

# Analysis of Sino-US Cultural Differences From the Perspective of Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory—A Case Study of *Saving Face*

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The film *Saving Face* is about a Chinese family living in the United States, reflecting the difference of cultural values between China and the United States through the clash of dialogue and behavior and ideology between three generations. Studies on the film *Saving Face* mainly focus on the comparative analysis of Chinese and American cultures, and lack systematic analysis from the dimension of cultural values. This study takes Hofstede's cultural values dimension theory as a perspective to analyze the cultural differences between China and the United States and explore the underlying causes of the intense cultural differences in terms of cultural dimensions, providing useful insights for resolving cultural differences in intercultural communication and moving toward cultural integration.

*Keywords:* *Saving face*, Hofstede's cultural value dimension, cultural differences

## Introduction

With the deepening of globalization, Chinese films have frequently appeared in the world's major film festivals and international trade, and intercultural communication has become a norm. The different cultural values, cultural differences, and integration reflected in films have also become the object of intercultural communication research. Cultural communication and exchanges between different countries, different nationalities, and different groups across cultures transcend the boundaries limited by countries and nationalities. Different cultures in the same area may have conflicts and differences. Hofstede's cultural dimension theory is a framework used to measure the cultural differences between countries. The film *Saving Face* highlights the obvious cultural differences between China and America. At present, there are few studies on the cultural dimension theory of the film. The present study adopts Hofstede's cultural dimension theory to find and analyze the Sino-US differences in six cultural value dimensions reflected in the film *Saving Face*, which helps to deepen the understanding of the cultural differences between China and America and promote the cultural exchanges between China and America.

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### Literature Review

Since the birth of Hofstede's theory of cultural value dimensions, it has received extensive attention from the academic circle. Through research and analysis, G. Hofstede, G. J. Hofstede, and Minkov (2005) categorized the differences between cultures into four basic cultural values dimensions: power distance, individualism versus collectivism and masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term versus short-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint, which became a classic theory in the field of intercultural research and an authoritative framework for studying intercultural communication. The researches on Hofstede's theory of cultural value dimensions have always been a hot spot in the field of intercultural communication. Chinese scholars mainly use Hofstede's cultural dimension theory to analyze the Sino-US cultural differences and corresponding causes of misunderstanding between different cultures in films (Li, 2018; Liu & Wan, 2017; Liang, 2018). Whereas, western scholars are much more interested in the theoretical exploration of the conceptualization of culture, communication, and conflict, trying to offer theoretical grounding for the explanations of existing cultural issues (Yama & Zakaria, 2019). *Saving Face* shows the strong cultural characteristics between China and America, which is a vivid and humorous portrayal of the clash of cultures. The story takes place in the United States, where Chinese ideas collide with American culture, creating the ups and downs of the film. In *Saving Face*, face view is the angle discussed by most scholars (e.g., Jiang, 2010; Pan, 2012). The previous studies on *Saving Face* mainly focus on the face view. Fewer studies have been conducted on the use of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory to study the film *Saving Face*. Thus, the current study tries to analyze the literature review of related scholars, make analogies and sort out each viewpoint, and deepen the study by combining Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions.

### The Intercultural Analysis of Sino-US Cultural Differences in *Saving Face*

Hofstede's cultural value dimensions will be adopted to examine Sino-US cultural difference in the film *Saving Face*. Due to the length of thesis, the current study mainly concentrates on two of Hofstede's cultural value dimensions, namely, high power distance vs. low power distance and long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation to analyze the cultural difference and conflicts reflected in the film.

#### High Power Distance vs. Low Power Distance

In the theory, the definition of power distance is the degree of power distribution in a country or institution or organization, and low-power members are often at the mercy of high-power members, which also occurs in families, schools, companies, and so on (Hofstede et al., 2005). In countries with high power distance, children are brought up with instructions to follow and treat their parents with maximum respect. They are basically obedient to their parents' suggested instructions, and even though they have a rebellious heart, they will still do what their parents want under the constraints of their minds, which leads to the fact that children in high power distance countries are often self-contradictory.

In the movie, the three main women, Wil, Wil's mother, and Vivian all choose to go for their parents' advice, whether that advice goes against their hearts or not, and they are willing to listen and accept it. This is also a manifestation of the high-power distance in China, which profoundly embodies the saying "The greatest thing for a filial son is to honor his parents". On the contrary, in low power distance countries, parents tend to treat their children equally and do not force their children to choose something because of their parents' family status. Wil's American neighbor comes to Wil's home to share dinner together. But two of his actions make Wil's mother feel rude. Firstly, he does not take off and change his shoes when he enters the house. Secondly, he

randomly pours sauce on the dishes. With the traditional Chinese mindset, Wil's mother could not tolerate this behavior and thought Jay is very rude. However, Jay is a Native American, and in his perception, going to receive home for dinner is a casual thing, and the relationship between him and Wil's mother is equal, rather than the existence of Chinese parental oppression.

Through the analysis of the movie plot, China conforms to the performance of high-power distance in Hofstede's cultural value dimension theory, while America belongs to low power distance.

### **Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Orientation**

This dimension can be defined as the degree to which people in a certain group accept future events, including material, emotional, and social needs (Hofstede et al., 2005). In countries with long-term orientation, societies, organizations, and individuals tend to set long-term goals for various things and require persistence and perseverance to achieve these goals. People are characterized by resilience, frugality, and humility. In the movie, Vivian's father finds Wil and talks to her because Vivian is unwilling to go to Paris to enhance her dance career. "If she (Vivian) doesn't go to Paris, she won't be able to achieve her genius". Because Vivian had been studying dance since she was six years old, her father never missed a single performance, and he had a long-term goal for Vivian's dance career. He accompanied Wil as a father hoping that Vivian would persevere in her career and not give up because of her love.

While, in countries with short-term orientation, society, organizations, and individuals tend to have a value of just-in-time enjoyment, encouraging a focus on the present. There is an emphasis on the firmness of the individual's position and the importance of the responsibilities assigned by society and identity. In the movie, Vivian is hesitant to go to Paris to develop her dance career because of her love. She speaks to Wil, "Going to Paris would be waiting for career recognition, but, I have new expectations here". It was evident in Vivian that she was conflicted by both orientations at the same time. Whereas before she clung to her dream of dancing, now she shows a value of enjoying the pleasures of relationships in time. Thus, Vivian oscillates between leaning toward the present and the future.

Furthermore, the most striking feature of the difference between countries with high and low levels of long-term orientation is humility. In long-term orientation countries, humility is considered a fundamental virtue, which is also shown at times in traditional Chinese culture. In the movie, when Wil's mother is looking for a suitable match for Wil, she and her friends in the Chinese community agree to set up Wil and friend's son Raymond with each other. This does not mean that Wil's mother is belittling Wil for not being good and outstanding, but it is a means of complimenting others with Chinese humility. On the contrary, when Jay comes to Wil's home for dinner, he walks to the table by himself and does not act formal because Wil's mother is at the table with her. Jay represents a short-term orientation country and does not act humble because of age and status differences, but instead emphasizes personal identity and faces everyone as an equal.

Based on the analysis of the film plot, we can conclude that China is a long-term oriented country and the United States is a short-term oriented country, which is in line with Hofstede's cultural dimension.

### **Reasons for the Cultural Differences Between China and America**

The Chinese nation has been up and down for five thousand years, giving birth to a long and splendid eastern civilization and forming a mysterious and ancient eastern culture. Chinese traditional culture is very focused on Confucianism, which has reached its peak in history, and still occupies a major position in today's Chinese society.

Confucian culture advocates a hierarchy, including distinctions between nobles and inferiors, old and young. Conversely, influenced by immigrant culture, the cultural spectrum of Americans is very diverse. People of each race came to the United States with their own unique cultural characteristics, and when these cultures continued to collide, they formed the current social atmosphere of the United States, a relatively free society. In addition, through the proclamation of the United States Declaration of Independence and the establishment of the separation of powers, this represents that Americans are a group that yearns for equality. They emphasized the importance of individuals and human rights, which was one of the factors that contributed to Americans' weak sense of hierarchy.

With the continuous development and integration of globalization, the strangeness between China and the United States is increasingly dispelled. But between Sino-US cultural exchanges, cultural differences and conflicts are inevitable. The film *Saving Face* is a microcosm of Chinese and American culture. Although each culture has its own uniqueness, we cannot distinguish between good and bad cultural hierarchies, and each culture deserves respect. The formation of every culture has gone through a long history to get to where it is today, and change is not possible in a short time. At the same time, the film also expresses the inevitability of the integration of the two cultures like the audience through the display of the plot.

Cultural differences exist everywhere, and it is unrealistic to try to avoid them completely, which means that some cross-cultural differences for us are inevitable. Therefore, the effectiveness, appropriateness, and flexibility in communication, as well as a broad knowledge and respect for different worldviews and their ways of difference resolution, are needed. Instead of avoiding intercultural differences, the development of intercultural competence is the essence of successful intercultural communication. Firstly, it is very necessary to get out of our own inherent cultural system and formalize our own thinking bias. Faced with the difference between two cultures, we need to develop empathy and strong adaptability, which means being able to accommodate different opinions and overcome obstacles in cross-cultural communication, and eventually agree with each other. Secondly, it is very important to broaden cultural knowledge and learn more about the culture of different countries without restricting people's access to culture, which can also develop and improve intercultural communication skills.

### Conclusion

Through the analysis of the plot of *Saving Face*, this research finds that there are many Sino-US cultural differences. Through the insight of cultural differences, people can better conduct cross-cultural communication between China and the United States. People should have cross-cultural communication awareness. Only when people have the cross-cultural awareness that there are many cultures in the world can it help people understand cultural differences better and can cross-cultural communication be easier. In addition, ethnocentrism limits the acceptance of cultural diversity and has a negative impact on cross-cultural communication. Therefore, trying to avoid ethnocentrism can also help people communicate better across cultures. Admittedly, certain limitations exist in this study. The conclusion may be more convincing if more films with similar themes could be studied. Furthermore, the analysis would be more in-depth if some other factors affecting the cultural value dimensions could also be analyzed.

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