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The Differences in Chinese and American Personal Values from the Perspective of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions taking the Disney Movie "Mulan 2020" as an Example

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Abstract

Cultural stories reflect the customs and values of a country. The spread of cultural stories inevitably carries the colors of other cultures, and with the deepening of cultural communication, different values are also fused in a subtle way, constantly influencing people from different cultural backgrounds. Starting from the study of cross-cultural communication, this paper will take the differences between Chinese and American personal values embodied by Mulan in the Disney movie Mulan 2020 as the starting point, analyze the differences between Chinese and American cultures in combination with the plot and lines of the movie, and finally explore the useful suggestions for the dissemination of cultural stories in the hope that it can provide reference for the reduction of comprehension bias during the process of cultural dissemination, and the promotion of friendly cultural exchanges and fusion.

Keywords

Cultural differences; personal values; Hofstede's Value Dimension; Mulan2020.

1. Introduction

With the deepening of cultural exchanges among countries around the world, the traditional cultural stories of many countries are making their way onto the world stage. These cultural stories reflect the long-standing political, economic and cultural concepts of a country, and deeply influence the values of individuals. Film and television adaptation of cultural stories is an important way of cultural communication today. Compared with direct translation, film and television adaptation can better present the storyline and characters, thus adapting to the needs of cultural communication and understanding. This kind of film and television adaptation inevitably integrates the cultures of different countries, just as Hua Mulan, as a typical Chinese character, gradually develops different characteristics from the original character under the molding of different cultures.

The story of Hua Mulan, as a long history of Chinese culture, first appeared in the poems of the North and South Dynasties in China, telling the story of Mulan's military service on behalf of her father, and behind the story lies the profound connotation of Chinese filial piety culture, which has made this heroine a household name and has been passed down from generation to generation in China. In 2020, Disney launched the live-action version of "Mulan", which has generated great attention for its cross-cultural issues.

Therefore, by sorting out and comparing the personal values of Mulan in Mulan 2020 with those of traditional Chinese Mulan, it can help to understand the cross-cultural connotations behind this movie and to have a deeper understanding of the cultural differences between China and the United States. It can also provide some references for telling a good cultural story, reducing the comprehension bias in the process of cultural communication, and promoting the integration of friendly cultural exchanges and fusions.

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2. Analysing Mulan's personal values from Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions

2.1. Personal values

Personal values are a core aspect of personality and the self [1] and reflect a person's beliefs and perception, evaluation and choice. Such values are relatively lasting and stable, and they govern the motivation of various behaviors, therefore, the value factors behind the characters can be explored through their behaviors. Meanwhile, personal values are closely related to group values. Society plays an important role in influencing the formation of individual values, and a large collection of individual values gradually affects personal values at the social and cultural levels. Characters or events under the influence of different cultures may have very different expressions of values.

The movie Mulan 2020, as a rendition of a Chinese story under the influence of American cultural values, portrays Mulan who differs in values from the traditional Chinese Mulan, which is a typical case of the differences in personal values between Chinese and American cultures, and a concrete embodiment of cross-cultural issues between China and the United States.

2.2. Hofsted's Theory of Cultural Dimensions

In the 1970s psychologist Hofsted initially proposed four dimensions for analyzing national cultural differences through a large-scale cultural values survey and study of employees of various local subsidiaries of the large multinational corporation IBM: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism/Collectivism, and Masculinity/Femininity. In subsequent developments and research, Hofstede was influenced by the Michael Harris Bond's survey of Chinese values, Hofstede added a fifth dimension, Long-Term/Short-Term Orientation, to his survey of national culture. In 2010, Hofstede and his son introduced the study of Bulgarian scholar Michael Minkov on Indulgence and Restraint, adding a sixth dimension, Indulgence/Restraint. [2]

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theoretical model, which is based on the preferred or desired values of a group and reflects the differences in thinking, feeling, and behavioral patterns of the members of a particular society, has become a highly influential theory in cross-cultural research today.

Based on the four dimensions of Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Long-Term/Short-Term Orientation, and Indulgence/Restraint in Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions, the following section will combine the four dimensions with the movie Mulan 2020 to specific episodes and lines, the aspects of filial piety, personal achievement, perseverance, and personal constraint in Mulan's personal values are analyzed to explore the differences in Hua Mulan's personal values under the influence of American culture

2.2.1. Filial Piety & Power Distance

This dimension refers to the extent to which disadvantaged members of a country's institutions, organizations or households expect and accept inequality in the distribution of power. In countries with a relatively high-power distance index, members of the society have a higher degree of acceptance of inequality, and disadvantaged groups tend to rely on powerful groups.

China belongs to the countries with high-power distance, it emphasizes the obedience of the younger generation to the elder generation in Chinese families, advocates respect for teachers and elders in schools, and focuses on superior-subordinate relationship in work, which are all typical manifestations. The United States, on the other hand, is a low power distance country, highlighting the premise of "liberty and justice", which is also reflected in the focus on equal rights.

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In the movie Mulan 2020, the theme of filial piety occupies an important part. Mulan accepts her parents' arrangement and participates in an auspicious match as filial piety; she protects her father and joins the army for him as filial piety. To a certain extent, these episodes reflect the importance China attaches to filial piety, but it is not exactly the filial piety in traditional Chinese culture.

In China, it is often said that "filial piety is the first of all good deeds", which is considered to be the foundation of an individual's moral character. Filial piety is an individual's devotion to family, but also an individual's compromise and obedience to the family. Confucius, an ancient Chinese Confucian scholar, believed that social stability was based on unequal relationships between people and advocated the moral code of "benevolence" and "propriety". The traditional Chinese family, deeply influenced by Confucianism, emphasizes the distinction between the young and the old, the order of seniority, the inability of the younger generation to disobey the elders, and even the lack of necessary communication in the parent-child relationship.

The fact that Mulan's parents talk to her through matchmaker and force her to make the "best" decision is a manifestation of Mulan's obedience under the culture of filial piety. However, there are also many intimate conversations between Mulan and her father, where the father is not a superior and disobedient elder, but a "friend" who can open his heart to his daughter, which is a reflection of the low power distance.

Therefore, the movie shows the fusion of Chinese and American "filial piety", reflecting the difference between Chinese and American personal values in the family, with China emphasizing obedience and compromise to maintain the balance of the family, and the United States emphasizing equality and communication in family relationships. Of course, in modern China, the deeper cultural exchanges between the East and the West have gradually changed the traditional view of the individual and the family, and this Western-conscious "filial piety" culture has been widely understood and accepted by Chinese audiences.

2.2.2. Personal achievements & Individualism/Collectivis

This dimension refers to the extent to which people in a given society are connected to each other, how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others and to society, and whether society is more concerned with individual or collective interests. In an individualistic society, people are more loosely connected, and individual interests take precedence over collective interests, while a collectivist society is more like a strong and united group, and collective interests are more highly valued.

China is a collectivist society, while the United States is more individualistic. Chinese people attach great importance to the collective, from the smallest "filial piety" to the family and clan to the largest "loyalty" to the region and the country, all have a strong sense of collective responsibility. In the movie, Mulan's parents emphasize more than once Mulan's responsibility as a daughter to fight for her family's honor through marriage, which is the best reflection of this.

Mulan's mother, when persuading her father to control Mulan, says:

You forget, Mulan is a daughter, not a son. A daughter brings honor through marriage.

Mulan's father says to Mulan:

Your chi is strong, Mulan. But chi is for warriors not daughters. Soon, you will be a young woman and it is time for you to hide your gift away.

Your job is to bring the best out of Mulan. ... Your job is to bring honor to the family.

But Mulan in the movie is not a woman who blindly devotes herself to filial piety, but a heroine who keeps searching for herself and finally accomplishes herself. Mulan joins the army to protect her father, but also to prove herself. As a woman she can still be as brave as a warrior.

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For the view of personal achievement, she did not succumb to the idea that marriage is the only honor for a woman, but firmly took the responsibility, courage and strength as the meaning of her life. Challenging the limits on the training field, turning defeat into victory on the battlefield, and finally succeeded in saving the emperor and saving the country.

Mulan discusses her favorite girl with her comrades in the barracks, and she says:

My ideal woman is courageous.

And she has a sense of humor.

She's also smart.

What she looks like is not the point.

It is Mulan's ideals and requirements for herself, a reflection of her personal values, which also highlights the feminist overtones in them, and therefore Mulan's pursuit of female values. This kind of person heroism obviously comes from the influence of American values. Therefore, the Mulan here remains the personal values fusion, she has both absolute loyalty to the collective and a strong sense of responsibility, but also accounted for victory over the difficulties, the realization of personal values of the idea of heroism.

2.2.3. Perseverance & Long-Term/Short-Term Orientation

This dimension refers to the extent to which members of a given culture are comfortable with delaying the fulfillment of their material, emotional, and social needs. The populations of countries with a high long-term orientation tend to place greater value on long-term commitments and encourage virtues oriented toward the pursuit of future rewards. Conversely, the populations of countries with a short-term orientation are less accepting of delayed fulfillment of their needs and place greater value on immediate benefits.

China is a long-term oriented country with a pragmatic cultural tradition, and in such a society, frugality and hard work are virtues that are prized in this culture. In both work and life, the Chinese tend to build long-term, stable relationships and try to avoid face-to-face conflict. The United States, on the other hand, is short-term oriented, and this tendency tends not to be self-sacrificing for the sake of long-term harmonious relationships, focusing on rational analysis in choices and quick realization of short-term benefits.

In the movie, Mulan's military life is full of hardships. In the beginning, she dared not take a shower for fear of being recognized as a woman; she could not sleep peacefully because the male comrade next to her would be crowded with her. But she never wants to give up, and gradually adapted to this life. The training in the barracks unleashed her potential and earned her the appreciation of her comrades and the general. Even though she was later expelled from the barracks due to her status as a woman, she still risked being punished by returning to the barracks to deliver the enemy's message, and with the support and trust of her comrades, she led the troops back to the capital city and succeeded in rescuing them. Afterwards, Mulan refused the reward and returned home to make up for her debt to her family.

This coincides with the Chinese personal values that emphasize personal morality and promote perseverance and struggle, which are not exactly the same as the American personal values that focus on satisfaction and relaxation in the moment.

2.2.4. Show or Hide & Indulgence/Restraint

This dimension is defined as the degree to which people attempt to control their desires and impulses based on different upbringing styles. Relatively weak control is called "indulgence", while relatively strong control is called "restraint".

China is a country that favors restraint, where people control the fulfillment of their desires and believe that their behavior is bound by social norms and that they cannot fully indulge themselves. In the United States, indulgence is characterized by the pursuit of pleasure, the importance of freedom of speech and leisure time, and a more relaxed social norm.

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In the first part of the movie, Mulan has been asked by her parents to control her behavior and nature since she was a child, showing the social requirements for a daughter, which leads to Mulan's unwillingness to show her talent and chi in the military camp, and her remorse for her careless play. In the face of the witch's intimidation and temptation, Mulan adheres to her inner moral choice and resolves to help the country to which she is loyal, a sense of social responsibility that stems from her father's education and the influence of society as a whole. After experiencing the confrontation with the witch, Mulan decides to identify herself as a woman, to fully unleash her strength, and to truthfully reveal her hidden inner secrets to the public, even though she is aware of the consequences of doing so. Here Mulan undergoes a qualitative change in her heart, as her social constraints on herself become lighter and her inner desire for self-realization grows stronger.

Mulan's personal values in the movie continue to be a blend of Chinese constraints and restraints and American release and pursuit. The presentation of such personal values in the movie is in line with people's impression of Chinese female heroes, but also reflects the contemporary values of women searching for themselves and releasing themselves.

2.3. Suggestions for the adaptation and dissemination of cultural stories

From the perspective of Zhuoyi Wang, “Mulan (2020) is a window into the tension-ridden intersectionality of the gender, sexual, racial, cultural, and political issues that shape the production and reception of today’s cross-cultural films.”[3] Even though most of the cultural stories cannot fully export their long established and true values embedded within the nation in the process of adaptation and filming, it is undeniable that this kind of cultural dissemination will more or less reveal the more obvious parts of their culture. Therefore, the dissemination of cultural stories requires targeted cultural integration and the exploration of the positive and universal aspects of these stories.

However, relying solely on the adaptation and dissemination of cultural stories by other countries can also lead to problems, such as altering the spiritual core and scenarios of the stories themselves, or deliberately creating contradictions and stereotypes. Therefore, countries with these cultural stories should take the initiative to disseminate them, and use internationalized translations that are more accurate and vivid, and in line with local cultural connotations, to present the real stories.

3. Literature References

At present, cross-cultural research on Mulan 2020 by scholars mainly focuses on the lessons of the film for cultural communication (Huang M, Qin J, Xu J, et al.,2021), the phenomenon of cultural misinterpretation in movie adaptation (Chen R, Chen Z, Yang Y., 2020), differences in characterization (Wang L, Han B, Xu G., 2020), the evolution and comparison between the animated version of the Mulan movie and the live-action version (Negara B P., 2021), the study of the movie from the perspective of feminism or gender (Manaworapong P, Bowen N E J A., 2021), as well as the study of cultural differences between China and the West embodied in the movie. [4-8]

Through specific cross-cultural cultural theories, there are fewer studies on the differences in personal values of Mulan, an independent characterization, in Chinese and American cultures. This is also the reason why the author decided to study the differences in Chinese and American personal values embedded in the film Mulan 2020 from Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions after reading a large amount of related literature

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4. Conclusion

An analysis of Mulan's personal values in the movie Mulan 2020 through the five aspects of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory reveals that there are some obvious differences between Chinese and American personal values.

The Chinese people have a high-power distance and attach importance to the culture of filial piety in their personal values; they advocate collectivism and pay attention to maintaining the honor of the family and the country; they are long-term oriented and possess the spirit of perseverance and struggle; and they will restrain their personal behaviors. Whereas, the American people have a low power distance and emphasize the equality of relationships; they have obvious characteristics of individualism and pay attention to the pursuit of personal achievements and values; they pay more attention to the present moment, and they are more indulgent in their behaviors.

The Mulan shown in the movie is not the product of a single value, but the result of the fusion of the two personal values of China and the United States. Through this fusion, viewers from different cultures can understand the universal values embedded in an unfamiliar cultural story. In today's cross-cultural communication, cultural differences should be treated with tolerance and appreciation, so as to reduce the understanding bias in the process of cultural communication and promote the friendly exchange and integration of cultures.

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