

A Comparative Study of Cultural Values in Chinese and American Food Corporation Profiles

Meiling Liu¹, Zhongmin Li^{2,*}

¹*School of Foreign Languages, Hunan Applied Technology University, Changde, Hunan, 415100, China*

²*School of Foreign Languages, Hunan University of Arts & Science, Changde, Hunan, 415100, China*

**Corresponding author*

Keywords: Adaptation theory, Corporation profile, Cultural values

Abstract: Corporation profiles serve as informative discourses that align with the structural elements and contextual aspects of language. Based on Adaptation Theory, this research aims to compare the cultural values embodied in Chinese and American food corporation profiles. Altogether 20 texts were selected for analysis. Results show that the common purpose of Chinese and American food corporation profiles is to achieve profit, which reflects the economic orientation of corporate values in both countries. In terms of structural object conformity, Chinese and American food corporate profiles show great differences. For example, Chinese food companies tended to use positive four-character idioms in their profiles, reflecting the values of “harmony” “goodness” and “beauty”, while the profiles in American corporate were simpler, practical and concise. In terms of contextual component conformity, the differences are reflected in the level of power distance, collectivism and individualism, etc. The reasons causing the differences were analyzed from social, economic and cultural factors.

1. Introduction

Corporation profile, like “business cards”, serves to introduce the basic information of corporations to the public, which facilitates a cooperative relationship between the two parties. While it is a description, it is different from a general manual as it is stylistically subdivided into conceptual exposition, narration, and description. Structurally, it is mainly in the form of a general division and a subdivision. Functionally, it is equivalent to a communicative act that promotes mutual benefit and cooperation through communication and interaction. With the rapid development of economy, people’s living standards are improving day by day. People pay more attention to food hygiene and safety, which shows that food corporations play a vital role in the society. Since there is no standardized way of editing food corporation profiles, many studies on this topic focus on the translation and stylistic aspects of the profiles. Adaptation theory provides a new perspective for understanding language. Therefore, this research aims to study the cultural values in Chinese and American food corporation profiles. Through a comparative study, this research attempts to answer the following questions: What are the differences between the cultural

values of Chinese and American corporation profiles in terms of language structure and contextual adaptation? What are the reasons causing the differences?

2. Corporate Culture and Values

Corporate culture, first developed in the 1980s, is a mental and material form characterized by the production and management activities of a corporation [1]. It exists objectively and influences the behavior of all members, providing a harmonious environment for colleagues of different ages, levels, and positions. It is an integral part of a corporation and is of utmost importance for its success. Corporate culture acts as a set of values, beliefs, and ethics that guide the behavior of all members of the organization, and it can help to create a sense of purpose and belonging among employees [2]. It also encourages innovation and creativity, provides a platform for communication and collaboration, and helps to create a positive working environment. Ultimately, it serves as the foundation for a successful and sustainable corporation.

Corporate culture has four levels of structure. Among them, the spiritual layer includes corporate spirit, management philosophy, and values [3]. The system layer has three aspects: corporate leadership system, organization and management system. The behavior layer is the various behavioral norms in the corporate system. And the material layer is mainly the products and services produced by the enterprise, such as the production environment and staff clothing.

The system layer and material layer are two crucial elements that both support and challenge a corporation's culture. Values lie at the heart of corporate culture, providing the internal motivation for a company's survival and growth. They represent the fundamental beliefs and goals that a corporation seeks to promote in the pursuit of business success. It has six categories, namely: rational values, aesthetic values, values of a political nature, values of a social nature, values of an economic nature, and values of a religious nature. As a standard for evaluating the quality of corporate culture, values can determine whether it is positive or negative. However, different people may hold divergent views on what constitutes good values. For a company, a shared set of values among its employees is necessary for building a coherent corporate culture.

In short, a strong corporate culture built on shared values can provide direction and create a positive internal and external image for a company, which is of great importance. Conversely, a weak corporate culture and poor values can have negative consequences and impede a company's growth. To create a better future, a company should bring together like-minded individuals who share common values, pursuits, and goals, and work together towards a shared vision.

3. Adaptation Theory

Adaptation Theory, a linguistic concept developed by Jef Verschueren (2000), offers a new perspective for studying language use and structures. The theory highlights the importance of conformity in language use and adaptation, which are essential for effective communication. The theory comprises three key attributes: variability, negotiation, and adaptability[4].

Variability refers to the dynamic range of language choices available to individuals. Language is not static, and people constantly create and select new expressions while rejecting outdated ones. This process of selection is aimed at improving linguistic communication. Negotiation involves the use of both unambiguous and vague expressions to ensure that anything can be communicable and communicative. This attribute recognizes that language use is unstable and requires highly flexible principles and strategies that reflect the interaction and choices of both parties. Adaptability refers to the ability to change language use to accommodate choices among uncertain expressions. This means choosing an expression that best facilitates the communicative behavior of both parties. Adaptability is only possible when language use is both variable and negotiable.

In the context of Adaptation Theory, the research perspective of conformism explores the contextually relevant components of conformity, structural objects, dynamics, and the conscious emergent nature of the process[4][5]. This paper aims to illustrate the adaptation of structural objects and contextually related components from two perspectives: the adaptation of words and sentences to the language user, the psychological world, and the social world. Specifically, this paper will examine the cultural values behind Chinese and American food business profiles. The primary purpose of language is communication, which involves making constant choices. When describing and interpreting language, there are four important aspects to consider: contextual components of conformity, structural objects, dynamics, and conscious emergence of processes. In this discussion, we will focus on contextual components and structural objects.

Contextual components are the relevant factors that influence language use. These include linguistic and communicative contexts. Linguistic context refers to the environment in which language is used, also known as the discourse context. Communicative contexts are divided into four main categories: language users, the physical world, the social world, and the psychological world[6]. These contexts are communicated through language. Language users are divided into speakers and receivers, and both play a role in the description and interpretation of discourse. They are not restricted by time and place and can transform their roles based on the changing environment. The physical world refers to time and place, while the social world refers to social factors that influence communicative behavior, such as social institutions and norms of behavior that are widely accepted. The psychological world refers to the psychological state of the communicator, including their personality, emotions, and beliefs. It involves the process of communication between minds and conforming to the psychological world of others. All these factors play a crucial role in language choice at all times.

4. Comparison of Cultural Values in Chinese and American Food Corporation Profiles

4.1 Data Collection

Food corporations operate with the goal of generating profit by providing products that are both healthy and appealing to consumers, excluding items designed for therapeutic purposes. To better understand the concept of food corporations, this thesis employs a comparative research method that examines 10 profiles from Chinese and American food corporations. The Chinese companies were chosen from the 2021 Hurun China Top 100 Food Industry List, while the American companies were selected from Food Engineering's annual report: 2021 Top 100 Food & Beverage Companies. Additionally, this study utilizes a textual analysis approach to examine the written content of these companies' official websites, providing insights into the cultural values that underpin their operations. By relying on reliable and authentic data sources, this paper aims to enhance the credibility of its findings.

4.2 Comparative Analysis in Structural Objects

The process of language use is an ongoing series of choices that language users make based on both structural and communicative intentions. These choices are reflected in language structure and use strategies, such as the selection of textual forms and modifiers for corporate profiles. A profile is a communication activity involving both the speaker (representing the company) and the receiver (customers and investors). Typically, these choices are conscious and subject to contextual changes, although they may become automatic to some extent. Since a corporation profile is not a face-to-face communication, it is considered an indirect or unconscious activity. The corporation aims to maximize its interests by improving its profile and establishing a positive image. As such,

the degree of adaptation and selection process for the corporation profile is constantly improving and innovating.

(1) Vocabulary Level

It is necessary for corporation profile creators to give consideration to national consumers and investors. That is, the corporation profile should be in line with the use of local language, highlighting the language characteristics of the country. The differences in vocabulary level are reflected in discourse construction of corporation profiles.

First, Chinese corporations are commonly found to use four-letter idioms when presenting information about themselves and their products. However, American corporations often employ relatively simple and easy-to-understand words in their profiles. See the following examples:

Chinese corporation profile:

Located in the southern part of the northern temperate zone, Bozhou City is a warm temperate semi-humid monsoon climate zone, with humid climate, moderate rainfall, obvious monsoon, and sufficient sunshine. The main goal of the “Huaxia Wine City” is to build a “famous wine town, brewery base, cultural heritage, recreation and tourism” with the path of “strengthening the leader, culture leading, innovation driving, cluster gathering and three products action”. (From Gujinjing Group)

American corporation profile:

As the world’s leading brewer, we are always looking to serve up new ways to meet life’s moments, dream big to move our industry forward and make a meaningful impact in the world. We are committed to building a future that everyone can celebrate and everyone can share. (From Anheuser-Busch InBev)

From the above, it is clear that the Chinese food corporate profile reflects the values of “harmony”, “goodness” and “beauty”. The four-character idioms used in the profile reflect the unity and harmony of the structure and form, reflecting the value of “harmony”. The use of emotionally charged words and positive language in the introduction reflects the value of “goodness”, which is conducive to enhancing cultural confidence and spreading traditional culture. The use of four-character idioms in the profile emphasizes coordination and proportionality of the structure, which is aesthetically appealing and reflects the value of “beauty”. In contrast, The American corporation tends to use simpler and more understandable language to convey the reality of the company and does not reflect these values.

Second, the use of numbers in Chinese and American food corporations is different. Some examples are as follows:

Chinese corporation profile:

In 2021, Qingdao Beer climbed to an all-time high on the basis of its consecutive record operating results. The company achieved a total product sales volume of 7.93 million kiloliters and achieved operating revenue of RMB 30.17 billion, an increase of 8.7% year-on-year. Net profit to shareholders of listed companies reached RMB 3.16 billion, an increase of 43.3% year-on-year. The revenue and net profit once again both hit record highs. (From Qingdao Beer)

American corporation profile:

In FY22, BEES reached 3.1 million monthly active users and captured approximately 32 billion USD in gross merchandise value (GMV), growth of over 60% versus FY21. (From Anheuser-Busch InBev)

As can be seen above, Chinese corporations tend to use precise numbers, while American counterparts prefer to use vague numbers. Some modifiers (range words) are used before numbers in American corporation profiles, such as “over”, “among”, “more than”, “approximately”, etc., which indicates the uncertainty of the language text. The use of fuzzy numbers improves the expressiveness of language and increases the scope of imagination. However, the use of precise

numbers can clearly express the substantive information of food corporations, but it lacks the ability to communicate and negotiate, and cannot be readily changed. In other words, the use of more precise numbers in Chinese food corporation profiles can make the expression more authoritative and authentic, while the use of vague numbers in American food corporations makes the expression communicable and negotiable.

(2) Sentence Level

Sentences are organized according to certain grammatical rules and sentence structure, and they are linguistic units that express complete meaning. Complete sentences and official language are used in both Chinese and American food corporation profiles. However, the differences between them are mainly reflected in two aspects: at the macro level, although the sentence structure of the two languages is somewhat similar, there are also differences; at the micro level, there are certain differences in the grammatical relations of sentences in Chinese and American food corporation profiles.

Firstly, the similarities and differences between Chinese and American food corporation profiles are reflected in the structure of sentences, as is shown in the following examples:

Chinese corporation profile:

Adhering to the vision of “Let people eat pork with ease”, MUYUAN company is committed to producing safe, delicious and healthy high-quality pork food for the society, to improve their quality of life and let them enjoy a fruitful life. (From MUYUAN Food)

American corporation profile:

By being mindful and committed to these ideals, we uphold our founder’s dedication to people and their well-being. And we promote an environment where we can push beyond boundaries and across borders to create foods and brands that help to fuel the best in everyone everywhere. (From Kellogg Company)

As can be seen above, both corporations use compound sentences. The difference between them is mainly in the logical relationship. English sentences focus on hypotaxis, using various tangible cohesive devices to achieve completeness in terms of both grammatical form and logical form. English sentences are tightly organized, levels are distinct, and syntactic functions are manifested explicitly. In comparison, Chinese sentences focus on parataxis, expressing the meaning conveyed by the connecting words in English through the internal logical relationship between sentences.

Secondly, there are also some differences in the sentences of Chinese and American food business profiles at the micro level. Examples are as follows:

Chinese corporation profile:

“Shuijingfang” is a well-known brand of high-end liquor in China. (From Shuijingfang Group)

American corporation profile:

They are based on the latest science, embedded in state-of-the-art technologies, and powered by real data to deliver real results. (From Mars Company)

As can be seen from above, some differences exist in the grammatical relations between the two. Value-based thinking affects the perspective and the way people see things. American food corporation profiles use passive voice. Textual information is concrete and has a certain formal logic, indicating that it is a linear mode of thinking. In contrast, Chinese food corporation profiles prefer to use active voice. Textual information is concise and has a certain symmetrical logic, which is a non-linear mode of thinking.

4.3 Comparative Analysis in Contextual Correlates

“Context” refers to the environment of linguistic communication, including both communicative context and linguistic context. Corporate profile is a means of communication that results from a

mutual choice between the company and the customers. In this subsection, the use of the communicative context will be discussed, including the language user, the social world, and the mental world. The physical world will not be discussed, as food corporation profile does not require any criteria for temporal or spatial reference.

(1)Language Users

Language users are the core of the communicative process, which enables the normal exercise of the communicative context. They are not only the two sides of communication but also other people involved in the conversation. Therefore, the choice of personal pronouns is crucial for corporate profiles. Generally speaking, corporations have common words and names. For example, Chinese food corporations often introduce themselves with indicators such as “this company/group”, while Americans often use “We”. This reflects the psychological distance between the corporation and its customers. Chinese corporations mostly act in their own interest and attract investors, while American corporations attract consumers and highlight the intimacy of the company. The following table shows a statistics of 20 corporations (10 corporations for each country) using indicators in their profiles.

Table 1: Person Indicators in Chinese & American Food Corporation Profiles

Indicator	Chinese corporation	American corporation
Company name	7	3
The company/group	3	3
Our company/group	5	7
We	3	9

As table 1 indicates, Chinese corporations use the third person more frequently, emphasizing rights and status, which belongs to high power distance. The use of the first person by American companies closes the psychological distance between companies and customers, increases reliability and communication, and belongs to the low power distance. Psychological distance and power distance are different, reflecting the different political values of the two countries’ corporations.

(2)The Mental World

The Mental World refers to the psycho-emotional factors of the communicative participants, such as motivation or desire. The speaker has to express himself or herself appropriately, and the receiver is able to predict the meaning of the speaker [7]. When writing a food corporation profile, the company strategically explores the mental world of its customers in order to catch their eye. At the same time, customers will interpret the corporation profile and make relevant moves. The main factors that attract customers are the cognitive and emotional components: the cognitive component includes the company’s capabilities and capital, and the emotional component focuses on product information and services.

There are some differences between Chinese and American food corporations in presenting their psychological world. Chinese food corporations prefer to use cognitive components to present their psychological world, such as company strengths and rewards, while American food corporations prefer to use emotional components, such as product information and services. Both cognitive and affective factors can influence language choice and communicative behavior. The main manifestation here is how companies in both countries make choices that appeal to their potential customers. They refine and enrich the content of the company profile by guessing the psychological activities of customers. The example below shows how Chinese food companies attract customers and investors.

In 2020, Gujing Group received a number of national honors, including “National Intangible Cultural Heritage”, “Sixth National Civilization Unit” and “National May Fourth Red Flag Youth

League Committee”. In 2022, Gujing Gong was awarded the “National Youth Civilization” in the Huazun Cup brand value evaluation of Chinese alcoholic beverages, with a brand value of 227.027 billion yuan. (From Gujing Group)

It can be found that Chinese food corporations rely on external factors to attract consumers and investors, which makes them think that the corporation has competence, market, science and talent. It is in this context that food corporation profiles and companies, consumers and investors adapt to each other and choose each other. In comparison, American food corporations prefer to use product information and services to attract their customers. See the following example:

As a company, we have strict procedures in place to prevent crossover of allergens into other products that do not contain the allergen. The best way to determine if a product contains an allergenic ingredient is to read our product label. (From The Hershey Company)

American food corporations attract customers by showing details such as product ingredients. At the same time, customers pay more attention to product information especially some related notes when reading the profiles of American corporations. In this case, the desire and motivation of customers are adapted to each other with the psychological world of the company. The provision of service information by American corporations shows that they value humanization and the protection of individual interests. Therefore, the use of internal factors by American corporations to attract customers and investors is low-context communication, reflecting the value of personal interest first.

(3)The Social World

The social world is the social factors that influence the context, such as social institutions and norms of behavior that are accepted by the general public [8]. Social factors influence people’s language choices and linguistic communication. Corporation profiles are the bridge between food companies and consumers and investors, so social factors, such as social environment, social responsibility and institutions are frequently mentioned. The differences between American and Chinese food corporation profiles can be seen in the following description.

First, there are some differences in social environment. Social environment consists of mission and vision, social responsibilities and obligations, and official language. See the following example:

In 2020, By-Health donated more than 35 million RMB to support the fight against the new pneumonia epidemic. In the same year, we donated more than 10 million RMB to promote the 1000 days of life nutrition program together with UNICEF. (From By-Health)

Corporate responsibilities and obligations reflect societal values-collectivism. Chinese corporations believe that the interests of society and the collective outweigh individual interests. They take from the people and use them for social causes. They are brave to assume their responsibilities and obligations, contribute to society and promote social development. Therefore, it is clear that Chinese food corporation profiles are closely related to political context, which reflects the social characteristics of socialism and Chinese policies. In contrast, the image of American food corporations is more refined, as follows:

We aim to improve communities and the world, and we create products that improve the lives of our consumers. (From Hormel Foods)

As can be seen above, food corporations in America highlight food safety. Food safety is the way to ensure personal safety, and companies always maintain the interests of customers, reflecting individualistic values. At the same time, The American food Special columns on diversity and equity appear in their profiles. See the following example:

Tyson Foods’ workforce consists of a dynamic group of Team Members with a variety of experiences, beliefs, and lifestyles.....We believe that diversity, equity, and inclusion is paramount to our continued success. Therefore, we strive to recruit, retain, develop and promote talent that believes that our differences strengthen our ability to innovate, move beyond challenges and

execute with excellence with a level of trust that is undeniable. (From Tyson Foods)

From the above, it is evident that American food corporations prioritize fairness and justice. They believe in equal opportunities and inclusiveness, and ensure that the interests of all groups are protected. It reflects the values pursued by contemporary American society—democracy, fairness and friendliness.

In summary, there are similarities and differences in the social context and systems of food corporations in China and America. Both countries emphasize their corporations' missions and visions, but the goals and steps taken to achieve them differ. Chinese food corporations aim to contribute to society and develop themselves based on societal needs, whereas American food corporations prioritize serving people and attracting customers through development. Chinese corporations often quote government reports and speeches by leaders in their media and reports sections, enhancing their authority and credibility. They also frequently hire famous people to promote their brand, while this is not common in American food corporation profiles. These differences in corporation profiles can be attributed to cultural values that influence the writing styles and perspectives of profile creators.

5. Reasons for the Differences between Chinese and American Food Corporation Profiles

Through comparing the profiles of Chinese and American food corporations, it is evident that while there are some similarities between them, there are also several prominent differences. These differences can be attributed to various factors, including social environments, stages of economic development, and cultural backgrounds.

(1) Social aspect

The United States is a capitalist country that prioritizes the development of the individual, emphasizes diversity, fairness and inclusion, and values competition. It reflects individualism, where each individual has the right to pursue his or her own interests. On the other hand, China is a socialist country with a strong sense of community and collective consciousness. This means that individual interests are subordinated to the overall interests of the company, reflecting collectivism. In terms of institutions, China has a strict hierarchical structure with a patriarchal system at its core, and the power distance is relatively high. In contrast, the United States is a democratic political system with an emphasis on democracy, and the power distance is low. In addition, Chinese corporations view social responsibility primarily as a means to improve corporate profitability, while America view social responsibility as a moral obligation.

Chinese corporations keep up with the the times and follow the path of Chinese specialism, highlighting the core values of socialism. The inclusion of government agencies in the profiles of some Chinese food corporations indicates that these corporations have been affirmed by local governments and agencies. This affirmation provides a degree of protection, promotes the development of the corporation and maintains its image. In addition, it broadens customers' horizons and deepens their impressions. Only when corporations and government agencies cooperate can we reach a rich and harmonious situation. American food corporations emphasize corporate governance, the right of all individuals to pursue the highest positions, and the right to participate in the management of the corporate system. These reflect the fact that American corporations follow religious values, i.e., beliefs. American society believes that “universalism” is the only correct value for them. They promote democracy and respect for individual rights.

(2) Economic aspect

Western countries underwent significant primitive accumulation of capital in their early stages, which influenced their economic concepts and, in turn, the development of their culture. In contrast, China's feudal society was based on self-sufficiency and a small peasant economy, resulting in

relatively backward economic concepts and capabilities. Currently, the United States is a developed country with a mature institutional system, whereas China is a developing country with a strong desire to learn from Western management systems while also emphasizing local Chinese culture.

(3) Cultural aspect

Feudal ideology and Confucianism influence Chinese values. To a certain extent, feudal rituals contributed to the formation of authoritarianism and reflected hierarchical structures. China was deeply influenced by Confucianism, which emphasized the “the doctrine of the mean”. Collectivism is the core of Confucianism, which emphasizes a harmonious state of mind. American society believes strongly in religious beliefs. It believes that the only correct value in the world is the “universal spirit”, which emphasizes democracy and respect for individual rights.

In conclusion, the differences in corporation profiles between Chinese and American food corporations can be attributed to social, economic, and cultural factors. Understanding these differences is crucial for corporations seeking to expand globally and tailor their profiles to different cultural contexts.

6. Conclusion

Through comparative analysis, similarities and differences were identified in the cultural values of Chinese and American food corporation profiles. Both Chinese and American food corporations introduce their products and services to the public in their corporate profiles with the ultimate goal of maximizing profits, which reflects their economic values orientation. However, there are also prominent differences between the two. Chinese food corporations often use positive four-character idioms that reflect the values of “harmony” “goodness” and “beauty”. American corporations, on the other hand, use simpler, more easily understood language to convey their messages. The use of different syntactic structures in Chinese and American food corporate profiles reflects the different modes of thinking of the two countries’ corporations and profile writers. American company profiles focus on formal logic and the pursuit of truth, reflecting rational values, while Chinese corporate profiles focus on symmetrical logic, care about the expression of meaning, reflecting perceptual values. Chinese corporations prioritize social responsibility and obligation in their missions and visions, reflecting the value of collectivism. American corporations, on the other hand, focus more on food safety and individual rights, reflecting individualistic values.

References

- [1] Dempsey J. *Moral responsibility, shared values, and corporate culture. Business Ethics Quarterly, Vol. 25, No. 03, pp. 319-340, 2015.*
- [2] Guiso L, Sapienza P, Zingales L. *The value of corporate culture. Journal of Financial Economics, Vol. 117, No. 01, pp. 60-76, 2015.*
- [3] Hofstede G, Hofstede G J, Minkov M. *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind. New York: Mcgraw-hill, 2005, pp. 12-14.*
- [4] Verschueren Jef. *Understanding Pragmatics. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. 2000, pp. 58-59.*
- [5] Hu Cheng. *An Analysis on the Chinese-English Translation Mechanism of Chinese Enterprises Profiles from Functionalist Perspective. Studies in Literature and Language, Vol. 13, No. 05, pp. 24-31, 2016.*
- [6] Gurau Calin. *Developing an environmental corporate reputation on the internet. Marketing Intelligence & Planning, Vol. 31, No. 05, pp. 522-537, 2013.*
- [7] Han Hyun Jeong. *The Relationship among Corporate Culture, Strategic Orientation, and Financial Performance. Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, Vol. 53, No. 03, pp. 207-219, 2012.*
- [8] Thomas Anning-Dorson. *The level matters: building capabilities for innovation and enterprise performance through customer involvement. European Journal of Innovation Management, Vol. 26, No. 01, pp. 48-64, 2023.*