

A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Family Education in China and the U.S.: *Home with Kids* vs. *Good Luck Charlie*

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Abstract

Family education serves as the foundation of social education and plays a decisive role in shaping children's worldview, values, and outlook on life. As a crucial component of the social education system, family education not only exerts an indelible and permanent influence on the development of lifelong habits in children but also directly impacts the stability and development of future society. This paper, grounded in the theory of cultural dimensions, analyzes the differences in existing educational philosophies between China and the United States by considering various factors such as cultural backgrounds and social values. The aim is to integrate the essence of educational philosophies from both countries to propose several suggestions for improving current family education practices in China.

Keywords: cultural dimension theory, family education in China and the United States, comparison, similarities and differences

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Home with Kids is a Chinese mainland comedy family television series that has gained immense popularity among viewers due to its rich comedic elements. The show tells the story of a remarried couple and their respective children forming a blended family and living together. The characters in the series are distinctively portrayed, with humorous and witty dialogue, and the drama and conflicts are quite pronounced, making it a typical comedy family sitcom. The family environment depicted in the

show is representative of the typical Chinese family education setting, and it presents various issues and challenges in Chinese family education through a light-hearted and humorous comedic approach.

Good Luck Charlie is a family-themed sitcom originally created by Disney Channel. The series revolves around the life of the Duncan family of six, unfolding the story through DV recordings, and narrates the detail of the youngest daughter Charlie's growth and a series of meaningful and funny incidents that occur in the family during this process. Based on fundamental topics such as friendship, romance, and academics that

children face during their growth, the show conveys a warm family atmosphere and the significance of growing up to the audience. With its unique perspective and captivating plot, the series has garnered a large fan base worldwide and has become one of the rare family-centered sitcoms on Disney Channel in recent years.

As typical representatives of family sitcoms in China and the United States, these two shows, based on their respective cultural backgrounds and social environments, present the unique family education settings of China and the United States, providing classic sample templates for studying the differences in family education between the two countries. The following text will offer a deep-level interpretation of the details of the two shows based on cultural dimensions, further exploring the underlying reasons behind the differences in the education systems of China and the United States.

1.2 Research Significance

Family education, as a component of social education, unfolds under the guidance and framework of the “college entrance examination” (Gaokao), much like school education. In recent years, the number of applicants for the Gaokao in China has continued to rise. In 2024, the number of Gaokao applicants reached 13.42 million, an increase of 510,000 from the previous year, setting a new record. At the same time, the significant rise in the number of students repeating their final year, along with the reform and innovation of the new Gaokao question types, has increased the academic and life pressure on Gaokao candidates and their families to varying degrees. Whether in economically developed regions such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, which are often touted as having extremely abundant educational resources, or in provinces with large Gaokao populations represented by the “Four Mountain and River Provinces,” the competition for limited spots in prestigious universities remains particularly fierce across the country. Under the existing framework of the Gaokao system, China’s current educational evaluation system tends to overly emphasize students’ academic test scores, while neglecting the cultivation of interpersonal skills and practical abilities to varying degrees. This singular evaluation system transitions from the school level to the family level, manifesting in Chinese parents’ neglect of their children’s

all-around development. This short-sighted approach to upbringing may yield some results in the short term but plants significant hidden dangers for the children’s future life development. Additionally, influenced by the inherent rationalism and utilitarianism in Chinese society, Chinese families often do not focus on exploring their children’s personal interests and hobbies, aiming instead to mold their children into “tools” that fit the existing educational mechanism. This leads to a profound sense of confusion when children enter university and later life, creating a generation of individuals akin to “Zhang Xifeng.” Education, as a major national and party priority, has its improvement in educational philosophy not only related to the enhancement of China’s educational endeavors and the quality of talent but also key to promoting social progress and enhancing the country’s soft power and international competitiveness. The document “China’s Education Modernization 2035” proposes eight basic concepts for advancing educational modernization, emphasizing all-around development, lifelong learning, and teaching students according to their aptitude, which provides guidance for realizing educational modernization and building a strong educational nation, pointing out the direction and goals for the improvement of China’s educational philosophy in the future. This article aims to compare the existing differences in family education concepts between China and the United States from the five levels of cultural dimension theory, offering multifaceted suggestions for the improvement of China’s current educational system.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1 The Development of Cultural Dimension Theory

Dutch psychologist Geert Hofstede proposed the Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory in the late 1970s as a framework for measuring cultural differences between countries. This theory provides a clear measurement tool and comprehensive framework for understanding and comparing cultural differences across nations, playing a pivotal role in various social fields such as cross-cultural communication, international business communication, business management, and cross-cultural academic research.

In the initial stages of developing this theory,

Hofstede and his team conducted two large-scale questionnaire surveys among IBM employees worldwide. The survey aimed to explore differences in employee values across different countries, covering 72 nations and more than 20 languages. This extensive questionnaire provided a rich sample space for further research and discovery of the theory.

Based on the extensive sample research, Hofstede published the book *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* in 1980. This book initially outlined multiple dimensions for measuring value differences between countries, marking the formal preliminary formation of Hofstede's theory.

In subsequent developments, to further refine the basic framework of the cultural theory, Hofstede incorporated suggestions and theoretical additions from scholar Michael Minkov, introducing a new dimension: indulgence versus restraint. This dimension refers to the extent to which a society allows for the gratification of basic human desires and enjoyment of life, and it can be interpreted through two tendencies: self-restraint and self-indulgence.

2.2 The Content of the Cultural Dimension Theory

In the 1970s, Hofstede conducted an in-depth study of IBM employees' attitudes and value orientations toward work based on over 116,000 survey questionnaires distributed across 72 countries. He summarized and categorized these findings into five cultural dimensions: individualism versus collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, long-term versus short-term orientation, and masculinity versus femininity. The specific analysis of these five cultural dimensions in the context of Chinese and American family sitcoms is as follows.

3. Five Cultural Dimensions: An Analysis of Chinese and American Family Education in *Home with Kids* and *Good Luck Charlie* from the Perspective of Cultural Dimension Theory

3.1 An Analysis of the Differences Between Chinese and American Family Education in *Home with Kids* and *Good Luck Charlie* from the Perspective of Individualism and Collectivism

The United States and China are typical representatives of individualistic and collectivistic social values, respectively. These

values reflect the relationship between individuals and collectives under certain social structures, as well as the specific behaviors exhibited by individuals and collectives within those structures. China is a quintessential collectivist country, emphasizing harmony and unity within groups, encouraging individuals to suppress their individuality to conform to the majority, and prioritizing collective interests over personal ones. This collectivist cultural tradition in China can be traced back to the unified system established during the Qin Dynasty. The cultural value of uniformity maximizes organizational efficiency and leverages the advantage of "pooling resources to accomplish major tasks." The creation of legendary projects like the Huoshenshan and Leishenshan hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic is a testament to the strengths of China's collectivist culture. Within the framework of collectivism, individuals are not merely seen as independent, thinking entities; rather, they are often assigned specific social responsibilities and roles. Society encourages individuals to exist as stable components of the broader social framework and discourages behaviors that deviate from mainstream norms. China's college entrance examination system also reflects this collectivist cultural tradition. For example, in humanities subjects like Chinese, students can only score points based on a single standard answer. Individualistic or unconventional ideas are not accepted by the existing educational system, and students must continually adjust their answers to align with the fixed standard. In contrast, in countries dominated by individualistic ideologies, such as the United States and France, exam answers are often open-ended, and students are encouraged to think outside the box and use their imagination. In American classrooms, teachers emphasize expressing personal opinions and respecting individual freedom and the right to self-expression. As a result, students raised in the American education system tend to have a stronger desire for self-expression, while those raised in the Chinese system are more inclined to suppress their individuality to adapt to their environment. The reflection of collectivism and individualism in the two TV shows is as follows:

(1) *Home with Kids*

Xia Donghai: (earnestly) Kids, remember, no matter where you go, home will always be your safe harbor.

Xia Xue: (moved) Dad, I understand. I'll always remember those words.

Liu Xing: (playfully) What if there's no water or electricity at home?

Xia Donghai: (smiling) Then we'll figure it out together. Home is a place we build through collective effort.

In this scene, Xia Donghai emphasizes the importance of family unity to his children. Even in difficult moments like a lack of "water or electricity," he underscores the need to rely on the family's collective strength to overcome challenges. Rooted in collectivist traditions, individuals are encouraged to support one another, highlighting the responsibilities and contributions each member should make within the family—the smallest yet foundational unit of society.

(2) *Good Luck Charlie*

Bob: Hi! I'm Teddy's dad.

Spencer: Nice to meet you, sir.

Teddy: Uh, Spencer and I are studying for our biology test tomorrow.

Bob: Are you, now?

Teddy: Yes, yes, we are, so can everyone please leave? Not you.

Bob: Teddy?

Teddy: Yeah?

Bob: I thought your mom said no study date.

Teddy: Yeah, at the library.

Bob: Oh, right. Okay, so then you've talked to her about this?

Teddy: Of course I did. I mean, I'm — I'm pretty sure I did. It's just I talk to so many different people about so many different things.

In this segment, Teddy's father is concerned about his daughter, who is at a crucial stage of her studies, potentially becoming too engrossed in a romantic relationship. He approaches Teddy to inquire about the situation. Although Teddy's father does not approve of his daughter studying alone with her boyfriend, he does not adopt a direct or forceful approach to demand an immediate change in her behavior. Instead, when their views clash, he first guides his daughter to further reflect on her actions through questioning. After considering various factors, if his daughter still insists on her choice, Teddy's father, in his role as a parent, ultimately respects her personal decision. This scenario

offers a glimpse into the manifestation of individualism within American family traditions: even though parents still hold the responsibility of guiding their children's growth, they leave ample room for personal choice, reflecting the respect and affirmation of individual rights and freedoms inherent in individualism. However, while individualism grants individuals considerable freedom of choice, it also requires them to take full responsibility for their decisions and the associated risks, without the safety net provided by the collective family unit, highlighting the dual aspects of individualism on the individual.

3.2 *Analyzing the Differences in Chinese and American Family Education in Home with Kids and Good Luck Charlie from the Perspective of Power Distance*

Power distance is a significant theory in the study of cultural differences, describing the extent to which members of a society accept unequal power distribution. China is a typical high power distance country, where the level of power distance varies across different contexts. In the workplace, this is reflected in the absolute obedience of subordinates to their superiors' directives; in the family setting, traditional Chinese parents hold absolute authority over their children, often making unilateral decisions; in the social structure, the prevalent "official standard" culture leads to a general reverence and desire for authority among the populace. In contrast, the United States represents a typical low power distance country. In such societies, the perception of social hierarchy is more blurred, and the boundaries between different levels are not as distinct. Consequently, questioning and challenging authority are more common in low power distance societies. The differences in this dimension are reflected in two family sitcoms as follows:

(1) *Home with Kids*

Xia Donghai: Xue, I've found you a tutor. They'll start coming to the house tomorrow to help with your studies.

Xia Xue: (surprised) What? A tutor? I don't need one!

Xia Donghai: (calmly) Your grades have slipped lately. A tutor can help.

Xia Xue: (protesting) I can handle it myself!

Xia Donghai: (firmly) This is for your own good. My decision is final.

Here, parent Xia Donghai insists on hiring a tutor for Xia Xue due to her declining grades. Despite Xia Xue's objections, he disregards her autonomy, acting on the typical Chinese parental mindset of "I know what's best for you." This reflects the exercise of traditional patriarchal authority, where parental decisions often override children's voices under the guise of benevolence.

(2) Good Luck Charlie

Amy: I never should've gone back to work.

Bob: Sweetheart, this is all gonna be okay.

Amy: No, no, it's not. It's too hard. I can't do this. I mean, what made me think I could go back to work full time and take care of four kids? I'm a terrible mother.

Bob: No no, you're not. Look, if anything, I'm a horrible father.

PJ: Would you guys chill? You're great parents. Teddy, Gabe and me turned out pretty good.

Bob: Yeah, come on. We've got to be doing something right.

In one scene, Amy, a mother of four, feels frustrated by her inability to balance work and childcare. Her son, PJ, actively comforts and counsels her. This illustrates how parents in low power distance societies are more likely to reflect on their own behaviors rather than blindly criticize their children from a position of parental authority. In this cultural atmosphere, communication between parents and children resembles equal exchanges between peers, with children having a vague sense of the hierarchical relationship that exists between parents and children.

3.3 Analyzing the Differences in Chinese and American Family Education in Home with Kids and Good Luck Charlie from the Perspective of Uncertainty Avoidance

The cultural dimension theory of "uncertainty avoidance" describes the extent to which members of a society tolerate and accept ambiguous situations and uncertain risks. In high uncertainty avoidance societies like China, Japan, and Germany, people tend to establish and adhere to a series of frameworks and rules to avoid uncertain risks as much as possible, ensuring the smooth operation of society within a fixed framework. In contrast, in low uncertainty avoidance societies like the United States, people are more inclined to break

established patterns, take risks, and embrace uncertainty. Countries influenced by high uncertainty avoidance cultures often have more stable operational orders and structures, with stronger capabilities to handle major crises, often characterized by the ability to "concentrate efforts on major tasks." On the other hand, countries deeply influenced by low uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to be more innovative. Due to the social culture that encourages risk-taking, these countries often have a more vibrant atmosphere for innovation, and adventurous ideas are more likely to be realized. The differences in this dimension are reflected in two family sitcoms as follows:

(1) Home with Kids

Liu Mei: Stop! What are you doing up so late?

Liu Xing: Just doing what we want!

Xia Yu: (holding a feather) Turning this feather into a rose. (bows to Liu Xing) I love you!

Liu Xing: Hey, Mom, can I ask for some money? (touches hair) I want to dye my hair green.

Liu Mei: What?! (looking furious)

Xia Donghai: Whoa, Mei, calm down. Let him finish. What else do you want?

Liu Mei: (through gritted teeth) Go on...

Liu Xing: (smirking) Get a girlfriend.

Xia Donghai: That's... a bold request.

Liu Mei: Liu Xing?! (raising her hand)

Liu Xing: What's the big deal? Xue gets to date her "wild boy"! Why can't I meet my "savage girlfriend"?

Liu Mei: (pointing) If you dare have a "savage girlfriend," you'll suddenly find you have a savage and wild mother! (lunges forward)

Liu Xing: Unfair! Unfair!

Xia Donghai: Mei, Mei...

In this scene, parent Liu Mei vehemently rejects Liu Xing's unconventional desires—dyeing his hair green and dating—to signal zero tolerance for such "deviant" behavior. Chinese parents often prioritize steering their children toward socially accepted paths, minimizing risks to ensure their growth aligns with societal norms. Actions deemed outside these expectations are aggressively discouraged, reflecting a focus on maintaining control over their children's "societal timeline."

(2) Good Luck Charlie

Amy: Okay, What's going on here?

Gabe: Dad fell down the stairs and broke his butt.

Amy: You weren't holding the baby, were you?

Bob: Um, yes, then no, then yes again.

Amy: You promised me you weren't gonna drop this one!

Bob: Honey, look, it was just a little accident. Oh, and by the way, for the record-an amazing catch!

In this scene, Bob, as a parent, accidentally falls down the stairs while taking care of the child but fortunately catches the child in time. This seemingly high-risk behavior appears somewhat adventurous in an American family context but is generally acceptable. Amy, the wife, does not solely blame or complain about Bob's unstable behavior. Instead, the entire conversation unfolds in a relatively humorous and light-hearted atmosphere. This attitude towards risk indirectly influences the children in the household. This subtle detail reflects the high tolerance and acceptance of uncertainty and risk in American culture. Children raised under the influence of a low uncertainty avoidance culture often grow up to be more willing to break conventional norms and exhibit a greater spirit of innovation.

3.4 Analyzing Home with Kids from the Perspective of Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation

The dimension of long-term versus short-term orientation primarily reflects the extent to which a nation or individual, influenced by a particular social culture, accepts the time span for the goals or benefits they pursue. Long-term orientation means that individuals need to sacrifice some immediate benefits and pleasures for the realization of long-term goals, reflecting their determination and perseverance towards achieving these goals. In contrast, short-term oriented cultures place more emphasis on the realization of immediate benefits and the enjoyment of the process. Individuals raised in short-term oriented cultures often do not place much importance on predicting future trends. The differences in this dimension are reflected in two family sitcoms as follows:

(1) Home with Kids

Liu Xing: Mom, I'm hungry.

Xia Yu: Mom, me too.

Liu Mei: I've prepared a big dinner. (Liu Xing and Xia Yu inhale deeply) But we can't eat until

your sister arrives.

Liu Xing: Ugh, I miss Sister Xue so much!

Xia Yu: Me too!

Liu Xing & Xia Yu: (singing) *Come back soon, don't let our stomachs growl! Come back soon, don't let our stomachs growl!*

Liu Mei: Why isn't she back yet? Could something have happened?

Liu Xing: Maybe they're eating out. Let's start without her—the food's getting cold! (the boys rush toward the table)

Liu Mei: Nope. Not happening.

Here, Liu Mei prioritizes upholding family etiquette at the dinner table over her children's immediate hunger. Despite their protests, she reinforces the importance of social rituals and delayed gratification—a hallmark of Chinese parenting. The phrase "It'll all be better once you go to college/get a job/get married..." exemplifies this long-term orientation, where short-term desires are sacrificed for future stability. This mindset, widely mocked yet deeply ingrained, underscores how Chinese families equate present sacrifices with future success.

(2) Good Luck Charlie

Day's all burnt toast

生活搞得一团糟

Running late, and dad says

就要迟到, 爸爸在叫

Has anybody seen my left shoe

我左脚的鞋子有没有人看到

I close my eyes, take a bite

我闭上双眼, 咬口早餐

Grab a ride, laugh out loud

跳上车子, 放声大笑

The above text is part of the opening song lyrics of *Good Luck Charlie*. Through this text, readers can generally understand the extremely tense and chaotic morning scene in Charlie's family. The tolerance of American families towards such a casual lifestyle actually reflects an important characteristic of American culture that values short-term orientation and immediate benefits. Compared to pursuing well-organized order for long-term stability and efficiency, American families place more emphasis on the happiness and benefits of the present moment. Although behaviors driven by short-term oriented values

often carry certain risks for the future, they also create a more relaxed and tolerant social atmosphere. Under the influence of a social atmosphere that pursues short-term oriented values, each individual in society places more importance on their own feelings, rather than blindly following the guidance and norms of a fixed “social clock.”

3.5 Analyzing the Differences in Chinese and American Family Education in Home with Kids and Good Luck Charlie from the Perspective of Masculinity vs. Femininity

The dimension of masculinity versus femininity describes the extent of differences in gender roles as recognized by society. A society dominated by masculinity emphasizes the significant differences in gender roles among its members, such as assigning greater social responsibilities to men compared to women. Qualities like “decisiveness, aggressiveness, and ambition” are considered basic traits that men should possess in such a social dimension. In contrast, in a social atmosphere dominated by femininity, the social responsibilities assigned to men and women are more evenly distributed, and the differences in character labels assigned by society to men and women are no longer as pronounced. This is reflected in the fact that character labels like “modesty and patience” can be equally applied to both men and women. In fact, both China and the United States are countries dominated by masculinity, as seen in the social atmosphere’s admiration for character labels with distinct male characteristics like “decisiveness and bravery.” The family education in both China and the United States reflects, to varying degrees, the importance placed on cultivating masculine traits in children, and the family structures in both countries exhibit a certain degree of “men working outside, women managing the home” distribution, emphasizing the reflection of gender differences in social division of labor.

4. Conclusion

This article, based on cultural dimension theory, provides a detailed and in-depth analysis of the differences between Chinese and American family cultures from five dimensions. In fact, the differences in family education concepts between China and the United States reflect the fundamental differences between Chinese and American cultures, determined by the long-term accumulation of different historical and cultural

backgrounds in the two countries. Chinese culture emphasizes “pragmatism,” pays less attention to the inner spiritual world and spiritual attributes of individuals, and thus focuses more on the investment-to-return ratio of things. In terms of family education, this is reflected in Chinese parents’ avoidance of all uncertain risk factors and their adherence to long-termism. Children raised under Chinese family education are also more inclined to compare their growth trajectories quantitatively rather than truly exploring their spiritual world and inner selves. In contrast, American family education places more emphasis on cultivating children’s autonomy, encouraging them to actively engage in self-exploration and trial-and-error processes during learning. Because American family education focuses more on the immediate significance of education rather than the future utility and benefits it may bring, it provides children with a more relaxed growth environment. Children raised in such an environment can thus acquire independence and autonomy earlier, providing strong support for their smooth transition into adulthood. The family education systems in both China and the United States reflect the basic requirements of their respective national conditions and are the best choices made under different national systems. However, we need to pay attention to the critical position of current family education as the last barrier children need to pass before entering adult society. We should actively learn from the reasonable highlights of American family education, striving to further develop and improve our own family education, making it more aligned with children’s natural instincts and growth paths, and carrying forward certain progressive concepts and trends of modern society.

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