

A Review of the Phenomenon and Formation Mechanism of Cultural Differences between the United States and China

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Abstract:

America and China have different cultures. For example, Chinese culture emphasizes the group, while American culture emphasizes the individual. Chinese culture emphasizes integration, while American culture emphasizes analysis. In addition, there are differences in customs, religious beliefs, and nonverbal communication between the United States and China. This article examines the cultural differences between China and the United States in historical geography, traditional thought, cognitive systems, and language. In the following, I will explain and discuss the reasons for the cultural differences between China and America. The author hopes this article will be helpful for readers interested in cultural differences between China and the United States and global trade exchanges.



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1. Introduction

Culture is a society's faith, custom, system, character, and common way of thinking. It is the whole way of life of the organization and the entire course of working of the nation (Tian, 2014). Culture is shared by members of all linguistic communities and is unique to that linguistic community. Culture is the long-term creation of society and the historical phenomenon of social history accumulation. Along with developing the global economy and the information society, the United States has become a "global village." However, there are still differences between China and the United States (Tian, 2022). This research explores the reasons for the cultural differences between American and Chinese cultures.

2. Literature review

The concept of culture is broad, and it is challenging to define it clearly. Many philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, historians and linguists have been trying to define culture from the perspective of their respective disciplines. However, up to now, no universally accepted and satisfactory definition has been obtained. It is not only a social phenomenon but also a product of human beings long-term production and creation. In a broad sense, culture is the sum of material civilization and spiritual civilization created in human development. Specific culture contains specific political and economic characteristics. In a narrow sense, a country's culture includes lifestyle, customs, thinking mode, art and technology, religious beliefs and values. Culture is the sum of material and spiritual wealth created by human beings in social and historical development. Culture refers specifically to the spiritual wealth created by ideology. Culture is a kind of religion, belief, custom, moral sentiment, academic thought, literature and art, science and technology, and various systems that can be inherited and condensed in and out of materials. China has 5,000 years of culture and history, while the United States has only 200 years of history (Jin, 2007). The difference between American and Chinese culture is immeasurable. They are barriers and gaps in interaction and understanding between the people of both countries. Cultural differences between China and the United States are complex and multifaceted (Wu, 2016).

2.1 Differences in cultural concepts

Traditional Chinese culture, centred on Confucianism, has consistently argued that there is a difference between high and low ranks and that seniority is appropriate. Everything has to be governed by specific rules and hierarchy (Ren, 2021). When young people meet their elders, they are the first to greet them. Students should be respectful of their teachers. The United States has inherited a predominantly Christian Protestant ideology and a weak hierarchy (Huo, 2022). Americans attach great importance to their interests and personal rights, seek equality, and have fewer inter-generational customs (Zhao, 2022). Children call their parents by their first names. Students call their teachers by their first names. Children can discuss and express their views with their parents (Fay, 2021). Human emotions are essential in Chinese culture (Cao, 2021). Human relations have a particular social structure in Chinese society (Huang et al., 2021). Emotions and human faces are related, and those who pay attention to human emotions return to befriend others (Zhou & Chen, 2021). Therefore, self-esteem is created and realized in Chinese culture through kinship and mutual connection. The Chinese place emphasis on family and class and support collectivism. Collective interests always prevail when individual interests conflict with collective interests (Zhang, 2022). In measuring individual behaviour, we are more inclined to be moral. We pay attention to maintaining harmony and collective interests, which is very different from the American culture (Yuan, 2022). The United States advocates personal liberty and stresses realizing the individual's potential, pursuing personal goals, the purpose of private interests, and the supreme rule of law (Kagan, 2021). People in

the United States tend to benefit each other and show relatively little affection. However, they highly value self-interest and freedom and have a strong sense of self (Tsoi & McKiernan, 2022).

2.2 Differences in the mode of thinking

The way of thinking is the result of the social culture and is affected by the production method, history, tradition, philosophy, language and literature (Liu, 2021). The Chinese and the United States cultural backgrounds are not the same, and their thinking style is different. The Chinese prefer holistic thinking, emphasize the whole's priority, and adopt the whole-to-part way of thinking. For example, when stating an order, it should be uppercase to lowercase, i.e. country/state/city number. Display time is the year, month, and day respectively (Li, 2022). Americans like analytical thinking and emphasize sector priorities. They are opposite to the Chinese in expressing spatial demands, from minor to prominent positions, and small to large in expressing time (Walter & Drochon, 2022).

2.3 Differences in customs

There are also significant cultural differences between China and the United States regarding social conventions (Yin, 2021). Considering the attitude of American and Chinese cultures towards different animals. The term "dog" is a derogatory term in most Chinese idioms (Wang and Cheng, 2022); however, the reverse is true in American culture. Dogs, they say, are the best friends of mankind (Segura et al., 2022). This is also reflected in idioms, such as "You're a lucky dog," which means you're fortunate. Likewise for "Owl." The phrase "as wise as an owl" in English idioms shows that it symbolizes wisdom in American culture (Sheridan, 2021). However, the attitude of Chinese culture towards owls is quite the opposite. Owls are so strange and repulsive that ancient superstitions called them "Chow Wu." They said it is bad luck to hear the owl meow at night. Until now, there are superstitious legends such as "night owls enter the house, never come back" (Jia, 2022).

2.4 Differences in religious beliefs

Religion is closely related to Chinese and United States cultural differences (Niu, 2021). In the 2,000 years since the introduction of Buddhism into China, Buddhism has deeply affected the Chinese people, becoming an indispensable part of the Chinese language and vocabulary (Zhang, 2022). Many of these terms have something to do with Buddhism. For example, "Saving one's life is better than building a seven-story pagoda," "All five skandhas are empty," "Becoming a monk in the middle of the journey," "The path of a man is too high for the devil," and so on. However, if these words are translated into English are literal and cannot be understood by Americans (Luo, 2021). Similarly, Christianity, the United States' dominant religion, is deeply rooted in American culture. Most Americans have the same God as Judaism and Christianity. A 1991 Gallup poll found that half of Americans believed God created man about ten thousand years ago. Therefore, in American culture, "God" takes the place of "Buddha" in Chinese. Some idioms and proverbs also refer to this deity. For example, "God sends good luck to food" and "God bless you."

2.5 Differences in nonverbal communication

There are also significant differences in nonverbal communication between China and the United States (Liu, 2015). First, traditional Chinese culture is not good at expressing friendship and intimacy between people using body gestures such as hugging and kissing (Hui, 2022). American culture never stops kissing and hugging between relatives and friends. Second, eye contact is important in interpersonal communication in America. As the saying goes, however, this is not required in China. Some Chinese even deliberately avoid looking into each other's eyes to show humility and respect (Wan, 2021). Third, the American and Chinese have

different requirements for spatial distance (Cao, 2016). Most Americans do not want to get too close when talking. They always keep their distance. Chinese people can tolerate people who do not know each other intimately, but Americans cannot tolerate such physical contact. Therefore, Chinese people have much smaller personal space than Americans. Most of these cultural differences are also reflected in schools. Chinese students usually have to stand up and answer teachers' questions to show respect, while American students usually sit down (Sun, 2021).

3. Interpretation and Discussion

Cultural differences are objective phenomena, and explanations and discussions about the attribution of phenomena are helpful for efficient and effective trade and social exchanges between China and the United States. However, the reasons for cultural differences between China and America are also different and complex. The root causes can be explained and discussed from four aspects: the influence of historical and geographical conditions, the influence of traditional thinking, the influence of cognitive systems, and the influence of symbols.

3.1 Impact of historical and geographical conditions

Chinese people live in a vast interior with a subtropical monsoon climate. There are four distinct seasons. The domestic natural environment and natural resources made the ancient Chinese economic life mainly agricultural (Zhang, 2018). In an agricultural economy, people work in a "work at sunrise, rest at sunset" manner. The self-sufficient lifestyle has created a uniquely Chinese way of life that limits everything. This philosophical speculation that the finite is infinite emphasizes the harmony between groups. American ancestry comes from coastal countries and European regions. With the development of the navigation industry, they believe in human power, express their individuality, dare to adventure and are full of challenges (Wang, 2006). They care about speed and efficiency, are good at math, and are unsatisfied with the status quo. Therefore, they became the first immigrants to North America. Harsh natural conditions, changing weather and conflict with Indians always bring different challenges. Therefore, people and the environment are often in a state of opposition and confrontation, requiring mental initiative, reinforcing the belief in the conquest of nature and the transformation of the world that is the basis of "ocean culture." Chinese culture is based on an agricultural society. It is a complex hierarchical society that emphasizes hierarchy and harmony. However, the United States is not entirely dependent on agriculture but heavily on industry and commerce, and these industries have higher requirements for individual characteristics. Thus, in line with this, the American mindset is personal, which is different from the Chinese interpersonal orientation.

3.2 Impact of traditional ideas

Chinese culture is a domestic culture based on Confucianism, which supports simplicity, harmony, moderation, symmetry and balance (Chen, 2021). Confucius advocated "sticking to it" and "too much is too little." Zhu Xi said: "The middle man is impartial, and the mediocre man is ordinary." "The golden mean" is the fundamental moral principle of Confucius, has become a moral principle of later generations, and is essential to regulate interpersonal relations. Lu Xun once quoted an example. If a man thinks that the house is too dark, someone else must be opposed to it. But if he wants to take the roof down, someone else will try to convince him to open a skylight. This is the so-called "golden mean." The golden mean advocated by the Chinese people lies in the proper adjustment and compromise in interpersonal relations to make themselves and others "get along" without damaging the basic principles so as not to cause fierce confrontation within the group or even rupture. Whether enterprising or withdrawing,

we should be modest, conform to the golden mean and not go to extremes. However, on the other hand, the Chinese people's moderation and peace have developed a kind of inertia to a certain extent, indulging in "harmony" excessively and lacking innovation consciousness and enterprising spirit. Influenced by Confucianism and Taoism, the Chinese see dialectical and holistic thinking as their main characteristics, are characterized by the universality of experience, emphasize the relationship between the individual and society, and form a group-oriented society. Its main features. American culture is a maritime culture based on ancient Greek traditions. The characteristic of that thinking is Aristotelian logical and analytical thinking that emphasizes individuality and freedom. A society dominated by individualism. Americans do not accept mediation. They can be right or wrong and like to be innovative. The American tradition of belief in survival and development permeates competition. To remain unbeatable in the competition, they are always willing to innovate, eager to find new solutions to old problems, and willing to relocate, accept new jobs and take risks. This is something that much Chinese lack.

3.3 Impact of cognitive systems

From the perspective of social cognitive systems, American and Chinese philosophies and epistemologies have built various psychological theories in social and historical contexts (Zhao et al., 2007). The complex social relations in Chinese people's lives force them to pay attention to the outside world, so the structure itself is dependent. On the contrary, since Americans live in relatively simple social relationships, they tend to focus on objects and their goals. In the American social cognitive system, the social organization directly affects cognitive processes. Dialectical and logical thinking is one of the characteristics of this mental process. More importantly, this trait has been preserved and has widely influenced people's psychology and behaviour. Chinese perceptions are situation-oriented, while Americans are person-oriented. As a result, the Chinese react to the world with a passive attitude, while the Americans conquer the world with a playful attitude.

3.4 Impact of symbols

Chinese characters are suitable for visual thinking, and English letters are suitable for logical thinking (Jin, 2014). The differences between Chinese and English are consistent with the cultural differences between China and the United States. Chinese characters originated from pictographs, and pictographs developed directly from primitive totems. They describe the objects they refer to using glyphs and express their meanings using shapes. In other words, at the beginning of the creation of characters, Chinese characters were unified with the things they described; The English alphabetic characters maintain the unity with pronunciation when creating characters. The agreement of these two kinds of differences reflects two orientations: one is oriented to objects, and the other is oriented to speech. Therefore, the author draws two conclusions. First, the primary kanji source is intuitive pictograms, whose meaning is based on similarities between symbols and images. Second, the shape and pronunciation of the English alphabet are consistent. Nevertheless, there is no relationship similar to what they point out. Alphabets are very abstract. Based on the above two results, the author believes that Chinese are good at induction and Americans are good at analysis.

4. Conclusion

Generally speaking, the cultural differences between China and the United States are manifested in many aspects, including cultural concepts, ways of thinking, customs, religious beliefs, and nonverbal communication. In addition, various factors, including historical and geographical conditions, traditional ideas, cognitive systems, languages and characters, also determine the formation mechanism of cultural differences between the two countries.

Culture is generally a broad and complex field as a social and historical phenomenon. In addition, due to the differences in history, geography, customs, cognitive system and personality between China and the United States, there are many cultural differences between the two countries, which also causes the problem of cross-cultural communication. Through literature review and comparison, the public can learn more about each other's cultures and realize the cultural differences between the two countries. In that case, people can better avoid misunderstandings in mutual exchanges, prevent conflicts that may occur in communications, and better promote interactions between different cultures by broadening our respective horizons.

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