

The Differences of Chinese-American Sports Culture from the Perspective of Culture Value Dimensions

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Abstract. Chinese and American culture differences lead to the differences of Chinese and American sports culture. This article dissects that the main differences lie in the culture value dimensions. And it uses qualitative research method and comparison method to demonstrate Chinese sports culture and American sports culture from the perspective of Hofstede's four culture value dimensions: collectivism and individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and femininity. It also analyses the reasons of these differences. Then this article makes a result that the differences of collectivism and individualism lead to all these differences of culture value dimensions naturally. This “we” consciousness and “I” consciousness may give an explanation to the communicative conflicts.

Introduction

As international tools, sports have no boundaries. And the development of sports will promote international communication. Nevertheless, due to the differences of culture, sports culture present different. In order to enjoy and communicate better with sports between China and America, we should comprehend Chinese-American sports culture from the perspective of culture value dimensions.

Culture and Culture Dimensions

There are more than 200 concepts of culture have been proposed by anthropologists, sociolinguists and language teaching theorists.

Hofstede defines culture as the core standard making a distinction between one group people from another in a psychological viewpoint. Culture is “software of the mind” [1].

Culture is the total accumulation of beliefs customs, values, behaviors, institutions and communication patterns that are shared learned and passed down through the generations in an identifiable group of people” [2].

According to Larry A. Samovar, “culture is communication and communication is culture” [3].

To sum up culture include shared values, beliefs, customs, behaviors, and communications. And communication can be divided into several small parts, such as economic, political, arts, sports and so on. So sports is a part of culture.

Sports culture generalized refers to the sum of all material and spiritual civilization in the aspect of athletics, created by human beings in the process of historical development [4]. It is evident that culture is the superior concept of sports culture, sports culture is a part of culture network.

Culture value dimensions are presented by Geert Hofstede, who is a famous Dutch interculturalist. Hofstede comes up with four cultural value dimensions on which cultures differ: individualism and collectivism; power distance; uncertainty avoidance; masculinity and femininity [5].

Collectivism and Individualism. Collectivism extent to which individuals perceive themselves dependent, more collectivist and more integrated into groups. Chinese culture worships the views, needs and goals of the in-group rather than oneself. And Chinese people prone to follow others, and

make them belong to a specific group and gain the sense of belonging. In China “we” consciousness prevails “I” consciousness [6].

On the contrary, individualism refers to the tendency of people to immediately look after themselves and their family, and neglects the needs of society. To some extent, the individualistic people tend to show their personalities in public to distinguish them from others, because they believe they are the unique ones in the world, they should behave or dress differently and uniquely [7]. And every individual has the right to his/her private property, thoughts and opinions. In American culture, “I” consciousness prevails.

The culture of collectivism is used to attribute the result of one event to a series of factors, because people in this culture live in groups or live in public opinions. For example, in 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the withdrawal event of track and field athlete Liu Xiang has profoundly explained this culture dimension. Many Chinese audiences couldn't accept his withdrawal, and the critical words on internet far exceed the words of sympathy and concern. At that time, Liu Xiang became a sinner through the ages; while, several years ago, when he broke the world records, he was the hero of the whole country [8]. The reason of this sharp contrast is that Chinese people live in the collectivism culture; they have a strong sense of social responsibility and honor. If the athlete wins the match, he makes his country proud, and when he loses, he disgraces his motherland.

To be different, American culture values highly individualistic heroism. They believe that the collective success is built on the basis of personal success and personal success is a prerequisite for collective success. So the reports about the athletes focus on the individual efforts of the athletes and the scientific training methods of the coach, but seldom attribute the achievements to the whole team, the government agency and higher leadership. For Americans, sports are sports, sports are just entertainment [8]. Matches are the chances to improve oneself; they have nothing to do with making country proud or disgracing motherland. So the official advertising language of NBA is “I Love This Game.” And never talk something about “Win for the Honor” and so on [8].

Power Distance. According to Hofstede, there is another important difference between the culture value dimensions of Chinese and American culture, which is high and low power distance.

Power distance indicates the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally among individuals [1]. High-power distance cultures think that power and authority are established facts and members are required to accept that people are not equal from the very beginning in this world and everyone is doomed to have his or her certain status. Social hierarchy is taken for granted and inflexible.

Low-power-distance cultures hold that inequality in society should be minimized. People who live in low power-distance cultures are freer to display emotions to individuals with different social status, because status differences are small [1]. And they strike for equality. Individualism takes up a great part of their social values. They work together to minimize power and status differences.

From long time ago, Chinese culture is high power distance, and it stresses on the public opinion. People's respect for authority and stick to a certain position unconsciously. The emotional and social distance between people of different positions in hierarchical systems is still emphasized by Chinese people [8]. Therefore, Chinese sports administration has its own hierarchy; even the staff has strict hierarchical level. And the relationship between athletes and coach is something like patriarchal relationship. Under the same coach, athletes have a family like seniority in detail. For example, the coaches are called “masters”, above it, there are “grandmasters”. Even if a person is a world champion, he also has to obey the hierarchical rules in front of his seniors. Otherwise he will face strong pressure of public opinions.

American cultures prevail low-power distance. Contrast with the strict hierarchy system of Chinese sports administration; American sports are professional sports, which are bottom-up mechanisms. American professional sports players grow up in the mass sports, and they are chosen through the perfect competition system by their active individual participation, with their constant efforts [9]. Therefore, there is no patriarchal relationship between coaches and athletes. This system can maximize personal value, which follows the idea of “I” consciousness.

Uncertainty Avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance shows how a culture deals with the anxiousness brought by the uncertainty of future or unknown situations. In high uncertainty avoidance cultures, when people feel threatened by unknown situations, they tend to avoid ambiguity and uncertainty by making rules, having faith in absolute truths and obtaining stability and seeking solutions from group members. People from high uncertainty avoidance cultures prefer to be slow-paced, rigid and formal, and often refuse new ideas and innovations.

Low uncertainty avoidance cultures, in contrast, accept uncertainty and variation more easily and feel more relaxed facing up to the diversity. People take it as a natural part of life and treat it with more tolerance. People from low uncertainty cultures behave more risk-taking and aggressive instead of thinking more cautiously before taking an action than people from high uncertainty cultures.

Chinese sports culture is a high uncertainty avoidance culture. Chinese athletes prefer to plan their career under a system, which can give them formal and regular schedule of their training and competition [10]. They never bother their heads about checking the schedules with coaches or companies, nor the fees of training and living. They choose stability and accept the training equipment, coaches, services and salaries given by governments. There is no wonder, when Chinese athletes win or lose a match; it is a national event [10].

However, American culture is a low uncertainty avoidance culture. American athletes face hundreds of uncertainty in their career future. They have to be both managers and employees, and to rent training ground, to invite coaches, to support crew and financial staff. They also have to check their schedules and to pay for these expenses by contest bonuses and advertisement incomes [11]. For this reason, American athletes are their own bosses. And when they win or lose the match, it has nothing to do with their countries.

Masculinity and Femininity. Hofstede uses the words masculinity and femininity to refer not to men and women, but rather to the degree to which masculine and feminine traits prevail.

Femininity is associated with implicit way of expressions, fluid gender roles, and interdependence. It stresses caring for people's feelings and needs. Chinese culture tends to be femininity, because Chinese people always care about other people's feelings and remarks. Chinese culture is restrained, implicit and cautious [7]. Thus Chinese sports culture pursuits balance and mean, but not creative and adventurous, so it is called "gentle sports culture" [4].

The very essence of Chinese traditional sports is "static", and it reflects a kind of static beauty, which pays attention to the value of the health keeping [4]. Take three of most popular mass sports programs for example. Tai chi conveys a meaning of combination of Yin and Yang, dynamic and static, softness and hardness. It aims at keeping health in both body and mind, but neither conquering the opponent, nor against the nature. Table tennis is known as China's "national sport", without any physical contact, the players compete by the middle net with their skills. Health Qigong is designed to man and nature as one and to conform to nature.

Masculinity is associated with such behaviors as explicit way of expressions, ambition, achievements, and signs of manliness. Compared to Chinese culture, American culture is more adventurous based. It originates from the sea civilization, so Americans are always keen on taking risks and exploration [7]. Through the body competition, American sports promote the essence of dynamic and show the pursuit of exploration and conquest of nature. So it is called "hard sports culture".

Take the broad masses of American sports programs to illustrate this masculinity feature. NBA, as the most popular match of basketball, pursues team cooperation, attaches great importance to personal heroism, which can be manifested from the frenzy pursuit of the MVP in each session. Second popular sports program football shows clear physical confrontation, the pursuit of strength, speed and attack. Except for balls, some outdoor activities, such as, mountaineering, rock climbing, etc. with a clear spirit of exploration and conquest. In addition, boxing, fencing and other popular sports, also fully reflect American sports culture values about dynamics, competitions and adventures.

Conclusion

All the differences between Chinese and American sports culture due to the differences of culture values dimensions. Chinese culture prevails “we” consciousness, stick to a certain position, and prefer rules to avoid future uncertainty, and to be conservative and implicit but not to be unique and adventurous. This culture is more like to accept and obey public things but not to emphasize “I” consciousness. American culture, on the contrary, neglects the social needs, minimizes the inequality to show the individual abilities, accepts uncertainty and diversity to make one unique, and then chooses to be adventurous to make self-achievements. These are the essence of individualism. Therefore, all these culture dimensions show the root differences in the aspect of collectivism and individualism.

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