradually became less fond of chess, she always had the feelings that her mother was using her success to show off, and this behavior made her annoyed, even wanted to quit playing chess. Finally in a conversation, Waverly broke out her emotions and said "why you have to use me to show off? if you want to show off, then why don't

you learn to play chess?" (Tan, 1989, p. 37). Due to China's high context culture environment, everyone has the same cultural background, some words are self-evident, causing people to pay more attention to collective cooperation and the views of others. Chinese people tend to be considered as many groups in the society of collectivism, People care about collective strength and honor, when they succeed, they should attribute credit to the help of the collective group harmony and cooperation are also important for them, the family also belongs to the collective, and when the daughter succeeds in a certain way, it is also the glory of the whole family, so it's normal for a Chinese mother in a collectivism society to show off her successful daughter and think it is also her honor. But Americans in the society of individualism are more focused on personal consciousness, thinking that they are fighting alone on the road to success and are more likely to enjoy the joy of success alone, mother's showing off to her is more like stealing her limelight, so Waverly raised such a sharp question. Of course her mother can't answer this question, because as for the daughter who grew up in America since childhood, her showing off is just the imposition of her own collectivism on her daughter's individualism.

2.2 Power Distance

Regarding power distance, it's the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept that power is distributed equally. Various countries have different understandings of power, so there are big differences in this dimension. We may find high-power distance countries have a greater centralization of power, and put more importance on status and ranks. In contrast, people in low-power distance cultures see hierarchy as an inequality of roles established for convenience, they pay more attention to individual rights rather than hierarchy. The difference in power distance can be measured by the Power Distance Index. As we can see from the Table 2, Asian countries, including China, have higher indexes and strict social systems. The European countries, including the United States, have lower indexes. Obviously, the indexes of China and the United States are significantly different, Naturally, these two countries will have very different customs and perceptions.

Table 2

Power Distance

Country	Power Distance Index (PDI)	Rank
Malaysia	104	1
Guatemala	95	2
China	80	9
South Korea	60	24
United States	40	37
Germany	35	40
Austria	11	49

And these differences are fully reflected in the novel *The Joy Luck Club*, Jing-Mei's mother has been strict with her since she was a child and asked her to practice playing the piano every day. Finally one day she couldn't stand her mother's request, she just wanted to watch TV, so her mother warned her that Only one kind of daughter can live in this house Obedient daughter. Confucian cultural pattern in China's high-power distance environment believes that a son should not stray far from his parents while they are alive, Confucianism requires children to support their parents, be filial to their parents, and obey their arrangements. As for the relationship between

parents and children, the Chinese are more inclined to collectivism, and naturally they pay more attention to the hierarchy. Chinese people in high-power distance environment believe that power and authority are facts of life, more attentions should be paid on rank and status. The parent is also children's superior, the child should obey the parent's order unconditionally, the mother thinks that her daughter should be respect to status differences and play piano without resist, so she got angry when the daughter didn't follow her order. But American people in low-power distance environment believe that inequality in society should be minimized, they don't like this kind of bondage, at the same time, they can't understand why they must follow someone's orders, so the daughter was stunned when her mother gave this order.

2.3 Uncertainty Avoidance

Regarding Uncertainty Avoidance, Hofstede's definition is that it refers to whether a society is threatened by uncertain events and unconventional environments through formal channels to avoid and control uncertainty, high-avoidance cultures try to avoid uncertainty and ambiguity by providing stability for their members through emphasizing consensus and establishing social protocols, and have more ritual behaviors to deal with the uncertainty, it's like what is various is dangerous. In contrast, low-avoidance cultures believe that practice counts more than principles and don't mind the change, and have a stronger will to take risks, what is various is curious for them. Its strength can be measured by the Uncertainty Avoidance Index, in Table 3 we can see that the index gap between China and the United States is not obvious, but the U.S. ranks higher than China.

Table 3

Uncertainty Avoidance

Country	Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)	Rank
Greece	112	1
Japan	92	11
Austria	70	23
United States	46	42
China	30	47
Denmark	23	49
Singapore	8	51

However, in the novel, we can learn that when dealing with the conflicts between mother and daughter, due to the lower uncertainty avoidance index, Chinese people have fewer ritual behaviors and tend to be more silent and avoidant in the face of uncertain factors. As mentioned above, Waverly's mother often showed off her chess skills in public, which made she felt very dissatisfied, and yelled to her mother on the street, at the same time she ran away from home in anger. When Waverly returned home, she thought her mother would be furious, but her mother didn't, she just ignored her indifferently. This made her feel very uncomfortable. When faced with uncertainties, as a child growing up in the United States since childhood, she is more willing to take the initiative to solve problems. But the mother with traditional thinking is more willing to use silence to escape the problem. She only talked to other people and ignores Waverly, which made an invisible wall erected between mother and daughter.

2.4 Masculinity Versus Femininity

Regarding Masculinity versus Femininity, Hofstede's definition is that this dimension mainly depends on whether a society represents more male qualities such as competitiveness and arbitrariness, or represents more female qualities such as humility and caring. Cultures high in the masculinity dimension focus on achievement or heroism, only a small number of women undertake social work, and most do housework at home. In contrast, cultures high in femininity dimension value interpersonal relationship, and caring for the weak and quality of life, more women are engaged in important social work, at the same time women's social status is also comparable to that of men. And this social tendency is often expressed by the masculinity index, as we can see in Table 4, although China's masculinity index is higher than that of the United States, the difference of index is not big, but in China's old society, the status of women was low, which is also reflected in the novel.

Table 4

Masculinity versus Femininity

Country	Masculinity Index (MAS)	Rank
Japan	95	2
Austria	79	4
China	66	10
United States	62	13
France	43	30
Denmark	16	45
Norway	8	48

Lindo Jong in the novel is Waverly's mother, when she was twelve, she was forced to be the neighbor's child bride, then she kept doing housework at home for years, she soon found out that she and her husband had no affection, but her cruel mother-in-law kept asking her to give birth to a grandson. She did not agree, so her mother-in-law forced her to stay in bed until she agreed to have a baby. As a woman with strong will, Lindo Jong eventually escaped from this terrible family. It can be seen that although the social status of both sexes in China and the United States is basically equal nowadays, in the old China, the masculinity index must be higher.

2.5 Long-term versus Short-term

Long-term orientation is the 5th dimension of Hofstede which was added by Michael H. Bond to the original four to try to distinguish the extent to which members of a culture can accept towards delays in meeting their material, emotional, and social needs. Long term orientation emphasizes persistence and long-term benefits, aims at valuing the future. But the members of short-term oriented pay more attention to the present, their personal steadiness and stability. This distinction between long-term and short-term orientation can be measured by the Long-Term Orientation index. As we can see from Table 5, China's long-term orientation index is significantly higher than that of the United States, and this gap can be vividly reflected in the novel *The Joy Luck Club*.

Table 5

Long-term Orientation vs. Short-term Orientation

Country	Long-term orientation vs. Short-term normative orientation (LTO)	Rank
South Korea	100	1
China	87	4
France	63	20
Great Britain	51	28
Canada	36	38
United States	26	47
Africa West	9	58

Humility is an obvious feature that distinguishes long-term orientation from short-term orientation, in a long-term oriented country like China, humility is a basic virtue of people. In the novel, during Jing-Mei's childhood, her mother told her that as long as she worked hard, she could accomplish anything. Her mother particularly wanted her to be gifted at something then became a star, at the same time regarded Waverly as her daughter's rival, often compared them in mind. One day when Jing-Mei and Waverly were arguing about the ad copy, Jing-Mei's mother was there, Jing-Mei wanted to modify the copy, but Waverly thought that she is not capable enough to accomplish it. At this time Jing-Mei's mother immediately assumed a humble attitude and admitted that Jing-Mei was not as good as Waverly in this aspect. In fact, due to the long-term oriented thinking, her mother just wanted to be humble in front of the others, not deliberately denying her strength. With short-term orientation thinking, Jing-Mei didn't understand her mother's behavior and only thought that her mother betrayed her, she began to doubt her own capability, which deepened the contradiction between mother and daughter.

Conclusion

In the novel *The Joy Luck Club*, although the author focuses on describing the cultural differences between China and the United States in the four pairs of mother-daughter contradictions, and emphasizes the differences in cultural forms between two countries, but at the end of the novel, under the joint efforts of the four pairs of mother and daughter, they finally understand each other, and resolve the conflict. Jing-Mei returned to China to meet her two sisters because she has been able to understand her mother's last wish from the perspective of Chinese culture; Waverly, who had a dispute with her mother and even ran away from home because of chess, finally chose to go to China for her honeymoon. Through these changes, readers can clearly feel that although there are conflicts in different cultures, they can still seek common ground while reserving differences. The differences between Chinese and American cultures have also been collided and merged in the various experiences of the four mother and daughter pairs and become easily understood by readers of the two countries.

At the same time, Hofstede's cultural dimension theory can be well reflected in the novel *The Joy Luck Club*. Hofstede's cultural dimension index can give people a general understanding of the cultural dimensions of each country, it's more conducive for readers to understand the novel. Under the current trend of world cultural integration, although the cultural differences between countries still exist, in the future, when dealing with these conflicts, views like 'seeking common ground while reserving differences' and 'taking the essence and discarding the dregs' will be supported by people all over the world. With these advancements, the cultural environment of various countries will become more complete.

References

- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Cultures consequences: International differences in workrelated values*. Sage: Beverly Hills.
- Hofstede, G. (1997). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. New York: Mo Graw-Hill,.
- Nomura. (1995). *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, (19), 63-65.
- Schmidt, W. V. (2007). *Communicating globally: Intercultural communication and intercultural bussiness*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Tan, A. (1989). *The Joy Luck Club*. New York: Ivy Books.
- 李文娟. (2012). 霍夫斯泰德文化维度与跨文化研究. *社会科学*, (12), 127.
- 汤新煌, 关哲. (2006). 试析霍夫斯泰德的文化维度理论——跨文化视角. *辽东学院学报*, (04), 57-61.
- (美)谭恩美 (Amy Tan) 著; 李军, 章力, 译. (2017). *喜乐会*. 北京: 外语教学与研究出版社.
- [荷]吉尔特·霍夫斯泰德,著; 李原, 孙健敏, 译. (2010). *文化与组织: 心理软件的力量* (第二版). 北京:中国人民大学出版社.
- [荷]吉尔特·霍夫斯泰德. (1996). *跨越合作的障碍—多元文化与管理*. 北京: 科学出版社.