

# Discussion and Analysis on the Communication of Automobile Culture in China

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**Abstract:** Taking Germany, the United States and Japan as examples, the article compares the evolution process of foreign advanced automobile culture; Taking 2000 and 2009 as the time nodes, the article divides the evolution of Chinese automobile culture into three stages. Drawing on the formation process of foreign advanced automobile culture and based on the development status of Chinese automobile culture, this paper constructs a model of Chinese automobile culture. Under the background of the post epidemic era, the article conducts a SWOT strategic analysis of China's automobile culture, and proposes that China must grasp the two strategic directions of green and environment-friendly consumption concept and civilized and harmonious driving behavior to guide China's automobile culture to develop towards green and healthy step by step.

**Keywords:** Automobile culture; Development strategy; Consumption concept; Driving behavior.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, cars have greatly changed people's daily life. Taking marriage as an example, from the "old three big things" such as bicycles, watches and sewing machines to the "new three big things" such as houses, cars and tickets, cars are gradually infiltrating into people's social life and becoming an irreplaceable part of people's daily life. The emergence and popularity of cars not only changed the "three major items" of marriage, but also represented the change of people's lifestyle and improvement of living standards. China's automobile industry has experienced more than 70 years of hard development. When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the national car ownership was 59000, the total population was 5416.7 million, and an average of 9180847 people owned a car; By 2020, the national car ownership has reached 273.49 million, the total population is 1412.12 billion, and an average of 5165 people own a car. Today, China can be called a country on wheels. As an advocate of green automobile culture, China took the lead in encouraging enterprises to vigorously develop new energy vehicles. Especially in the post epidemic era, in the face of increasingly complex industrial competition pattern, China has introduced a series of relevant policies to constantly guide China's automobile culture towards the direction of green environmental protection.

## 2. The Evolution of Foreign Automobile Culture

The core of automobile culture is the habit of drivers to buy and use cars, which embodies a country's consumption concept and driving norms for automobiles. Due to the obvious differences in religious beliefs and customs in different countries, cars in different social environments also have a unique cultural temperament. In the process of the development of the world's cars, the car cultures of Germany, the United States and Japan are the most typical.

### 2.1. German automobile culture

Germany is not only the birthplace of automobiles, but also the world leader in advanced automobile manufacturing technology and perfect automobile industry system. German automobile culture is mainly reflected in the following aspects:

First, Germans are keen on local brand cars. German enterprises strive to perfect every screw, which has created Germany's powerful automobile manufacturing technology. Compared with the same imported brands, Germans are often more willing to choose local automobile brands. Second, Germans pay attention to the consumption concept of pragmatism. For most Germans, the car is just a means of transportation. Practicability and energy saving are the main considerations when they consume. Third, Germans prefer manual transmission cars. Compared with automatic cars, Germans prefer the pleasure of controlling cars by themselves. In addition, the transmission of automatic cars consumes more fuel, which is inconsistent with the German consumption concept of energy conservation. Fourth, Germans show good driving etiquette. In Germany, comity to pedestrians is a conventional behavior of drivers. In case of traffic accidents, drivers on both sides will actively guide the crowd around while waiting for the arrival of the traffic police.

### 2.2. American automobile culture

In the American Wanderer, Creswell once pointed out that mobility plays an important role in the geographical life of the United States, which is used to distinguish it from European ancestors. This mobility has shaped the unique American spirit, and the American automobile culture represents the values of personal supremacy and capitalist efficiency.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Ford Company of the United States used large-scale assembly line to produce cars for the first time. The appearance of the Ford Model T enabled ordinary people to buy cars. By 1954, Americans had 60% of the total number of cars in the world, and about 69.5% of Americans drove to and from work. After the end of World War II, the United States really entered the automobile era, and the automobile culture also rose rapidly. In 1956, the

United States promulgated the National Intercontinental Defense Highway Adjustment Act, planning to invest 25 billion dollars in building a 66,000 km intercontinental highway network within 20 years. The crisscross highway network provides people with great convenience. Under this background, all kinds of sports cars with super horsepower and muscular appearance came into being and quickly became popular. Americans call them "muscle cars". Muscle cars not only truly reflect the American automobile culture, but also show the American national spirit of enthusiasm, freedom and individuality.

### **2.3. Japanese automobile culture**

The second oil crisis broke out in the 1970s, and Japanese cars, famous for their small displacement and low fuel consumption, gradually stepped onto the world stage. Japan, as a place where automobiles take off, has innovated and upgraded the automobile industry, focusing on the production of compact, durable and high-quality small cars. There are three main reasons why Japanese prefer cars with small displacement: first, cars with small displacement are affordable, with lower taxes and daily maintenance fees; Secondly, the Japanese have a high sense of conservation and environmental protection, which has created their consumption concept of pursuing energy conservation and emission reduction; Finally, this is also consistent with the Japanese life philosophy of pursuing peace and security from a narrow space.

Throughout the history of the world's automobile development, German automobile culture fully reflects the pragmatic attitude of German people to life, and the practical and environment-friendly consumption concept is embodied in automobile production and manufacturing; American automobile culture is the concentrated embodiment of American individualism supreme values, which shows the American spirit of advocating freedom and pursuing individuality, and reveals the deep-seated reasons for Americans' obsession with large displacement cars; The Japanese automobile culture reflects the Japanese character of being careful and pursuing efficiency, while the compact, durable, energy saving and emission reduction small cars are the biggest characteristics of Japanese cars.

## **3. The Evolution of Chinese Automobile Culture**

In 1901, the first car appeared in China. However, in the next 100 years, cars will be almost unimaginable luxury for ordinary people. In this period, China has not really formed its own car culture, and the car culture is in its infancy. The year 2000 was the first year of the formation of China's automobile culture. In this year, cars entered ordinary Chinese families, opening the prelude to China's automobile culture. With the continuous increase of China's automobile production and sales, China surpassed the United States to become the world's largest automobile production and sales country in 2009. Taking 2009 as the dividing point, the development of China's automobile culture can be subdivided into two stages: the initial formation stage of China's automobile culture from 2000 to 2009, and the strong rise stage of China's automobile culture since 2009.

### **3.1. The embryonic stage of Chinese automobile culture**

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, with the recovery of the national economy, it began to fully implement the planned economic system. Under the planned economy, all cars are uniformly rationed by the state, and almost all cars produced are used for public use. After the reform and opening up, the government reformed the automobile industry, gradually shifting from a planned economy to a market mechanism, and automobiles began to appear in the form of commodities. In 1984, Beijing Jeep, the first joint venture automobile enterprise, was established in China. Since then, advanced technologies and automobile brands of the world automobile industry have poured into China, marking the official opening up and joint venture development of China's automobile industry. However, although the automobile industry has made great progress, the core technology cannot be obtained only through joint venture. In addition, the high price of automobiles is far higher than the income of ordinary families, and the sales of automobiles are limited. At this time, China's automobile culture is still in its infancy.

### **3.2. Initial formation stage of Chinese automobile culture**

Since 2000, with China's accession to the WTO, China's automobile industry has made rapid progress in its connection with the world, and people's demand for automobiles has also shown a blowout growth. At this stage, people's consumption behavior towards cars shows a distinctive feature of purchasing compact cars or three compartment cars with manual transmission. On the one hand, compared with the crowded space of small cars, people prefer compact cars, and the car market is gradually transitioning from small cars to compact cars; On the other hand, due to the backwardness of technology and the limitation of price, the car with manual transmission was the first choice of consumers at that time. During the 10 years from 2000 to 2009, China's automobile culture was in the initial stage of formation.

### **3.3. The strong rise stage of China's automobile culture**

With the rapid development of China's automobile industry, China successfully surpassed Japan to become the second largest automobile producer in the world in 2006, and surpassed the United States to become the first in the world in 2009. Since then, China's automobile culture has entered a stage of strong rise. The automobile culture in this stage mainly presents two characteristics: first, the automobile consumption is high-end, the sales of high-end automobile brands in China continue to rise, and China's automobile consumption market continues to move towards the high-end market; Second, the concept of automobile consumption has been constantly upgraded. Its characteristics are mainly reflected in the following aspects:

The second-hand car market is expanding. In the traditional sense, the strong sense of "face" makes Chinese people seldom buy second-hand cars. However, with the obvious improvement of economic conditions and living standards, people's consumption concept is becoming more rational, and second-hand cars have become a good choice for a considerable number of consumers. Since 2009, China's second-hand car trading volume has continued to increase,

and the second-hand car market has become prosperous.

The rise of multi-function sports vehicles (SUVs). In recent years, SUV vehicles with large space and multi-function are favored by consumers. In addition to the relaxation of the national two tire and three tire policies and the acceleration of urbanization, the sales of SUV vehicles in China continue to rise. With the diversification of China's passenger car market, the types of cars are gradually increasing, and the sales of SUVs in China are increasing year by year.

The sales of new energy vehicles continued to grow. The increase in the number of cars has also brought many negative benefits to the environment. Under the advocacy of the concept of green environmental protection, people have gradually strengthened their understanding of new energy vehicles, and the sales volume of new energy vehicles is also rising rapidly, as shown in Table 2. In 2015, China surpassed the United States to become the world's largest new energy vehicle market. With the rise of new energy vehicles, China is gradually forming a green and healthy automobile culture.

## **4. Characteristics of Chinese Automobile Culture**

### **4.1. The consumption habit of buying cars at a large scale**

Influenced by traditional culture, Chinese people have formed a unique aesthetic concept, preferring cars with three compartments. In the eyes of Chinese people, cars can symbolize status, and big cars seem to show more dignity and style. Compared with crowded hatchback cars, hatchback cars just meet Chinese consumers' demand for large space. The consumption habit of Chinese people who like to buy big cars has led to such a phenomenon in the Chinese automobile market: cars with larger wheelbase are often more popular with Chinese consumers, and such rebuilt cars are also called "Chinese special cars".

### **4.2. Usage habits of cars as valuables**

The love of Chinese people for cars may be less than one tenth of that of Germany, the birthplace of cars, but the love of Chinese people for cars is obviously far greater than that of many countries. In China, most people decorate car seats with seat covers to better protect cars. It seems that adding seat covers to cars has become a common practice in China, because cars are hard won. For most ordinary families, cars are high value items, and consumers often treat them as valuables.

## **5. Contents of Chinese Automobile Culture**

### **5.1. Model of automobile culture**

If the western consumer culture represents the automobile culture, the behavior culture of Chinese automobile drivers faithfully reflects the automobile culture of contemporary China. The behavior habit of Chinese drivers in buying and using cars is the most prominent part of the automobile culture, which directly reflects the true face of Chinese automobile culture, making the behavior culture the core part of Chinese automobile culture. Based on this, we divide Chinese automobile culture into two parts: connotation and extension. The connotation is the substantial culture of automobile culture, especially the behavior habits of drivers in buying and using cars. The denotation is the image culture

of automobile culture, which is composed of social environmental factors such as laws and regulations, ethics and morality, and automobile manufacturers. These environmental factors affect the consumption and use habits of drivers in different ways and degrees.

### **5.2. Connotation of Chinese automobile culture**

British anthropologist Taylor believes that culture is a complex whole, including knowledge, belief, art, morality, law, custom and all abilities and habits obtained in society. After cars entered ordinary families in China, people gradually formed a set of unique behaviors, such as preferring to buy larger cars and decorating cars. These special behaviors can be divided into consumption behavior and driving behavior, which constitute the core connotation of automobile culture.

Automobile consumption behavior is affected by consumption concept. Consumption concept can be divided into rational consumption concept and irrational consumption concept, among which rational consumption concept includes practical consumption concept and environmental protection consumption concept. Consumer groups that focus on practical consumption concept pay more attention to the quality, performance, reliability and safety of automobiles. With the increasing tension of global energy and the increasing environmental pollution, consumers' awareness of environmental protection has gradually improved, and more and more advocate the concept of green consumption. Irrational consumption concept means that consumers give more added value to cars. The use value is no longer the only standard to measure the purchase of cars. People prefer to evaluate a car from a multidimensional perspective. Under the irrational consumption concept, consumers are no longer buying cars for the purpose of use, but pursuing novelty and fashion trends, or using cars to highlight their social status.

Driving behavior is also a part of the connotation of automobile culture. According to Oscar Iván, good driving behavior includes two aspects: one is the behavior of abiding by traffic laws and regulations, and the other is the behavior of giving way to drivers, pedestrians, passengers and police; In addition, the connotation of automobile culture also includes the behavior of drivers to analyze changes in road and traffic environment and take correct solutions, strengthen the study of relevant laws and regulations, improve safety awareness, and conduct daily maintenance and repair of automobiles.

### **5.3. Extension of Chinese automobile culture**

The extension of automobile culture includes laws and regulations, ethics and automobile manufacturers, which play an important role in the formation of automobile culture.

Laws and regulations. As a means of transportation, automobile needs the government to guide people to purchase and use it correctly through laws and regulations, and adjust the development direction of the national automobile industry at an appropriate time, so as to guide the development of automobile culture towards a healthy direction. In January 2000, the Proposal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Formulating the Tenth Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development put forward for the first time to "encourage cars to enter the family", which clearly included cars in the national development plan. Under this background, China's

automobile culture was born. In March 2016, the Opinions on the 13th Five Year Plan for Automotive Development clearly pointed out that new energy vehicles and smart new energy batteries are the new direction in the field of automotive innovation in the future. The promulgation of this policy means that the government will gradually guide the development of China's automotive culture in a green direction. It can be seen that the role of laws and regulations in the formation of automobile culture cannot be ignored.

**Ethics.** Laws and regulations restrict people's behavior of purchasing and using cars from the outside, while ethics and morality affect the spiritual civilization of drivers from the inside, thus restricting drivers' behavior. In the process of building a healthy car culture, the quality of vehicle drivers is particularly important, which should clearly reflect the humanistic care and respect for the old, the weak, the sick, the disabled, the pregnant and the young, as well as the social responsibility they should bear. The healthy development of automobile culture needs the protection of laws, regulations and ethics.

**Automobile manufacturers.** Automobile manufacturers play an important role in the formation of automobile culture. Automobile culture comes from a series of processes such as automobile invention, design, production, sales and use, in which automobile manufacturers play an indispensable role. Automobile manufacturers endow automobile performance, quality and connotation, making enterprise culture, brand culture and product culture an important part of automobile culture. Cars produced by an organization full of professionalism, high technology and meticulous working attitude, with a good corporate culture, represent an automobile culture in itself.

## 6. The Development Strategy of Chinese Automobile Culture in the Post epidemic Era

### 6.1. SWOT strategic analysis

China's auto culture has its own inherent advantages of rapid development and superior social system, but it has different degrees of drawbacks in terms of development time, technical level and systematisms; Affected by the COVID-19, China's automobile culture is facing the development opportunity of improving consumer safety and environmental awareness and policy support, but also the challenge of high fuel prices and rising environmental standards.

### 6.2. Strategic direction of reshaping automobile culture

To realize the reconstruction of automobile culture in the post epidemic era, we must start from the core connotation of automobile culture, which can be implemented from the following two aspects:

First, establish the concept of green and environment-friendly consumption. The consumption concept of green and environmental protection is conducive to the sound development of China's automobile culture. At present, all countries are facing the severe test of energy depletion and environmental pollution. Advocating the consumption concept of green, saving and environmental protection, and accelerating the development of new energy vehicles is undoubtedly an effective way to reshape China's automobile culture. The second is to advocate civilized and harmonious driving behavior. Due to the short time that cars have entered

ordinary families in China, people, cars and roads have not yet reached a unified and harmonious situation, so there are still many disharmonious problems in China's automobile society. Therefore, it is necessary to start from the driver, constantly standardize the driving etiquette of the driver, advocate civilized and harmonious driving behavior, drive the whole society to create a harmonious automobile social atmosphere, and ultimately shape an advanced and safe automobile culture.

## 7. Conclusion

Automobile culture is a side portrait of the rise and fall of society. Germany, the United States and Japan are the most typical auto cultures in the world. China's auto industry started late and has not yet formed an advanced auto culture. Compared with foreign advanced automobile culture, Chinese automobile culture can be divided into two parts: connotation and extension. However, the spread of the global epidemic has made China's automobile culture face many challenges. In the post epidemic era, if we want to reshape the automobile culture, we must start from its core connotation and focus on both consumer behavior and driving behavior, so as to lay a solid foundation for the development of the automobile industry.

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