

## **East Meets West in 'BEEF': A Hofstede-Inspired Analysis of Sino-American Cultural Dimensions**

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**Abstract:** This study delves into the cultural interactions and divergences between China and the United States as portrayed in the American television series "Beef". Leveraging dialogues from the series, this research employs textual analysis and word cloud methodologies to discern the distinct cultural traits and barriers to cultural integration between Eastern and Western paradigms. Anchored in Hofstede's cultural dimensions model, the analysis examines key dimensions including power distance, individualism versus collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance. The objective is to map out how these cultural dimensions manifest within the series and mirror broader intercultural interactions and misunderstandings. The findings offer insights into the complexities of cross-cultural communication and provide a basis for enhancing dialogue and understanding between diverse cultural groups. By exploring the portrayal of cultural differences in media, this paper contributes to academic discussions on cultural globalization and offers practical implications for cross-cultural engagements in global settings.

**Keywords:** Hofstede's cultural dimensions model; Cross culture; Sino-American American drama; "BEEF"

### **1. Introduction**

With the deepening of globalization, communication between China and the United States in political, economic, and cultural spheres are becoming increasingly frequent. People from different cultural backgrounds continuously interact and merge in their daily lives, work, and entertainment, highlighting the growing importance of cross-cultural communication.

Most existing cross-cultural studies focus on areas such as business communication, language education, interpersonal skills, and cultural adaptation, while less attention has been given to cross-cultural exchanges and differences in film and television[1]. As an important medium of cultural communication, film has gradually become a stage for showcasing the cultural differences between China and the West. The representation of these cultures in films often vividly reflects their distinct features, which is crucial for mutual understanding, communication, and learning [2].

This study, based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions model, examines the American TV series "Beef". Through textual analysis and word cloud analysis, it explores the Sino-American cultural differences portrayed in the series and reveals how these cultural dimensions manifest in specific situations. "Beef" is an American-produced drama that tells the story of two main characters who, after a moment of road rage, engage in a heated conflict that sparks a series of intense disputes and misunderstandings. Over time, through their continued interactions, the initial hostility gradually dissolves, leading to mutual understanding and redemption. The show provides rich material for examining cross-cultural differences through several aspects. First is the cultural background difference, with the East Asian identity of one of the protagonists and their integration into American society, reflecting the collision and fusion of Eastern and Western cultures. Second is the social class difference, as the protagonists—an entrepreneur and a contractor—come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, creating tensions around class mobility and identity. Lastly, there is a contrast in emotional expression and communication styles, influenced by the

characters' personalities and family dynamics. This study will focus on the behavioral patterns, values, and communication styles of the characters, aiming to provide new perspectives and insights for both theoretical research and practical applications in cross-cultural communication. This research is not only of theoretical significance but also contributes to enhancing cross-cultural communication skills. In the context of increasing Sino-American cultural exchanges, understanding these differences becomes crucial. Through this study, readers will gain a better understanding of the uniqueness of Chinese and American cultures and how to engage in more effective cross-cultural communication in the context of globalization.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Model

Hofstede's cultural dimensions model is a cross-cultural theoretical framework designed to help understand the differences in behaviors and values across various cultural backgrounds. While working at IBM, Geert Hofstede conducted a large-scale study, collecting data from over 100,000 IBM employees across more than 50 countries through questionnaires. After years of analysis, he published "Culture's Consequences" in 1980, introducing the concept of "national cultural dimensions" [3]. From these initial results, and with later expansions, Hofstede developed a model identifying four primary dimensions to differentiate cultures. Eventually, with the research contributions of Michael Bond from the University of Hong Kong, the model was expanded to six dimensions: Power Distance, Collectivism versus Individualism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long-term versus Short-term Orientation, and Indulgence versus Restraint.

These dimensions provide an effective tool for understanding and comparing social behaviors and values across different cultural contexts. Since its introduction in the 1960s, Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory has had a profound impact on the field of cross-cultural research. By breaking down culture into identifiable components, Hofstede's framework offers a method for recognizing cultural differences across nations, facilitating the resolution of cultural conflicts [4].

Many scholars have applied Hofstede's theory to study Sino-American cultural differences, highlighting the contrasting dimensions between Eastern and Western cultures. For example, Tian argues that Chinese picture books reflect collectivism and high power distance, while Western picture books emphasize individualism and low power distance, communicating distinct values through text and imagery[5]. Additionally, scholars have increasingly turned to film and television analysis to examine Sino-American cultural differences. For instance, Hu, using Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory from a cross-cultural perspective, analyzed the film "The Farewell", identifying differences in views on life, family, and consumption between China and the United States, and proposed suggestions for cross-cultural communication[6].

Similarly, Chen and Chen applied Hofstede's theory to analyze cultural dimensions in the film "A Grandson from America", exploring differences in family culture between China and America[7]. In another example, Rahayu studied the characters Nicholas Young, Rachel Chu, and Eleanor in "Crazy Rich Asians", aiming to understand the cultural differences between Chinese and American societies[8].

However, there are research gaps and limitations in studies applying this theory. Although some scholars have used Hofstede's cultural dimensions to analyze films, most research focuses on corporate management, with fewer studies examining cross-cultural representations in media. For instance, Li emphasized the need for diverse types of analysis to better understand cultural differences between regions and to effectively apply Hofstede's theory to different contexts, particularly in film and television[9].

### 2.2 Research on Cultural Differences in Film

A film is polysemous, and as David Croteau and William Hoynes argue, audiences construct meaning actively within the context of their social group, while also engaging in dialogue with the structure of the film itself [10]. Due to differences in ideology and cultural backgrounds, cross-cultural communication in films should strive to avoid confrontational approaches. Instead, it should actively seek common ground between different cultures, using themes and languages that evoke

emotional resonance. The key to finding this balance is to avoid "cultural centrism" and to enable equal cultural exchange between different subjects. By identifying shared values, creating universally relatable themes, and employing vivid cinematic language, filmmakers can mitigate the impact of cultural differences [11].

American anthropologist Edward Hall noted that China belongs to a high-context culture, whereas the United States is a low-context culture. In high-context cultures, communication styles are shaped by close interpersonal relationships, well-structured social systems, and strong behavioral norms [12]. In contrast, communication in low-context cultures tends to be direct, dramatic, open, and precise, often based on feelings or clear intent[13].

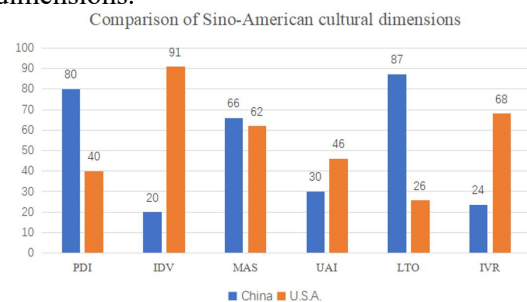
In "Beef", the TV series showcases cultural dynamics influenced by the diverse backgrounds of its main characters, who represent a blend of Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Japanese cultures, all situated within an American cultural setting. The series presents complex interpersonal relationships and cultural conflicts, using dialogue to explore the characters' psychological states. These interactions vividly illustrate how individuals react to different situations within a context of cultural tension, providing valuable support for research grounded in Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. This layered depiction of cultural conflict and fusion serves as an ideal case for analyzing cross-cultural communication and differences, particularly when examining how the characters navigate and resolve cultural clashes while immersed in both Eastern and Western influences.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Cultural Differences between China and the U.S. Based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

After Hofstede introduced the cultural dimensions model, many researchers adopted IBM's comprehensive questionnaire or parts of it to survey other groups. These repeated studies expanded the number of countries and regions in Hofstede's research to 74 and the U.S. received valid scores across the six dimensions identified by Hofstede, based on both the original IBM research and follow-up

studies. Figure 1. shows the comparison of cultural dimension scores between China and the United States according to Hofstede's six dimensions.



**Figure 1. Cultural Dimensions in China and the U.S.**

#### (1) Power Distance (PDI)

Power distance refers to the degree to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept unequal power distribution. In cultures with high power distance, relationships between superiors and subordinates, as well as between the elderly and the young, are viewed as unequal. Subordinates are highly dependent on their superiors, and the decisions made by those in power are often authoritative. This can enhance efficiency in decision-making but may lead to poor communication in times of crisis. In low power distance cultures, relationships are more egalitarian, and subordinates are less dependent on their superiors, with communication more likely to involve negotiation or debate. This encourages innovation and individual expression, though decision-making may take longer to reach consensus. A higher PDI score indicates a greater acceptance of hierarchical structures, and a lower score suggests a more equal distribution of power. According to the chart, China's PDI is high at 80, double that of the U.S.

#### (2) Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)

Uncertainty avoidance reflects the extent to which a society attempts to avoid uncertainty and irregularity through formal channels and procedures. High UAI cultures tend to establish detailed rules and processes to reduce uncertainty, valuing authority, status, seniority, and age. They also seek to avoid risk by providing greater job security. This culture excels in quality control and risk management but may stifle innovation. Low UAI cultures, in contrast, are more tolerant of deviant behaviors and opinions, have fewer rules, and encourage

innovation and experimentation, though this may increase uncertainty and risk in decision-making. Higher UAI scores indicate a stronger tendency to avoid uncertainty. The chart shows that the U.S. has a slightly higher UAI score than China, indicating that China tends to mitigate risks through more comprehensive strategies and regulations.

#### (3) Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS)

This dimension explores the relationship between gender roles and work, particularly the value orientation a society places on traditional male and female roles. In masculine societies, gender roles are clearly differentiated: men are expected to be confident, strong, and focused on material achievements, while women are expected to be humble, gentle, and concerned with quality of life. This culture values assertive behavior and wealth acquisition. In feminine societies, gender roles overlap, with both men and women valuing humility, social harmony, and a balance between work and life. The higher the MAS score, the more masculine the culture. The chart shows that both China and the U.S. have relatively close scores in this dimension, indicating a shared tendency toward masculine cultural traits.

#### (4) Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)

This dimension measures how individuals perceive their relationship with society. In individualistic cultures, relationships between people are weaker, and individuals prioritize their own interests and those of their immediate family. This culture encourages personal competition and achievement, fostering innovation and individual development. In collectivist cultures, individuals are integrated into strong, cohesive groups that provide lifelong protection, to which they owe loyalty. This culture emphasizes teamwork and collective interests, promoting social stability and solidarity. A higher IDV score indicates a stronger tendency toward individualism. According to the chart, the U.S. has a very high IDV score of 91, signifying a strong individualistic culture, whereas China's IDV is much lower at 20, indicating a more collectivist society.

#### (5) Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Orientation (LTO)

This dimension reflects the value a society places on long-term versus short-term benefits, indicating whether decisions are influenced more by past traditions or future possibilities.

Long-term oriented cultures focus on future planning, patience, and sustained development, which can be advantageous in resource management and environmental protection. Short-term oriented cultures, on the other hand, prioritize present interests and social responsibilities, with the belief that the present moment is most important. This culture tends to be more flexible and efficient in responding to urgent situations and short-term goals. A higher LTO score suggests a stronger long-term orientation. In this dimension, China scores very high at 87, indicating a strong long-term orientation, while the U.S. has a much lower score of 26, reflecting a short-term oriented society.

#### (6) Indulgence vs. Restraint (IVR)

Indulgence versus restraint is an important dimension that describes the extent to which a society allows its members to freely enjoy life. Indulgent societies tend to allow people to pursue pleasure and enjoyment, exhibiting a more open attitude toward fun and entertainment, with fewer restrictions on individual behavior. In contrast, restrained societies emphasize controlling desires, adhering to social norms and values. A higher IVR score indicates a more indulgent culture. In this dimension, China leans toward a restrained culture, with an IVR score of 24, suggesting that people are expected to adhere to stricter social norms regarding enjoyment. The U.S., with an IVR score of 68, tends toward an indulgent culture, where people are more encouraged to freely enjoy life and personal pleasures.

### **3.2 Data Collection and Analysis**

Film and television dialogue is not only a vehicle for conversation but also a key element in shaping character identities, conveying emotions, advancing narratives, and reflecting cultural values [14].

The researchers employed a qualitative research design using content analysis to identify the cultural differences between China and the U.S. For this study, the researchers selected high-quality materials to ensure a deep understanding of the subject matter. Purposive sampling was used to select the TV series that best depicted Sino-American cross-cultural interactions. To obtain relevant answers to the research questions, coding guidelines and thematic coding were applied, focusing on six



themes according to Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory [15].

In this study, a total of 108 lines of dialogue were collected. The primary data were taken from “Beef”, with the form of the data including dialogues, monologues, and narration. The data were gathered by watching “Beef” and identifying key character lines. The analysis was conducted through multiple approaches, including the presentation and explanation of the selected material. This method allowed for an in-depth examination of how the series’ dialogue reflects Sino-American cultural differences, particularly through the lens of Hofstede’s dimensions.

In this study, the researchers collected key lines from the two main characters in “Beef”—Amy Liu and Danny Cho—that reflect Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. Using word cloud tools, they generated word clouds for Amy Liu (Figure 2. ) and Danny Cho (Figure 3. ) for preliminary analysis. A word cloud is a unique form of text visualization, where words of different frequencies are displayed in varying font sizes and arranged in visually distinct patterns. The more frequently a word appears in the text, the more prominent its size and position in the word cloud [16].



Figure 2. Word Cloud of Amy Liu's Cross-Cultural Lines



Figure 3. Word Cloud of Danny Cho's Cross-Cultural Lines

This visual approach allows for a clear and intuitive representation of the key themes and cultural dimensions each character embodies, offering insights into how their dialogue reflects the Sino-American cultural differences

explored in this study.

#### 4. Result and Discussion

##### 4.1 Assimilation of Individualism in Eastern and Western Societies

From Figure 2. and Figure 3. it is evident that in Amy Liu's dialogue, words like "hope" "enjoy" and "hate" appear frequently, indicating her frequent reflection and expression of personal feelings and dissatisfaction with her current situation. Amy values her independence, demonstrates strong self-awareness, believes in her abilities and judgment, and tends to act based on her own values and beliefs. These traits align with the characteristics of individualism. On the other hand, Danny Cho's dialogue frequently includes words like "care" "career" and "family" indicating a strong sense of belonging and responsibility, bound by family and social duties.

Western societies, such as the U.S., emphasize individualism, where people are encouraged to think and act independently, relying more on their own abilities and self-awareness, and pursuing personal achievements, freedom, and independence. In contrast, China, as a collectivist society, places greater emphasis on group interests and family relationships. Individual identity and belonging are often defined through their connection to the group, with a focus on collective goals, harmony, and cooperation. Despite both characters having Eastern family backgrounds, Amy is more deeply assimilated into Western individualism. This could be linked to their social status differences: as a successful entrepreneur, Amy enjoys a higher social status, a better living environment, and access to more social networks and resources, allowing her to integrate more easily into Western society. In contrast, Danny’s struggling renovation business and his family’s forced return home due to financial failure reflect his lower social status, lack of resources, and limited opportunities. His feelings of being overlooked in social settings contribute to his lack of social recognition and respect. His famous line, “Western therapy doesn’t work on an Eastern mind,” further illustrates this point.

##### 4.2 Transcending Gender Stereotypes in Western Society

In both Eastern and Western societies,

masculine traits are often more emphasized. As a male character, Danny Cho takes on significant family and social responsibilities in the series. He faces competition and pressure in the workplace and serves as the family's economic backbone, demonstrating resilience in the face of hardship. These responsibilities reflect traditional masculine traits. On the other hand, Amy Liu, as a female character, exhibits a rich emotional world and subtle emotional expression. She is sensitive to others' emotional changes and offers support and care through her words and actions. While pursuing professional success, she also emphasizes family harmony and happiness, reflecting strong feminine characteristics.

Unlike many shows that present a "men work outside, women tend to the home" dynamic, "Beef" portrays a blending and transcendence of traditional gender roles. Amy handles many of the domestic affairs, ensuring the family's comfort while also excelling in her business, allowing her to engage with high society and establish herself as a powerful woman in Western society. Danny, as the family's economic provider, shoulders significant family and social responsibilities, but he is far from a cold, emotionless "money-making machine." After experiencing a series of setbacks, he begins to reflect on his life and personal value, as seen in his line, "I need to relax myself," and when he reconciles with his brother, he says, "I should have talked to him more." His interactions with Amy evolve from seeing her as an unattainable figure to gradually understanding her struggles and opening up. These reflections are not just responses to external circumstances but also a deeper expression of his own emotional sensitivity.

#### **4.3 The Repression and Awakening of Self-Consciousness**

Although both protagonists in "Beef" are second-generation immigrants, the influence of Eastern cultural values—particularly self-discipline and emotional repression—runs deep in their lives. The show highlights the tension between public and private selves, with Amy and Danny mirroring each other's self-destructive tendencies.

The entire storyline stems from the characters' excessive emotional repression. A sudden road rage incident between Danny, who is deeply frustrated, and Amy, who is under immense

anxiety, escalates into an outburst of anger over a minor conflict. This triggers a series of irrational acts aimed at sabotaging each other's lives. Their mutual destruction and self-destruction serve as an eruption of long-repressed emotions.

Influenced by East Asian culture, both protagonists are masters of emotional repression, skillfully hiding their wounds. Amy, for instance, fakes a confident and calm demeanor at a business forum, assuring the audience that women can "have it all" if they work hard enough. In public, she sells the myth of the "perfect woman," deceiving both herself and others. Both Amy and Danny are also heavily impacted by their families of origin, unable to easily reveal their struggles or show vulnerability to their parents. As Amy herself says, "I think that growing up with my parents taught me to repress all my feelings," and "I don't want anyone to see the real me." The patriarchal structure and familial expectations in East Asian families force Amy to remain reserved and Danny to "only report the good news" to his parents, even as they both approach emotional breaking points, seeking opportunities to release their long-held tensions.

#### **5. Conclusions**

This paper uncovers the unique plot and character development in the American TV series "Beef", highlighting the struggles of East Asian Americans who find themselves caught between the influences of both family and society, living within the cultural gap between East and West. Through the lens of Hofstede's cultural dimensions model, this study delves into the show's depiction of cultural conflict, enriching our understanding of Sino-American cross-cultural differences. By applying Hofstede's model to the analysis of a television series, this research successfully expands the model's scope of application. This effort not only confirms the model's applicability and effectiveness but also offers new perspectives and methods for cross-cultural studies. By deeply analyzing the cultural differences and integration portrayed in "Beef", the study fosters better cultural exchange and communication between China and the U.S., promoting mutual understanding and respect and advancing cross-cultural exchange at a deeper level.

This study primarily focuses on analyzing a single television work, meaning the data source is relatively limited. Although “Beef” is representative, a single case study may not fully capture the complexity and diversity of Sino-American cross-cultural differences. Moreover, while Hofstede's cultural dimensions model is influential and widely applicable, it has its limitations. For example, the model was developed based largely on Western cultural contexts, which may not fully apply to the study of non-Western cultures. Additionally, the model's categorization and interpretation of cultural differences may be somewhat subjective and partial.

Future research could integrate multiple data sources, such as film and television works, literature, and field studies, to more comprehensively reflect the complexity and diversity of Sino-American cross-cultural differences. The use of multiple sources would allow for greater accuracy and reliability through cross-validation and supplementation of data. Additionally, future studies could adopt a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approach to further explore Sino-American cultural comparisons. For instance, comparative analyses could be conducted between “Beef” and other films and TV shows with cross-cultural themes. Collaborating with disciplines such as sociology, psychology, cultural studies, and communication studies could further enhance the depth of cross-cultural research.

Cultural fusion is an inevitable trend in the development of societies. Actively understanding each other's thinking patterns and communication norms, abandoning rigid thinking modes, and enhancing cultural exchange will improve adaptability to different cultures. Enhancing cross-cultural communication skills and striving to understand diverse cultures can help bridge the gap between differing values, fostering mutual understanding.

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