

A CASE STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION – TAKING “PUSHING HANDS” & “SERIAL (BAD) WEDDINGS” AS EXAMPLES

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Abstract: Along with the acceleration of the global integration process, the relations between countries are becoming closer and closer. Transnational cooperation is becoming common. ‘Screen cooperation’ is one of the examples. More and more foreigners appear on Chinese screens, Chinese actors and actresses have also earned a presence all over the world. The roles they play are all in foreign cultures and reflect intercultural communication. By analyzing the intercultural communication factors in the movies “Pushing Hands” and “Serial(Bad) Weddings”, we see that after receiving better knowledge of intercultural communications, we can better understand and cope with cultural collisions, which are often generated during intercultural communication. This can help to reduce cultural conflicts, enhance communication and common understanding, and improve people’s lives in a foreign culture.

Keywords: intercultural communication, films, cultural differences

1. Increasingly frequent intercultural communication

Regarding to intercultural communication, it refers to communication activities among members from different cultural backgrounds. With the rapid development of global integration, economic and cultural exchanges between countries are becoming more and more frequent, and cross-border cooperation in all walks of life has become a daily routine. Fast transportation and developed communication means that people from different countries, races and cultures can interact frequently. There are also more and more people working, studying, doing business or doing other activities abroad, where they are in a foreign culture, and people from different cultural backgrounds communicate directly, which can lead to a lot of interesting things, as well as

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a lot of contradictions and conflicts. More and more people are also aware of the importance of studying cross-cultural communication, and it has become a popular subject.

2. Intercultural communication in film and TV works

Film and television are the carriers of culture, and as one of the most popular forms of mass media, film plays a very important role in intercultural communication and propaganda. The film language is intuitive and vivid, and it is often artistic, with rich connotation and strongly appealing. It is often accepted by the public. Not only that, for those who are not in an intercultural environment, intercultural communication is not always available at any time in any place, so it can be compensated to some extent by watching film and television works about intercultural communication and cultural differences. Experiencing this vacancy can improve intercultural communication awareness and ability. So I would like to use two movies as examples to talk about intercultural communication.

3. Case study

3.1. “Pushing Hands”

3.1.1 Background

This film tells a story of the protagonist “Lao Zhu” who retires and comes to the United States. Due to his different language and living habits, he misses his motherland very much after the outbreak of family conflicts.

3.1.2 Reason for failure

a. Different languages

Language and culture are closely related. There is no culture without language, and there is no language without culture. Lao Zhu can't understand English. Martha doesn't understand Chinese. It is the reason why they can't communicate effectively.

b. Different living habits

As seen in this picture. Chinese and Western tableware are so different, not to mention the lifestyle of people.



figure 1 “Pushing Hands”

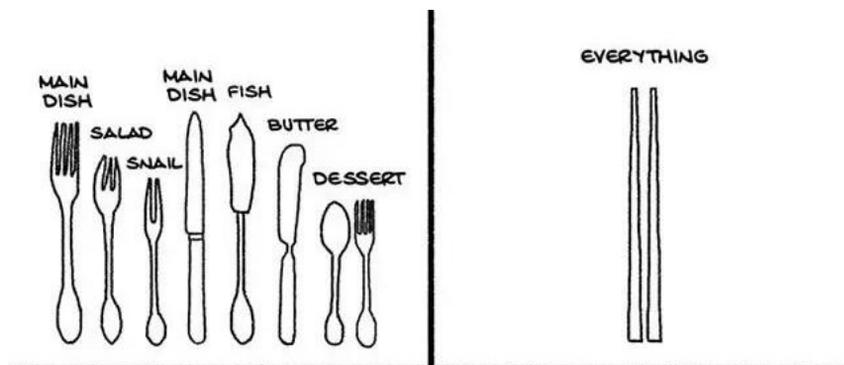


figure 2 “Chinese and Western tableware”

Lao Zhu is an old man who is idle at home. He has all the habits of a traditional Chinese old man: nap, listening to opera, smoking and cooking. But Martha is a veritable American, a writer whose main place of work is at home, and her workspace needs to be quiet, but Lao Zhu always listens to the opera without headphones.

c. Different values

In this film, the most direct manifestation of values is the difference between Lao Zhu and Martha is in their values on various concepts. Lao Zhu’s son, Xiaosheng, believes that his father is old and should live with his family for care. Martha believes that Lao Zhu broke the rhythm and private space of her life, which caused the conflict between them. Their contradictions were not resolved at the end.

3.1.3 Conclusion of first case

Lao Zhu and Martha have created many contradictions due to different cultural backgrounds, but they did not think about the causes of contradictions, and they did not actively solve problems. That is the reason why this can be regarded as a field case of intercultural communication.

“Serial (bad) Weddings”

3.2.1 Background

“Serial (Bad) Weddings” is a French film. It is a funny story of cultural difference between the father-in-law of a French family and four sons-in-law from different countries. The Chinese son-in-law is used as an example to analyze the intercultural communication of this film.

3.2.2 First example

At the beginning of the film, the three sons-in-law appear one by one. Two of them call their father-in-law directly by name, while the Chinese son-in-law always calls him “beau-papa”, which makes the father-in-law furious, and tells him not to call him that again. (This is the name of the wife’s father in French, and in Chinese there is a proper noun “岳父”). Here we can see the cultural differences between east and west reflected by different appellation.

3.2.3 Second example

Once again, the Chinese son-in-law hosted a family dinner. Because he spoke highly of his father-in-law, he was laughed at that he was “flattering”.

However, this is just because Chinese people prefer to express their own meaning in an euphemistic way, to avoid direct conflict. We are not very direct when speaking, for fear of hurting others’ face, while westerners prefer direct communication. These two different ways of communication are not the question of right or wrong, they are just cultural differences.

3.2.4 Conclusion of second case

The French couple in the film realized that the cultural conflicts and difficult communication of their sons-in-law were caused by different cultural backgrounds. They quickly chose to accommodate different culture and find ways to mediate conflicts. Therefore they finally resolved the conflict. So this film turns out to be shows a very successful intercultural communication case.

As long as the intercultural communication is handled properly, the two sides respect each other and understand each other’s culture, and try to see the problem from the other side’s point of view, the contradiction can be solved.



figure 3 “Serial (Bad) Weddings”

Conclusion

Through the analysis of these two films from different countries, we can clearly see the importance of intercultural communication. If we have learned the knowledge of intercultural communication, it can help us to avoid some conflicts caused by different cultural backgrounds, help us to communicate better, and integrate into the new cultural environment more quickly.

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