

Analysis on Fresh off the Boat from the Perspective of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

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Abstract: Fresh off the Boat, which was produced and aired by ABC, tells the story of Eddie's family from Taiwan that immigrated to the United States. Based on Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions, this paper will analyze the differences between Chinese and American culture from Individualism and Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Indulgence and Restraint.

Keywords: Fresh off the Boat, Hofstede, Cultural dimensions.

1. Introduction

Fresh off the Boat was adapted from the book written by a Chinese-American writer Eddie Huang, which tells the story of a Taiwanese family that came to Orlando in the 1990s. Huang loved everything in America from an early age, especially hip-hop. His father was well integrated into the local community, but his mother was often confused by white culture.

In TV series, Eddie's family used to live in Washington's Chinatown. Then his father went to Orlando to open an American fast-food restaurant. They experienced many laughable because of the difference of culture and custom. There are six people in the family: the eccentric, mean grandmother, the thrifty mother Jessica, the honest and loyal dad Louis, the hip-hop-loving eldest son Eddie, the handsome second son Emory, the smart youngest son Evan.

2. Literature Review

Dutch psychologist Geert Hofstede proposed his theory of cultural dimensions, which is a framework for measuring cultural differences in different countries. He proposes six dimensions of culture: Power Distance, Individualism and Collectivism, Masculinity and Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long-term orientation and Short-term orientation, Indulgence and Restraint (Hofstede, 2010).

3. Analyses on Fresh off the Boat

3.1. Individualism and Collectivism

Individualism and Collectivism dimension that focuses on the degree of social recognition of individual achievements and interpersonal relationships. Individualistic culture emphasizes respect for individual choices and decisions, while collectivist culture emphasizes group and harmony. The United States takes individualism as its core value, while Chinese culture is typical collectivism.

Case 1:

Eddie's father, Louis, as a volunteer in his son's school, coached the school's basketball team. Louis joined the basketball team and actively encouraged the players to work together to prepare for the game. But members of the basketball team said they don't need to practice because they think team member Dmitri, a tall, good basketball player, can lead them to win the game.

Case 2:

Jessica's sister is going to visit Huang family. Jessica doesn't want to lose face in front of her relatives, so she changes her hair style into a "successful" one. They also want to cover the truth that their restaurant is in bad condition.

Chinese pay attention to collectivism, especially their image and status of in the community. They do not want to be humiliated in front of acquaintances, so when Jessica's sister proposed to visit her, the whole Huang family attaches great importance to that with all means to make themselves look rich.

3.2. Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance refers to a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity, and it shows people's anxiety and distrust facing with the unknown. People from different cultures embrace different attitudes and measures to avoid risks when faced with uncertain things and situations.

Case 3:

Eddie's mom is the director of the play for kids. In her story, that American boy who chooses actor as his career finally become homeless. For her own kids, she wants them to be a lawyer or doctor, so that they could get stable income. Jessica is a traditional Chinese in nature. She believes that doctors, lawyers means stable income and stable life. In family education, she wants her youngest son to become a doctor or president in future. In her view, actor means too much uncertainty, which made her afraid and anxious, so in the drama she wrote, the child who chose to be an actor ended up on the streets. She also wanted to use such a story to warn other students.

China is a country that avoids uncertainty. Chinese culture advocates modesty, euphemism, while the United States focuses on individuality, risk-taking, respect for differences, people tend to express their needs more bluntly.

3.3. Indulgence and Restraint

The dimension of "Indulgence and restrained" refers to the degree to which a society allows for people's basic needs and desire to enjoy the enjoyment of life. The greater the value of self-indulgence, the less binding the society as a whole is on itself, and the greater the degree of allowing the society to indulge itself, the less restrictive people are.

Case 4:

Eddie gets A in the exam, but his mother thinks the school course is too easy. She is afraid that her son will fall behind, so she wants to find an extra school--- CLC(Chinese Learning Center). The headmaster tells her that they have an after-school program.

Case 5:

When Eddie first came to junior high school, as the only Asian, he was not accepted by other students. Later, the headmaster introduced Eddie to Philip, a transfer student, an Asian child adopted by Jews. However, the two people have completely different personalities. In order to help her son make friends, Mrs. Huang began to be nice to Philip. During the conversation, Mrs. Huang learned that Philip grew up under strict education, with excellent academic performance and wide hobbies. Philip mentioned that he practiced cello more than five times a day. He pursues perfection in every practice. If he plays it wrong, he will play it from beginning to end. Philip mentioned that he had to hurry home to do his homework after music class. After listening to Philip's words, Mrs. Huang's eyes lit up. She thought her son should be as hardworking as Philip. Since then, Mrs. Huang has been actively interacting with the Phillips family. But Philip was selfish and didn't keep his promise with Eddie. Mrs. Huang angrily denounced Philip as a child in China, and their family immediately broke off contact with Philip's family.

Case 6:

When Eddie's family went on holiday for the first time, Louis booked massage and steak dinner. After learning that the services were expensive, Jessica decided to cancel them. During the vacation, in order to save money, Jessica didn't want to eat snacks in the hotel room, and refused to rent towels. However, because Jessica was too thrifty, the family's travel experience is not good. Louis began to change Jessica's mind so that the family could enjoy the holiday. He took the whole family to enjoy massages and had a steak dinner. The last family had a pleasant holiday.

Chinese people firmly believe that ideal life can only be obtained from hard work, so Chinese will have higher requirements for themselves. Eddie suddenly got an all-A in the new school. Jessica insists that the school course is too simple and wants her children to take some extracurricular classes. But the principal refused her request, suggesting that the school had only one after-school activity on animals, which Jessica said would not help her child's grades.

4. Reasons

4.1. Different culture

China has a long history. In the history of thousands of years, China has implemented a feudal monarchy. Feudal monarchs used strict hierarchy and laws to rule the country, requiring the people to obey the monarch absolutely and suppress the development of their individuality. The United States is a multi-ethnic integration of the country, people of different nationalities live in the United States, different cultures so that people do not have to be too bound.

4.2. Different Economic System

As a socialist country, China has adopted a system of public ownership as the main body and the common development of various ownership economies, with the main means of production shared by the whole society. The United States is a capitalist country. Capitalism emphasizes the sanctity of

private property, paying more attention to individual development.

4.3. Long Rule of feudal Dynasties VS Integration of Many Ethnic

China is deeply influenced by Confucianism, which advocates justice and shame, and "courtesy" which emphasizes the hierarchy among members, requiring members to speak and act in accordance with their social status.

While Europe and the United States believe in Christianity, Christian doctrine advocates that all people are created equal, paying more attention to personal feelings.

5. Conclusion

This paper discusses the cultural differences between China and the United States embodied in the American drama "Fresh off the Boat". There are great differences between Chinese and American cultures, which may cause trouble in the process of cross-cultural communication between China and the United States. But through certain strategies, people can complete successful cross-cultural communication. In the episode, we find that Eddie Huang's family can gradually recognize the differences between Chinese and American culture. They not only maintain their own Chinese cultural habits, but also can gradually adapt to American cultural habits. Therefore, " Fresh off the Boat " shows us a successful cross-cultural communication.

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