

# A Brief Analysis on the Difference of Cultural Values Between China and Western Countries as Well as Their Relevant Social Influences

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## ABSTRACT

In recent decades, with the increasingly deepening of the globalization, the connection and exchange have become much more frequent and close than ever before. As a result the research on the difference of cultural values between China and Western Countries has become the focus for most college English teacher to pay great attention to. Starting with the great significance of learning about the difference between Chinese cultural values and Western ones, the thesis mainly talks about the difference of cultural values between China and Western countries from the following aspects such as thinking patterns, interpersonal relationship, social status, sense of time and life attitude respectively. Then a detail explanation has been made on the social influence of the above differences from different angles in order to provide with a beneficial reference for the future research and promote the further development of the research on the whole intercultural communication domain.

**Keywords:** *Difference, Cultural values, China, Western countries, Social influence.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As everybody knows, cultural values are the basis for every country to exist or depend on, which will have a deep influence on all the aspects of the social life. And it is well known there is too much difference between different countries or regions, therefore it is of great significance to learn about the difference between Chinese cultural values and Western ones. Not only can it promote the mutual understanding between different cultures, as well it is favour able to decrease the unnecessary misunderstandings or conflicts between different nations or countries.

## 2. THE DIFFERENCES OF CULTURAL VALUES BETWEEN CHINA AND WESTERN COUNTRIES

When it comes to difference of cultural values between China and Western countries, it has been reflected in many fields which have much to do with the social life, which mainly concentrates upon the following aspects such as thinking

patterns, interpersonal relationship, sense of time, life attitudes and so on. Here they will be discussed in detail one by one.

### 2.1 Thinking Patterns

When it comes to thinking pattern, Chinese persons tend to take the holistic viewpoints while thinking about everything in the word. Since the ancient time, the Chinese persons have looked on the mankind as an indispensable part of the whole nature. Consequently, following the nature and protecting the nature having become the consensus among most Chinese persons. Such the holistic thinking pattern can also be manifested in their daily life [6]. When Chinese person tackle the problems or difficulties in an enterprise or a company, they tend to start with the whole situation of the company or enterprise and find the final solution on basis of an overall careful analysis. In their daily life, while going to see a doctor of Chinese traditional medicine, he or she usually makes a judgment about the illness by watching the complexion, asking about the illness and taking the pulse, on basis of the above procedures, a

comprehensive diagnosis and a corresponding therapy will be made in the end. And an experienced cook tend to getting ready for the dishes just by controlling the duration or the degree of the heat according to their accumulated experiences years to ensure the perfect combination of the dishes' color, aroma and taste in a whole. Comparatively speaking, most Westerners tend to take a reasonable and analytical attitude towards everything in the world. As far as most Westerners are concerned, the mankind and the nature are divided sharply or completely, there is no necessary connection between the two. And the main mission of the human being is just to conquer and change the nature so as to make it serve for the mankind [6]. Therefore, during the long process to know and change the nature, a complete knowledgeable system for the natural science was established by the ancient Westerners. As a result, while dealing with some problems in their work and lives, Westerners tend to begin with the partial or the tiny things, that is, they usually divide a whole into many different parts in order to find out the existing problems and the corresponding solution as soon as possible. Thus, while reading an article, Westerners are used to dividing the whole article into a few parts to master the main idea and the structure very quickly. Unlike the Chinese traditional medicine, Western medicine has been divided into many different sections such as surgery department, internal medicine department, ophthalmology department and gynecology department etc. Then the patients can go to see the corresponding doctors and solve the problems in the shortest time. In addition, the Western cooks tend to get ready for the food ingredients through a scientific match and an accurate calculation in order to ensure the nutrition balance for their health.

## **2.2 Interpersonal Relationship**

While dealing with the interpersonal relationship, Chinese persons have advocating harmony and peacefulness, That is, they try their best to avoid dispute or conflict in order to keep a good relationship with others in the society; even when there are some contradictions come out, they tend to resolve them by themselves privately instead of solving the problems in the court. In most Chinese people's eyes, the collective benefits always occupy the most important position, and they tend to put the individual's benefits behind the collective benefits[2]. That is the reason why the persons who have devoted themselves to the public affairs or made great contribution to the whole

society are sung high praise of or commemorated by most people whereas the persons who only care about their personal benefits are often looked down upon in today's society. In one family, it is the responsibility for the parents to take care of their children and bring them up, conversely, as the children, they have the obligation to support their parents especially when they are old [5] and the young persons work hard to seek the success as well as the fame not only to carry out their own values but also to make their family feel glorious. In the ancient time, the Chinese young persons had no autonomous right to choose their life companion in one family, and their marriages used to be dominated by their parents. Even nowadays, the young persons also need listening to their parents' opinion, after all marriage means a connection between two families rather than just two persons in most Chinese's opinion.

However, individualism is the most popular cultural value with the Western society. For most Westerners, the individual benefits are the most valuable than any other things. Thus, there is no difficulty to understand why most Westerners have such strong consciousness of privacy and right-safeguarding [2]. Most Westerners would like not to be interrupted by any persons' sudden visit especially in their private time, and they don't like sending money or some other personal things to others even to their good friends. In one family, when the young persons are over eighteen years old, they tend to leave their parents and make a living by themselves. Their parents will never interfere with their marriages, which are decided by the young persons themselves completely [5]. In face of some disputes or conflicts, appealing to the court has become the sole channel to resolve any contradiction. Therefore, asking the lawyer for some help and going to the court have become the common things in the Western society. Even some tiny things or trivial matters in their daily lives have to be resolved by means of the law.

## **2.3 Social Status**

As everybody knows, China is a country with the feudalistic history of more than 3000 years. Because of the great influence of the feudalism which has lasted for such a long time, the hierarchical consciousness has been engraved in the mind of most Chinese people, which has a great influence on the all aspects of the social life. Consequently, most Chinese persons have had a natural trust in the ruler or the authority since the

ancient time. In their opinion, the honest and upright official are certain to protect the benefits of the masses and try their best to bring as much interests as possible to the local people. Family has been the most essential unit which constitutes the whole state, and the parents tend to take the dominating status. Not only can they take charge of most affairs in one family but also the future of their children such as their children's marriage. As the children, they need to follow the parents' words, which has been regarded as a respect or a filial piety for their parents. In a company or a working unit, the boss or the leader has the right to make a decision about all the affairs, and all the underlings or employees need to follow their decision. While coming across their superiors, they tend to show adequate respect. In contrast, equality is one of the most important cultural values in Western countries, and the idea of equality has enjoyed the popularity with most Westerners together with independence as well as freedom. In most Westerners' eye, all the social members are equal and there is no division of nobleness and lowliness in the whole society. In a company, it is not necessary for the underlings to follow the superior. If the underlings or employees have different opinions or unique ideas, they can speak them out boldly in face of the boss or the superior. What's more, the status of the children is as equal as that of their parents, not only can the children express their opinions about all the family affairs, also they have the right to decide their own affairs such as their marriage and their jobs and so on.

## **2.4 Sense of Time**

Like some other Asian countries, China belongs to past-oriented culture. It is well known that China is a country with a long history of more than 5000 years, which most Chinese people take pride in. As a result, experience has become the most valuable[3]; when Chinese persons go to see a doctor or have their hair cut, they would like to choose an experienced doctors or a barber with lots of experiences. When the company recruits the new employees, the job seekers with some working experiences are easier to be successful in the strong competition. What's more, China also belongs to multiple time system culture. In such a time system culture, relationship is the most important, and people can cope with a few things at the same time. Therefore, time schedule has become the secondary thing in their daily life. If some guests or good friends come to pay a visit, most Chinese persons tend to put the work at hand aside and make a warm

reception for the guests or good friends. However, most Western countries belong to future-oriented culture. In most Westerners' opinion, tomorrow or future is the most important, they are sure that they must achieve great success and live a happy life as long as they work hard[3]. As well, most Western countries belong to monochromatic time system culture. That is to say, most of Westerners pay great attention to the punctuality and promptness, and they tend to do one thing at one point. When one thing has been finished, they can start with another thing.

Most Westerners have a strong sense of time, and time schedule occupies the most important position in their minds. Generally speaking, most Westerners would not like to be disturbed by others especially when they are busy with their work. Thus, if some guests or good friends want to pay a visit to Westerners, they need to make an appointment in advance.

## **2.5 Life Attitude**

For most Chinese people, a stable job and a stable income have been the goal for them to pursue for many years. Generally speaking, when Chinese persons are over thirty-five years old, most of them would like to have a stable family and live a stable happy life; they tend to live in a place for many years, even some old persons have never left their hometown in their life. As well, lots of Chinese people have been engaging in one job for many years even throughout their lives, after all they have been accustomed such a working environment or the working partners around them and they don't want to change it all especially when a person is more than thirty-five or forty years old. If seeking the stability represents the life attitude of most Chinese people, pursuing the change and making a constant improvement stand for the life attitude of most Western person. For most Westerners, making a change or improvement is the word form their talk or conversation. Generally speaking, they tend not to work in a company or a department for a long time; changing the job or job-hopping is a very universal social phenomenon especially among most young persons because in most Westerners' opinion, changing the job means a completely new challenge and opportunity, which can help them improve themselves constantly and achieve greater success in the future. In addition, Westerners seldom live in a place for many years even throughout their lives, instead they can decide to move to another place for settlement as they like at

any time, in most Westerners' eyes, moving from one region to another not only can change their life attitude and spiritual outlook, also it is favourable to increase their life experience and stimulate their life passion.

### **3. THE SOCIAL INFLUENCE OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHINESE CULTURAL VALUES AND WESTERN ONES**

As has been said above, the difference of cultural values between China and Western countries has great influence on the whole social life, which has mainly embodied in the following aspects such as behavioral pattern, interpersonal communication, social customs, social etiquette and so on, and the following part will make a detail instruction on them one by one.

#### **3.1 Behavioral Pattern**

It is obvious that a person's behavior can reflect the cultural value he represents. When Chinese persons get along with others, they tend to take others' interests into their consideration rather than their own convenience. Therefore, in the dormitory, it is common for Chinese college students to take out the delicious food to share with others, and it is a natural thing for them to lend or borrow the daily necessities mutually in their daily life. As well most of them are ready to share their learning materials or good books with good friends or some other classmates. As well, in China when some one gets into trouble and confront with some difficulties, his good friends will lend their warm hand to help him financially and mentally without any hesitation. And it is a normal thing for good friends to lend or borrow the money when one happens to a financial crisis. In addition, while taking a bus, it tends to be regarded as a good manner for the young persons to give their seats to the old persons. And while attending the banquet, the seniority or the persons with the high rank tend to take the seat at the center of the table facing toward the gate. After all the guests are seated, only after the host's permission, can all the person begin to have the dinner, also in order to show their respect, the young persons or the underlings need to propose a toast or distribute the dishes to the seniors or the superiors constantly during the dinner. However, in Western countries, most persons would not like to share their personal things with others. And it is a taboo for Westerners to borrow the money from their friend; just like a saying goes, lending your money will lose your

friends, which shows that it is a sensitive for good friends to talk about the money. On the bus, most old persons would rather stand all the time than take the seats from the young persons because they don't want others to think that they have become old. While having dinners, Westerners tend to help themselves, and they don't want others to distribute dishes for them. In order to show their good manners, the men usually help the women to pull the chair when they take the seats or want to leave. When proposing the toast, it is common for the host and all the guests to take the wine glass and say "Cheers" together.

#### **3.2 Interpersonal Communication**

In the Western countries, before paying a visit to good friends, it is necessary to make an appointment in advance in order not to disturb their normal work and like. While making a conversation, it is suitable to choose some topic such as weather, sport, music and movies, and it is a taboo to ask some personal questions such as ages, marriage, families, health and income. That is because these above issues belong to their privacy in most Westerners' opinion and others have no right to know about them. If the conversation with them involves these topics, usually they will feel offended and become very angry. While hear the compliment from others, Westerners tend to accept it very happily by saying "thank you"[4]. While giving the gift to Westerners, it is necessary to pay attention to their personal interests as well as their cultural taboos. Also, when receiving the gift, most Westerners tend to be glad to accept it by saying "Thank you very much" and opening the gift in public[1]. However, in China, while paying a visit to good friends, it is not necessary to inform them in advance because in some Chinese people's opinion, a sudden visit will bring a pleasant surprise to their intimate friends. Also, in the conversation, it is common to ask others' age, marriage, income and health because asking about these personal questions shows a special concern about them in most Chinese persons' eyes. In addition, when hearing others' compliment or praise, Chinese persons tend to decline or deny it again and again by saying "No, no, I'm not so excellent as you say", "Where, where. I'm just so so." etc.[4]. In face of the gifts given by their good friends or relatives, most Chinese persons tend to decline them again and again by saying "You are so polite." or "They cost you too much!" etc. And they tend to accept the gifts reluctantly in the end and put them away

for the moment. After the guests leave, the gift will be opened by themselves[1].

### **3.3 Social Custom**

Because of seeking the cultural value of collectivism and harmony, when Spring Festival or Mid-autumn Festival come, returning home and reuniting with the family member have become the common expectation of most Chinese people. Sitting around the table with the family members and enjoying the delicious festival food such as Jiaozi, Niangao or the moon cakes is the happiest moment to most Chinese persons. In order to show the respect to the parents or the old persons, Double Ninth Festival or Chongyang Festival has become the day the show the concern and love for all the old person in China when most young persons tend to go back home to see their parents and express their gratitude. In addition, in the southern part of China, it is common for the married young couple to serve tea for their parents and express their deep gratitude for the love as well as the care given from childhood. As well, on Qingming Festival or even Spring Festival, Chinese persons tend to sweep the tombs to show their deep salutation and cherish the memory to their dead family member or their forefather. However, in Western countries, When Christmas Day comes, it is not necessary for them to go back home and reunite with their family members, instead they tend to stay with their little family or spend Christmas with their friends, and they just post a Christmas card to their parents and give their best wishes. When Halloween or Carnival comes, most young Westerners tend to dress themselves as the ghosts or take part in a parade to display their individuality fully and convey their happiness of festival.

### **3.4 Social Etiquette**

Different cultural values have great influence on social etiquette in different cultural background. In China, it is a common thing for a young person or an underling to be introduced to an old man or his superior, it is necessary for them to stand up immediately to show their respect. As well, the compliment is usually made by the persons with the lower status in order that they can leave a good impression on the persons with the high status. In one family, the children need to show enough respect to their parents or some other senior family members, and it is impolite to say some bad words to the seniors in one family. While having a family banquet, only after all the seniors are seated with

the parents' announcing the beginning of the dinner, the children or the juniors can take the chopsticks. If Chinese persons pay a visit to a friend and have a dinner with them, generally speaking they tend to arrive ten or fifteen earlier to show a respect to the friends[7] However, in the Western countries, while having a meeting in a company, all the underlings need to be seated whereas the superior need to stand to show their authority, and it is common for the persons with the high status to make a compliment to the person with the low status to stimulate their working enthusiasm. In one family, children can call their parents' or their grandparents' name directly, which can not be imaginable in China. Also if the parents want to have a talk with their children, they need bend themselves down or even squat down, which can manifest an equal status between the parents and the children. What's more, in the special communicative situation, the males need to show their good manners before the females by helping the ladies opening the door or taking the handbag. Finally if Westerners pay a visit to their friends and have a dinner together with each other, they tend to arrive a few minutes later in order to avoid the appearance of some embarrassing situation where their friends are making some preparation for the dinner with the aprons[7]. After leaving from the friends' home, they tend to write a thank-you note to the friends to convey their deep gratitude.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The research on the difference of cultural values between China and Western countries is a long, arduous process full of many different kinds of challenges or difficulties, which need the common effort of all college English teachers and some other persons who are interested in such a topic. Only by doing like this, can such a reach be enhanced and pushed forward further than ever before and can the misunderstanding or conflict between China and Western countries be reduced or even avoided, which will be favourable to the establishment of a harmonious and peaceful world.

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