

Changes in Sino-American Cultural Values Based on Relational Orientation — Analysis of Sino-American Teleplays

Dong Zhen

Shaanxi Institute of International Trade & Commerce, Xi'an, Shaanxi, China, 712046

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Abstract: Cultural values are the deepest part of a nation's culture. In recent years, the world is experiencing tremendous changes in many fields. Both Chinese and Americans values undergo slightly changes and even have some similarities. As we all know, it is not an easy task to study values because of its own complicated characteristics and dynamic feature. This paper attempts to discuss the likely changes and convergences of Sino-American cultural values with the help of six selected teleplays based on relational orientation. The Chinese teleplays are Golden Wedding, Struggle, and Beijing Youth; American teleplays are The Goldenbergs, Modern Family, and How I Met Your Mother. Each of them reflects the mainstream values of Chinese and American cultures in corresponding times respectively. It is found that although a few changes and convergences have happened in both countries, they have their respective characteristics because of their different traditions and national conditions. The trend of cultural globalization will be the coexistence of cultural convergence and diversity.

1. Introduction

Cultural value is a group of rules for assessing people's behaviors and manners; it is the deepest part of a nation's culture. Culture is value in a sense. Although cultural value has its relative stability, culture is never a definition of stationary. Especially in recent years, the world is experiencing tremendous changes, which not only affects people's material life but also rearranges their mental life and cultural values. From the establishment of Sino-US diplomatic relations to the President Xi's visit to America, the exchange between the two countries has been increasing, and both the colliding and blending during the communication have subtle influences on mutual cultural values. On the one hand, we need to emphasize the differences of cultural values between China and America; on the other hand, we need to treat cultural value's changes in the eye of development and dynamic state. All the changes of materialistic society and human mind give us an urgent request for the study of Sino-American cultural values and their development.

2. Relational Orientation

The study of values started in the 1930s. Since it was brought forward, values has been focused by many researchers, and becomes the key problems in many disciplines. In 1961, Florence Kluckhohn and Fred Strdotbeck, two American anthropologists, published Variations in Value Orientations. In their opinion, cultural value is "A conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable." Kluckhohn believed that "values are features of an individual or a group influencing people's choice of behavioral patterns, ends and means in dealing with various problems. Values are a set of universal, organized system which includes human nature, the relationship between human and environment, human activity, view of time."

Kluckhohn and Strodbeck suggested five basic types of problem to be solved by every society, which would indicate the values espoused by that society:

- 1) What is the character of human being? (Human Nature Orientation)
- 2) What is the relationship between human and nature? (Man-Nature Orientation)

- 3) What is the orientation toward time? (Time Orientation)
- 4) What is the value placed on activity? (Activity Orientation)
- 5) What is the relationship of people to each other? (Relational Orientation)

Each orientation mentioned above represents a universal question all human being and societies have to face. These questions are the heart study of cultural values, and these orientations should be analyzed as points on a continuum collectively not separately. Among which relational orientation, the last orientation in Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's value orientations, is concerned with the ways in which people perceive their relationships with others, also is more complicated than any other relations, including authoritarian, collectivism, and individualism.

3. Changes of Sino-American Cultural values in Relational Orientation with the Help of Related TV Series

Traditional Chinese culture belongs to collectivism. American culture belongs to individualism. Some scholars think that Chinese collectivism and American individualism are the typical differences between Sino-American cultures. Through the analysis of the Sino-American TV series, some changes were founded in the following seven aspects.

3.1 Self-consciousness

Traditionally, a Chinese treats himself or herself as a member of the group. They believe that individuals should not be independently minded, but should try to fit in the group and keep a harmonious relationship with the group members. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck deemed Chinese culture as the typical collectivism orientation. In *Golden Wedding*, as a technician, Tong Zhi asked to work in the third-line (some places which are very underdeveloped in the last century). If he did not go to the third-line when the whole country was in the hard times, he would forever lose the opportunity to ascend. If so, what everybody else would think of him. Others might think of him lacking of ability the same as Tong Zhi's thoughts, most traditional Chinese would like to talk about or evaluate someone in collectivity since they deem a single individual to be a member of the group. And it is hard for a single person to survive without the help of collectivity. Affected by the policy of working in the countryside and rural areas, most generations of 50s or 60s were engaged in kinds of collective movements and constructions of the motherland. On the other hand, because the country was in a difficult time, the third-line needed some experienced technicians like Tong Zhi. It was his bounden duty. For traditional Chinese, the goal and interest of a group are superior to the individuals'. When individual interests conflict with group interests, individual should sacrifice their own interests to protect and preserve the interests of group.

3.2 Family patterns

In traditional Chinese families, there are more family members than in the modern families. In *Golden Wedding*, Wen Li and Tong Zhi had four children. They insisted on having the fourth child again though they had already three daughters. On one hand, in Chinese tradition, sons are given preference to carry on the family line. Traditional Chinese believe the continuity of a clan and family prosperity is family's top priority. Meanwhile, Tong Zhi and Wen Li grew up in the traditional agricultural society with the small-scale peasant economy. People's life in the small peasant economy depended mainly on agriculture, at that time, productivity and labor tools are low and relatively backward. That is why family members have strong anaclisis with each other. So the comprehensive power of a family is directly decided by the number of males. On the other hand, traditional Chinese uphold more children and fertility in their whole life. People's understanding of "fu" (good fortune) was always associated with large population and labor. The idea that more children bring more fortune is the product of backward productive forces and social system.

3.3 Attitudes towards marriage

Traditional Chinese attitudes towards marriage are affected by the collectivism orientation. For

most traditional Chinese, marriage is not a case for a single person, but is twisted by many factors such as morality, responsibility, and honor. In *Golden Wedding*, Da Zhuang loved Wen Li's younger cousin, but he married with his child bride finally who he did not love under moral pressure and social consensus. In fact, "Chinese couples would not put the personal interests into the most important position and their focus of life is the small group—family". Affected by values of collectivism, traditional Chinese like Da Zhuang pay more attention to family clan and blood relations, and they hold the idea that each of their own behavior would bring direct impact on their family. Da Zhuang accepted and married with his child bride, because he did not want his family to be criticized by others.

In *Struggle*, there are different views of marriage. The decision of Xiang Nan and Yang Xiaoyun's

marriage was just like a child's play. Both thought if they got married suddenly, they would certainly shock everyone, and generate the sensational effects. So they decided to license to get married immediately, which made their parents frightened and almost fainted. It shows us the changes in modern Chinese attitudes toward marriage— marriage is decided by their own and has little relation with others. Their actions towards marriage may not have positive functions for other people, but anyway, this is a kind of pursuit for marriage and is very precious in their life.

3.4 Value of children rearing

Value of child rearing or parenting is a big topic. In 1982, Levine and Adelman pointed out that how people treat neonatal babies always shows their cultural values. And they said, in America, it is normal for parents to put the newborns into a separate room which belongs to the child completely. In this way, not only parents avoid being interfered, but the child develop a good habit in their own room, which is seen as a first step to be independent. In *Modern Family*, Mitch and Cam adopted a Vietnamese girl Lily. When the baby came back, they put her into the other room, which they had prepared for her personally. Although Lily was crying at night, Mitch insisted on his "crying" rearing method to prevent Lily would develop a physiological dependence. But of course, both Cam and Mitch would observe Lily's action so as to protect her if necessary. American parents keep a watchful eye on child's personality, ability to innovation, ability of adapting to the environment, and ability of independence. Just as Mitch, Americans attach great importance to child's own exercise. They believed generally that a child's growth must rely on his or her own strength. So the independent consciousness and ability are trained when the children are little. As long as the financial condition permits, Americans generally put the baby in another room, which is thought could help the child to enjoy his or her own little world and could practice the ability of independence from childhood.

Chinese people have different attitudes on child rearing compared with America. In *Golden Wedding*, after Tong Sibao birthed, Wen Li always worried her son's not sleeping well in his cradle and imagined he might catch a cold without her caring for. So she put the baby to her twin-bed and held the baby slept together with her, which often made Tong Zhi had no place to sleep. Her behavior also seriously affected her relationship with Tong Zhi. Chinese culture belongs to collectivism orientation. On one side, parents want their children could be independent when they grow up. On the other side, they do not hope their children living without their "protection". In modern society, more and more parents keep watchful eye on developing children's independence. The author finds that a lot of post 80s and 90s parents are willing to prepare an independent room for their child. When the younger parents communicate with kids, they always give children a chance to make a choice or to express ideas. Through this process, parents help children to have ability and consciousness of self-independence. In *Beijing Youth*, when the grandsons retraced their youth, their grandfather said, "it is good for young people to go out and practice. Society itself is a lecture hall where they would learn a lot." Thus, the modern Chinese has a free hand on developing child's independent ability now.

3.5 Relationship between parents & children

Influenced by the Confucianism and doctrine of “three cardinal guides”, most traditional relationships between parents and children are not equal. Parents always have the rights to make a decision for their children. In Golden Wedding, Tong Zhi was used to blame Tong Sibao. Once he shouted to Tong Sibao, “Sit straight up! Hands down! Do you think you should study now? No! You need to listen to what your father says!”, which made Tong Sibao think his father did not love him for a long time. Here, what we can see most is Tong Zhi’s criticism to Tong Sibao. Thousands years ago, Confucius put forward a lot of hierarchical ethics, which has a strong influence on Chinese hierarchical concept. Chinese family is considered as a team. Parents stand for authority and are at core position. In Struggle, there was something different. Lu Tao did not call his birth father “daddy”, but call his name “Lu Yaxun” directly. It is incredible for traditional Chinese to call their parents’ name directly. But Lu Yaxun did not think calling his name was irreverence. Changes of the address form Chinese hierarchical thoughts have weakened without perception.

Also, traditional Chinese parents emphasize their authority definitely in making decisions for their children. What their children learn and what the interests their children develop are always dominated by parents. There has something different on dealing with the similar situation in Struggle. Lu Tao’s father rarely told Lu Tao what he should do or not. When Lu Tao made Xia Lin angry, Xu Zhisen just gave Lu Tao a step-by-step education, not just a direct and simple answer. Once learned and did business in the United States, so Xu got advanced education and was affected by Western cultures. He thought that he and his son were equal, and could not make decisions for his son by his own, but could guide and induct him step by step.

3.6 Conjugal relations

Chinese sense of hierarchy is stronger than Americans’, according to Kluckhohn and Strodtbecks’ theories of value orientation. Chinese focuses more on one’s origin and social status than Americans. Sense of hierarchy in conjugal relations after wedding is weakened in China. In Golden Wedding, when someone pursued Wen Li, she refused wisely, because she understood her heavy responsibility for the family and loyalty to his husband and children as a wife and mother respectively. She sacrificed everything such as youth, entertainment and hobbies just for her marriage and her children. But everybody treated her efforts as women’s destiny. But for Tong Zhi’s cheating, everyone believed it was natural and normal. Just as Tong Zhi’s mother said that men might get confused temporarily to play around, but no matter how far they walked away, they would back home in the end. Husband and wife are thought to have the duty to be faithful to each other. Tong Zhi lost the faithful moral self-discipline for fancy emotional stimulus. But his family members did not condemn his emotional infidelity strongly. Traditional China is a patriarchal society that females are seemed to bound with an inferior position from their birth. Women’ virtues are embodied in the thought of regarding their husband as the center. To be a wife, one should be virtuous, kind, patient, thrifty and diligent in running the household. Women should also honor their parents before getting married and serve husband after marriage.

4. Conclusion

In recent years, the world is experiencing tremendous changes in many fields. Although the basic concept of each orientation does not change obviously, both American and Chinese cultural values have undergone subtle changes in modern times compared with traditional cultural values. Meanwhile, there are some convergences between Chinese and American cultural values. Studying cultural values and their changes are no easy tasks because values are originally complex. Limited number of TV series can only show us some of people’s values, and can not wholly show us the cultural values between Chinese and Americans. So, the study of changes and convergences of cultural values still need further investigation. But we can see that the trend of cultural globalization will be the coexistence of cultural convergence and diversity.

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