The Comparison Study of Romantic Relationship between U.S. and China

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Abstract:

Different culture have different types of communication patterns, because of their own social norms and social structure. While American culture is liberal and individualistic, the Chinese culture is more conservative. Likewise, romantic relationships are seen in different ways in different cultures.

Overall, all social units develop a culture, even in two-person relationship, the culture develops overtime. As a result of exposure to each other’s cultures and traditions, the Chinese may adopt more individualistic values, and Americans may adopt to more collectivist values.

Key words: Culture; Romantic relationship; Self-notion; Expressions; Dating; Marriage

Introduction:

Romantic relationship has its own benefits like companionship, happiness, loving and feeling loved. It is also of great importance to healthy personalities and interpersonal behaviors. Couples of different racial and ethnic backgrounds tended to view their differences primarily as cultural rather than racial. Different cultures do have their own views about intimate relationships. Some cultures are more romantic, showering their significant others with gifts. Some cultures are more demanding and expect their lovers to be more submissive. Others don’t expect too much from their partner, and they just enjoy being in a relationship.
In the past decades, research suggests that behaviors in a romantic relationship are somewhat different in the Chinese and American society (Tzeng, 1993). It is observed that for the Chinese, the term “romantic relationship” or “dating relationship” contains the elements of necessary seriousness and long-term commitment, therefore a romantic relationship is often perceived as one step before marriage (Hsu, 1985). Under the influence of American culture, however, romantic relationship is a strong emotional experience (Cohen, 1992). A greater degree of commitment would be found in romantic relationships in China than in romantic relationships in the United States.

In our experiences of romantic relationships we tend to view the whole process from the perspective of our own culture. However, all cultures are not the same therefore we might expect many differences in how relationships are viewed and how they are acted out. Although China’s rising ‘love culture’ has borrowed many foreign ideas, such as teen dating and Valentine’s Day, China’s romantic relationships hardly mirror Western ones. It is interesting to figure out these differences, from the way of expressing love to the conflicts between foreign lovers.

**Body:**

**A. The notion of self in the US and China**

Self-awareness can reflect the behavior deviation in a relationship. The notion of self can contribute to the difference in cross-cultural commitment patterns. Different self-constructions can help to explain the pattern of American and Chinese romantic
relationships. Markus and Kityama studied extensively on different self-constructions and their functions in the Asian and the Western culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). They reported that Asians tend to think of themselves in terms of their relationships with others and as a member of a group (i.e. the interdependent self), whereas the Americans would tend to think of themselves as an individuals and express their unique inner attributes (i.e. the independent self). And according to a similar research in 1993, romantic relationships of western culture are based on freedom of choice whereas in non-Western cultures relationships may have more to do with concerns of family or group (Moghaddam, Taylor, & Wright, 1993).

Western culture place great importance on rights and freedom of a person, with happiness and pleasure seen as fundamentally important. Such cultures are described as individualist, which focus on individuals rather than groups. In non-Western cultures groups tends to be primary concern, such cultures are collectivist, are encouraged to be interdependent rather than independent. Collectivist cultures correlate with strong emotional attachment to the in-group and emphasis on in-group harmony, whereas individualist cultures correlate with emotional detachment from in-groups. People are very good at entering and leaving groups but do not develop deep and lasting relationships with others with the same frequencies as collectivists. From this claim, we can see that the differing self-constructions can help to explain the pattern of bonding in Chinese and American romantic relationships (Triandis et al., 1993).
B. Physical actions and oral expression in the US and China

When you come in contact with a person, contacts and communications are necessary. It helps the two have further understanding of each other and promote the relationships. In physical actions, Americans are ardent and share their emotions directly. They show their passion by hugging each other when they meet together. In the same way, they give kisses to each other when they want to express their love. They share their emotions directly. Unlike Americans, Chinese are conservative in body language. They are shy about showing their feelings publicly and always keep their emotions under control.

In oral expression, Americans like to say sweet words to each other whenever they want, such as "I love you", "Honey", etc. They send cards to show the feelings of greetings, appreciation and apology. In contrast, Chinese rarely say "I like you" to each other. Instead of calling their names directly, they use the words—father/mother of kids to call their spouse. They work hard and are responsible as ways to show their romantic feelings to their spouse instead of saying sweet words. They think that to do their best and support the family in the wealthy condition shows their love to the spouse. And if they had to say something, they would like to ask about each other’s daily life, like whether you have a dinner on time or reminding you to keep warm when it’s getting cold. They also pay less attention to understanding the feelings of the spouse. They believe that buying gifts for spouse in the festivals or for the sake of other reason is a waste of money. Even if they do something wrong, they don't apologize to their spouse. They think that there is nothing to be sorry for between a
couple.

In conclusion, Americans are ardent, but Chinese are shy. There is really a lot of difference in romantic expression between the American and Chinese.

C. Love and Dating

Love is one of the most profound emotions known to human beings. Loving and being loved adds richness to our lives. When people feel close to others they are happier and even healthier. Love helps us feel important, understood, and secure. But each kind of love has its own distinctive feel. The kind of love we feel for a parent is different from our love for a baby brother or best friend. And the kind of love we feel in romantic relationships is its own unique type of love.

When you are acquainted with a certain person and want to move forward, then it comes to next stage, dating. Dating is a tricky thing, which is supposed to be fun and memorable in American. Americans are expected to be independent and are seen to have less control over their activities compared with Chinese. Moreover, America being a free country, freedom of speech and free sex is practiced widely making dating more lenient for the Americans. Dating process is so lenient in the American society because of many television programs, dating sites, and other widespread exposure to the sexual content on the media. In American TV programming, sexual content is commonplace, from daytime soap operas to primetime broadcast. This media culture cultivates the mind-sets of people and caused them to have premarital sex during their dating period. Thus, Americans do not consider dating as a crucial
issue. On the opposite, dating is considering to be a healthy social norm because they believe that a person can get more insight in to the opposite sex and achieve their self-development through numerous different dates. Furthermore, the concept of “one night stand” is very common and widely accepted in America. When people are upset or stressed out, they tend to go to a pub and drink just to put all the stuffs behind them. Alcohol leads to risky behavior and makes them even more prone and vulnerable to a one night stand with a stranger. One night stand is so popular in America that the society accepts this act with safety precautions.

In Gao’s study, he hypothesized that the degree of commitment in romantic relationships in China is greater than it in the United States (Gao, 2001). The most significant difference between American and Chinese is activities that the Americans plan romantic activities while the traditional Chinese do not. For example, traditional Chinese parents are very restrictive, so the couples are more likely not to make any plans to go out. First, Americans often present gifts to their lovers in a casual way. Men, especially, give gifts, like a rose, chocolates, or jewelry, to their lovers frequently. Americans are also very good at creating a romantic situation. Usually, men will make a reservation at a nice restaurant before a date. Then, the men will appear being well-dressed in front of their lovers. As a result, women feel very charmed. Most Americans enjoy romantic activities, such as walking on the beach under the moonlight and going to a high little hill to see a beautiful night view and shining stars. Unlike Americans, traditional Chinese rarely give gifts to their lovers, let alone giving a gift on a daily date. They give gifts, which are often very expensive,
on their anniversary or a special occasion. Also, Chinese are not good at creating romantic situations. Most of them will make a reservation at a restaurant if women want them to do it.

In conclusion, there are many different concepts of romance between American and Chinese. Overall, Americans are more romantic than Chinese.

D. Marriage in the US and China

Finally, a good relationship will come to marriage. A good marriage is the combination of love, trust, partnership, tolerance, and provides beautiful and enriching opportunities for growth.

Marrying for love is a vital component of long-term relationship in American. One of the popular aspects of romantic relationships in American culture is living together or cohabitation. Traditionally, the circle of relationship for an American is dating, engagement, and then marriage, just like what Chinese people do now. However, the pattern has increasingly changed to dating, cohabitation, engagement, and then marriage. Overtime, the culture in America has experienced many changes at various stages such as in 1920s (the development of industry and women’s education), 1950s (the development becoming inverse), and 1970s (the new civil rights laws and affirmative action policies). And today, with this very dynamic culture, social norm in America have transformed from what used to be prohibited to what is now acceptable. But for Chinese couples, romance and love are less important and they consider marriage as a responsibility towards family. The characteristics that Chinese are more
rational and Americans are more emotional toward marriage is because historically, arranged marriage in China is reasoned as a way to bring up family social class and economic wealth. Generally, Chinese people prefer a well-matched marriage in education, family background and material resources, etc. And their romantic love will finally be replaced by family love during the decades of marriage. For Chinese couples, romance and love are less important and considered as a responsibility towards family (Sprecher & Hatfield, 2015; Wolf & Huang, 1980). As a result, daughters of a Chinese family were seen as a business commodity to be "exchanged" for greater social and economic benefits. For a marriage to be "successful", therefore, is for a family to find a wealthy husband for their daughter despite of the individual's preference. Essentially, romance or passion are seen as unrealistic expressions. Even though arranged marriages are increasingly rare in urban areas of China, many marriage decisions are still strongly influenced by parental input (Hughes & Maurer - Fazio, 2002).

From these arguments, we can see that commitment has a more pragmatic function in the Chinese culture, which often reflects the obligation or responsibility of a person that is involved in a relationship, whereas Americans are more likely to focus on the emotional aspects of a relationship.

**Conclusion**

Culture is an important aspect when considering relationships and communication. Different culture have different types of communication patterns, owing to their social
norms and societal structure. All social units develop a culture. Even in two-person relationship, a culture develops over time. In romantic relationship, for example, partners develop their own history, shared experiences, language patterns, rituals, habits, and customs that give that relationship a special character, which differentiates it in various ways from other relationships. While American culture is liberal and individualistic, the Chinese culture is more conservatism and communistic. Likewise, romantic relationships are seen in different ways in different cultures, and American are the most open-minded among them.

In a word, different cultures may adopt similar values during this modernization process. While the Chinese may adopt more individualistic values, Americans may adapt to more collectivist values as a result of exposure to each other’s cultures and traditions. From all what have discussed above, we know the differences and similarities of romantic relationship in different culture. Having a profound awareness of these can help us establish a solid foundation for the long run relationship by taking advantage of both terms. That is the ultimate goal of our discussion.

References:


