

10.18686/rcha.v2i6.4706

Observing Cultural Differences Between China and the West Through *The Gua Sha Treatment*

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Abstract: *The Gua Sha Treatment* tells a story of a series of misunderstandings caused by three generations of Xu Datong's family by the grandfather scraping grandson in the United States. On the surface, the film is explaining the differences between Chinese and Western therapies. In fact, it reflects the friction and collision caused by cultural differences. This paper analyzes the cultural differences between China and the West in the film and tells what should we do in cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: *The Gua Sha Treatment*; Cultural differences; Cross-cultural communication

1. The Brief Introduction of the Film

The Gua Sha Treatment is directed by Zheng Xiaolong, which tells a story that took place in central St. Louis, a Chinese family living in the United States. Computer game designer Xu Datong, his wife Jane Ning, his son Dennis and his old father who has not yet received a green card. Xu Datong's father left a purple scratch on Dennis's back after Gua Sha. American doctors and Children Welfare staff who unaware of the traditional Chinese scraping treatment mistook the child had been abused and took Xu to court. The incident caused a series of chain reactions, leading to Xu's separation from his son and couple, breakup of friends, loss of work and a serious blow to his family and career.



Movie Stills of *The Gua Sha Treatment*



Xu Datong and his family members

2. Chinese and Western Cultural Differences in the Film

The first and the most obvious one is Chinese' and Americans' different attitude towards Gua Sha. In China, Gua Sha is a traditional treatment for sunstroke, stomachache and acroanesthesia by scraping the patient's neck, chest or back that is popular in the folk. However, Americans consider one who experienced Gua Sha was being abused. They take this kind of treatment as infringement. The film shows that both the Children Security Association and the doctors believed Dennis lived in an unsafe environment so they took Dennis away and take Xu Datong to court and accused him of violating his son's rights to life and health.



Xu Datong and Jane Ning were led away by the police

Then, there are political differences between China and the United States. On legal aspect, Chinese mainland enforce uniform laws, while American states have their own legal provisions in addition to complying with national laws. In the film, Jane Ning found no laws allowing Gua Sha in St. Louis. So that means they broke the law without knowing it. In the United States, the law covers almost every aspect of society, that is to say citizens are protected by law in all aspects, especially about children. It is illegal to keep children at home alone, and it is illegal for parents to quarrel in front of their children. But in China, most of these situations are regarded as personal behavior and irrelevant. One reason to explain this difference is that in China, from the perspective of collectivism, the family is regarded as a whole. While the United States regards individuals as independent, including children, due to their individualism.

Moreover, Americans individualism also confined to their values about success. At the beginning of the film, Xu Datong was rewarded as the best designer of video games by the company. When he was requested to make a short speech, he mentioned that he would especially extend thanks to his boss and all of his colleagues. This is a typical Chinese speech made after being successful. They attribute their success to others' help and cooperation. Nevertheless, Americans hold different values in this aspect. Americans are more likely to express pride in themselves and their accomplishment rather than to express pride in other characters.

In addition, on family aspect, in traditional Chinese thoughts, parents should respond to their unreasonable demands from children in front of others. But in American consciousness, scolding their children in front of others will hurt his or her self-esteem and this kind of behavior should be strongly prohibited.

Besides, Dennis was born in the United States, so he has part of American thought. When his father hit him because he beat his classmate, Paul, he said that the one who hits his baby is not a good father. But his grandpa told him that hitting is a sign of affection, cursing is a sign of love. Dennis accepted grandpa's point of view, and he began to use it as an excuse to beat Paul after going to school. This reflects the difference in educational views. Chinese consider that strict teachers produce outstanding students, while in the United States, adults prefer children to develop freely and characteristically.



Dennis and his grandpa talking at the table

What's more, Chinese and Americans have different understandings towards friendship. In the film, Xu Datong asked his friend Kunlan to be his counsel in the hearing. Although Kunlan is just a property right lawyer who knows little about family law, Xu Datong insisted on asking him to be his counsel because Kunlan is his friend, and he trusts him. When Kunlan told the judge that Datong once hit Dennis and this action led the case to be taken over by the formal court, Datong was very angry and decided to quit the job because he thought Kunlan's be-

havior betrayed him. However, what he didn't know is that Americans treat friendship more rationally than Chinese. They focus more on truth and reasons, not just human feelings.



Xu Datong asked his friend Kunlan for help

3. Ways That We Should Follow in Cross-cultural Communication

People in different countries maintain different cultures. We are supposed to respect all kinds of cultures. In order to avoid the friction and collision caused by cultural differences, we should observe the following rules in cross-cultural communication.

When in Rome, do as the Roman's do. This idiom emphasizes the need to respect and adapt to local customs, social norms and values when entering a new environment or culture. It embodies respect for and understanding of diversity and is an important principle in intercultural communication. Thus people can better integrate into the new environment, reduce misunderstandings and conflicts, and promote harmonious coexistence. This is not only the embodiment of personal cultivation, but also the key to the success of cross-cultural communication.

Put yourself in the other's shoes. That means we should consider things from the perspective of others and understand their feelings and needs. This principle is particularly important in interpersonal communication because it helps us to break the limits of being egocentric and increase understanding and compassion for others so as to adjust our behavior style and establish a more positive and healthy interpersonal relationship.

Sincerity and candor are the most important cornerstone of building a deep interpersonal relationship. In interpersonal communication, trust and understanding can only be established when we sincerely express our thoughts and feelings and accept feedback from others with an open mind. Sincerity and candor will not only help eliminate misunderstandings and estrangement, but also promote in-depth exchanges and common growth between the two sides.

4. Conclusion

As each country has its own unique historical background which had a profound impact on local people's ideas, values and behaviors, differences between different cultures cannot be completely eliminated. What we can do is to try our best to enhance mutual understanding, maintain awe of the unknown, be tolerance to differences and promote cross-cultural exchanges and cooperation. Such efforts will not only contribute to personal growth and vision expansion, but also help to promote globalization and multicultural prosperity.

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