

Cultural Conflict in American Factory from the Perspective of Hofstede's Cultural Dimension

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Abstract: Documentary is a kind of artistic creation which takes real people and events as the object and triggers people's thinking through the recording of objective and real situations. American factory records the process of Chinese entrepreneur Cao Dewan's investment in Dayton, Ohio, and reconstruction of the local closed factory. From the perspective of Hofstede's cultural dimension theory, the collision between Chinese and American cultures in American Factory will be analyzed from power distance, collectivism and individualism, and uncertainty avoidance.

1. Introduction

American factory, released at the Sundance Film Festival on January 25, 2019, is a documentary produced by former US President Barack Obama and starred by China's "Glass King" Cao Dewan. Once released, it has aroused a lot of controversy and gained a lot of praise. At present, the score in China douban.com is 8.5, earning a 95% rating on Rotten Tomatoes. This film tells the story about Cao Dewan, a Chinese entrepreneur, who took over an abandoned General Motors factory in Dayton, Ohio, the "rust belt" of the United States and rebuilt it into a glass factory. Because he brought thousands of jobs to the local people, Cao Dewan was warmly welcomed and appreciated by the government and the people of Dayton at very beginning. To some extent, he was also regarded as a savior by the local people. However, when the factory was officially put into production, problems came one after another. Despite the costs in all aspects and the support of the local government, Fuyao US factory was still facing a loss. In addition, Cao Dewan is also faced with the increasingly fierce collision between Chinese and American cultures. Thus, in this American factory built by the Chinese, it provides a valuable opportunity for China and the United States to observe each other closely and provides an excellent model for people to explore the positive significance of cross-cultural communication between China and the United States.

The theory of cultural dimension was put forward by Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social psychologist, leaving a far-reaching influence in the field of cross-cultural research. This paper will from power distance, individualism collectivism, long-term orientation and short-term orientation, respectively discuss what cultural conflicts Fuyao American factory under Cao Dewan's leadership encountered in the process of achieving corporate profits, the differences between Chinese and American cultures, and the enlightenment for our cross-cultural communication.

2. The Embodiment of Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory in the American Factory

2.1 Power Distance

Hofstede believes that the power distance is the expectation and acceptance of the unequal distribution of power by the vulnerable members in the organization of a country, and it is the yardstick to measure the unequal distribution of power within social organizations. In the enterprise, the typical performance is the obedience and awe of the staff to the authority represented by the superior and the management. However, in social organizations with low power distance, although the management has decision-making power and certain authority, it does not arouse the awe of employees. On the contrary, it tends to dilute the inequality of power distribution and support a freer and more equal organizational atmosphere. Different cultures have different understanding and acceptance of the power distance. Traditional Chinese culture tends to have a bigger power distance, with clear hierarchy and centralized rights at the top. In contrast, American culture tends to accept the lower power distance, and emphasizes the inherent equality of rights of social members. The management of social organizations rarely intervene in employees unnecessarily. In the film, the Chinese factory of Fuyao Glass implements semi-military management on workers and holds regular meetings before work. Chinese workers need to stand in neat rows and count off as soldiers, chanting slogans. The American leaders who come here to learn from the experience are shocked and feel unbelievable. They decide to bring this management method to the United States. But the effect is really unsatisfactory. The American workers even can't stand in a row, leaving the director awkwardly, let alone the other things. So, it is not difficult to understand the conflicts when Chinese executives manage American employees in the old way. Besides, an American female employee once complained her Chinese supervisor for yelling at her. The Chinese supervisor explained innocently that he just made a request because the American employee did not give him any feedback. It is easy to see that the reason of the conflict owns to that Chinese executives are used to the mechanized management and command their subordinates to do things with authority, while American employees think that they should work equally. Behind this, it reflects the differences between the management philosophy in China and the deep-rooted right consciousness of American workers.

2.2 Individualism Vs Collectivism

Hofstede holds that individualism refers to the loose social structure in which social members pay attention to the rights of individuals, while collectivism is a close social structure. Social members seek protection by integrating into the collective, respect mutual harmony and mutual assistance, and submit their personal feelings to the overall interests of the team. As an immigrant country, the culture of the United States is highly individualistic, emphasizing the sacredness of individual rights, the high degree of independence of social members, and great concern for self-esteem. The Chinese culture, which has been influenced by Confucianism for a long time, is a typical collectivism culture, which emphasizes that the individual is supreme to the collective interests, and the members of the organization have spiritual obligations and loyalty to the organization. In addition, status of people in the group is also hierarchical, and the individuals need to act according to the hierarchy. In the documentary, there is a huge difference between collectivism and individualism between China and the United States, which is presented almost through the whole story. Fuyao Glass Factory is characterized by unity. All the people gather together to sing the song of the enterprise and bless to each other like a family at the Spring Festival party. Compared with the harmonious atmosphere in Chinese factory, there are contradictions between Chinese executives and American employees in American factories that neither side can understand. In the eyes of American employees, the Chinese have a poor attitude, and they feel they are not respected. The company never express the gratitude to the employees for their hard work

and let alone the verbal rewards. Thus, it is not hard to find that in the United States, which accepts a highly individualistic culture, people pay attention to self-esteem, resent being asked by direct orders, and need to explain the motivation or principle of orders. By contrast, the Chinese workers work attentively, never chat during the work, and obey the orders of the leaders.

2.3 Uncertainty Avoidance

As for uncertainty avoidance, Hofstede defines it as the degree of response to threats that people show when facing uncertain or unknown environments. And we can judge this feeling by people's tension and their need for predictability which involve both the written and unwritten. In the society where uncertainty is low, social members often have certain psychological expectations for risks and future uncertainties and can accept uncertainty and deal with risks calmly. In the culture of high uncertainty avoidance, social members show high tension and pressure on the unknown. China is a country with high degree of uncertainty avoidance which advocates introversion, being disciplined and tolerant. It often adopts a silent and evasive attitude towards environmental threats. For example, The Chinese worker Wang dedicated his whole youth, from 18-year-old to middle-aged, and stuck to his post for more than 20 years. Leaving his wife and children in China, he came to the American branch factory without extra bonus. He even can't even eat my meal at most of time, but only eat two pieces of bread. In front of the camera, he smiled and told the scald on his arm calmly. He thinks employees are like the people laying tracks, and they don't think too much except for doing their job well. In the eyes of these Chinese workers abroad, it is the factory locals think is unsafe and inhuman that gives them the opportunity to realize their ideal. Compared with the older generation, they are grateful for their ability to have such a life and job opportunities. American culture, however, advocates risk-taking, encouraging innovation and expressing their opinions. At the early stage of the establishment of the factory, at the staff training meeting to understand American culture and customs, a trainer once stressed that the United States is a place to be released, so long as it does not break the law, it can do whatever it wants, and even if the president jokes, he will not have any responsibility. Americans are outspoken, and pragmatic. Such characteristics are mainly reflected in it that American workers are generally brave to express their thoughts and safeguard their rights which is struggled by them for long time. The workshop of Fuyao American factory has only one exit and no entrance which Chinese workers are used to. In the camera, American workers worries that if there is a fire, they cannot escape in time and be trapped. When Chinese supervisors require the American workers to operate the stand-up forklift to carry twice the maximum load, they feel it dangerous and directly refuse. In addition, the operation mode of Fuyao factory at the cost of environment and workers' health is different from the inherent values of American employees. Ignored by their supervisor, American employees resort to labor union to intervene those problems existing in the workplace. They urgently seek attention and wanted to fight for legitimate rights and interests by expressing their voice.

3. Conclusion

By investing in the documentary *American factories*, former US President Barack Obama hopes to get outside of their lives and experience and understand the lives of somebody else. Apart from the cultural conflicts, labor relations and enterprise working environment in the film, this documentary at least plays a positive role: the characters under the camera show us the process of mutual adaptation and mutual understanding, from which we can see the willingness of Chinese and American people to exchange and cooperate. Because of the selfless teaching of Xiao Wang, a Chinese employee, rob, the kiln director, regards him as a teacher and invited Xiao Wang to his home for Thanksgiving. Even at the end of the film, the friendship between the workers of the two

countries does not end because they leave the factory. In the context of globalization, more Chinese enterprises are just beginning to go to world. Therefore, we should be prepared for cross-cultural exchanges, eliminate stereotypes, understand each other's culture without prejudice, communicate rationally, seek common ground while reserving differences, and achieve win-win cooperation.

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