Interrogating Intercultural Communication in the Context of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions: A Socio-Psychological Analysis of the Film ‘The Farewell’

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Abstract. In today's academic research, both cross-cultural communication and the psychology of language have been extensively studied, yet research combining the two to explore phenomena in cross-cultural communication through the lens of psycholinguistics is not common. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the psychological dynamics of cross-cultural communication, focusing on Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory and applying theories of psycholinguistics to further investigate the psychological dynamics and subconscious influences in this cross-cultural process. Through an in-depth analysis of the movie "The Farewell," this research explores how cultural backgrounds influence individuals' and collectives' attitudes towards uncertainty and ambiguity, as well as the psychological reasons behind cultural dimensions. The movie primarily discusses the story of a Chinese-American protagonist, Billi, whose grandmother in China is terminally ill and unaware of her condition, around which a faux wedding is organized as a reason to visit her. This study deeply investigates the issue of the right to end-of-life information and other cultural conflicts presented in the film. Utilizing Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, it delves into individualism versus collectivism, power distance, long-term versus short-term orientation, and uncertainty avoidance, to understand their impact on communication styles, emotional expression, and decision-making processes. The paper highlights the necessity of integrating cultural sensitivity and psychological flexibility in global interactions, contributing to a broader discourse on cultural psychology.

Keywords: Key words; Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory; The Farewell; cross-cultural communication; psycholinguistics.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary society where globalization is continuously advancing, cross-cultural communication has become a part of daily life, especially against the backdrop of economic globalization and increasing international migration, making the communication and understanding between people of different cultural backgrounds particularly important. With the deepening of cultural integration, how to effectively conduct cross-cultural communication, understand, and respect the values and behavioral habits under different cultural backgrounds has become a crucial issue in international exchanges and even in the process of individual social adaptation. Cross-cultural communication involves not only the direct exchange of language but also the understanding of the deep psychological dynamics and social-cultural structures behind cultural differences.

This paper, through the analysis of the phenomenon of cross-cultural communication in the movie "The Farewell", explores how cultural differences affect people's communication modes, emotional expression, and decision-making processes when facing family crises. The movie tells the story of a Chinese-American mixed family gathering in China due to the grandmother's terminal illness, where family members decide to conceal the illness from the elderly, sparking a series of cultural conflicts and emotional entanglements. This study, with the aid of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory and the methods of psycholinguistics, conducts an in-depth analysis of the cross-cultural communication displayed in the movie, revealing the specific manifestations of cultural dimensions in real life and their profound impact on interpersonal communication.
This paper first briefly reviews Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, including individualism versus collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity versus femininity, and long-term versus short-term orientation, providing a theoretical framework for understanding cultural differences. Subsequently, through detailed analysis of the plots and behaviors of characters in "The Farewell", this article discusses how these cultural dimensions affect family members' communication and emotional expression in a cross-cultural context. For instance, the conflict between individualism and collectivism displayed in the film not only reveals the different attitudes towards family members' illness information in Chinese and American cultures but also reflects deep cultural value differences.

Furthermore, through the perspective of psycholinguistics, this study further analyzes the impact of cultural differences on the psychological dynamics in communication, including the choice of language, and the directness versus indirectness of communication, which play a crucial role in cross-cultural communication. Through careful observation of character dialogues and emotional exchanges in the movie, this article unveils the complexity and challenges of communication in a cross-cultural background, as well as the psychological adaptation and adjustment mechanisms involved in this process.

Moreover, this research emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting cultural differences in global interactions, proposing profound insights into cross-cultural communication. For example, by analyzing the family conflicts and cultural integration in "The Farewell", this paper points out that enhancing cultural sensitivity and psychological flexibility can help people better adapt to a multicultural environment, promoting understanding and respect among people from different cultural backgrounds.

Although the research object of this paper is limited to the analysis of a single movie, potentially not covering all situations and details in cross-cultural communication, it provides a unique perspective and practical case for understanding and studying cross-cultural communication. Future research could further explore how different cultural backgrounds and individual differences affect the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication, and how to apply and validate the findings of this paper in a broader cultural and social context.

In summary, through the analysis of cross-cultural communication in "The Farewell", this paper offers a research method that combines cultural dimensions theory and psycholinguistics, providing valuable insights for understanding and promoting effective communication across different cultural backgrounds. By delving into cultural differences, psychological dynamics, and communication strategies, this study not only enriches the theoretical research on cross-cultural communication but also provides practical guidance for dealing with cultural conflicts and promoting cultural integration in practice. In the context of deepening globalization, this research can offer assistance for the evolving practice and study of cross-cultural communication.

2. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

In the realm of cross-cultural communication research, scholars commonly employ Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory to assess conflicts and their origins between cultures. Introduced by Hofstede (1980), this theory encompasses six dimensions for measuring cultural values, namely: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Long-term versus Short-term, and Indulgence versus Restraint. According to Yu (2011), Power Distance refers to the expectations and acceptance levels of weaker members regarding unequal power distribution within the institutions and organizations of a country. Lower Power Distance Index is more prevalent in developed countries with well-established political systems and stable governance, while higher Power Distance countries and regions tend to be economically disadvantaged, characterized by concentrated power, strict regulations, and a rigid hierarchical system.
Hofstede (1980) defines Uncertainty Avoidance as the degree to which members of a culture feel threatened when faced with uncertain or unknown situations, often manifested through a sense of tension and a need for predictability. According to Yu (2011), Individualism is characterized by a loose social organizational structure where individuals emphasize their own values and needs, advocating reliance on personal efforts to pursue self-interest. On the other hand, Collectivism involves a tight social organizational structure where the collective interest takes precedence over individual interests, and people expect care from members within the "in-group" while maintaining absolute loyalty to the group as reciprocation.

The dimension of Masculinity versus Femininity primarily examines whether a society emphasizes qualities traditionally associated with males, such as competitiveness and assertiveness, or qualities associated with females, such as humility and care for others, as well as the delineation of roles for males and females. The Masculinity Dimension Index (MDI) indicates the extent of masculinization in a society – a higher MDI suggests a more pronounced masculine orientation, while a lower MDI indicates a more prominent feminine quality in the society.

Individualism and collectivism represent another important dimension. Hofstede (1980) asked surveyed employees about the most important aspects of an ideal job. Some individuals believe that freedom, challenge, and personal time are more important. Societies with this cultural atmosphere are considered to possess traits of individualism; whereas, others believe that training opportunities, good working conditions, and fully utilizing their skills are most important, indicating they belong to a collectivist society. Individualistic societies emphasize the freedom, rights, and independence of individuals, where their needs, goals, and achievements are deemed paramount. This societal value system prioritizes individual rights, freedoms, and achievements, encouraging competition and self-expression among individuals, with independence and personal development considered key to societal success and happiness. In such societies, social organization is looser, and interpersonal connections are typically voluntary, with governments playing a role in safeguarding individual rights and freedoms. In contrast, collectivist societies emphasize the interests of communities, families, or groups over individual interests. In these societies, individuals are seen as part of the societal whole, and their behaviors and decisions are influenced by societal expectations and collective influence. This value system underscores social cohesion, unity, and common interests, with the importance of individuals contributing to and serving the collective being emphasized. Social organization is tighter, and social relationships rely more on group identity and belongingness, with governments possibly placing more emphasis on social equity and shared resources to ensure overall societal well-being.

Hofstede (1980) thought long-term orientation and short-term orientation represent two different tendencies of individuals or societies towards time perception and decision-making. Long-term orientation refers to the inclination of individuals or societies to consider the future, emphasizing the setting of future goals and long-term planning, as well as making decisions for the benefit of the future. Individuals or societies with this tendency typically prioritize stability, endurance, and foresight, emphasizing perseverance and long-term investments, and are willing to make sacrifices and efforts for future benefits. For example, some East Asian countries (such as China, Japan, and South Korea) are considered to have higher long-term orientation, as they emphasize education, career planning, family traditions, and long-term investments. In contrast, short-term orientation refers to the inclination of individuals or societies to focus on immediate gratification and benefits, lacking consideration and planning for the future. Individuals or societies with this tendency typically prioritize immediate pleasure and satisfaction, and may lean towards immediate rewards, lacking patience and attention towards long-term goals and future planning. For example, some Western countries (such as the United States and the United Kingdom) are considered to have higher short-term orientation, as they prioritize immediate satisfaction and pleasure, and may lean towards short-term consumption and immediate rewards. Long-term orientation and short-term orientation are of significant importance in cross-cultural studies and international business. Understanding the time perspectives and decision-making tendencies of different cultures and societies helps in effective communication, cross-cultural management, and formulation of business strategies.
3. Psycholinguistics

In the research, the author will also apply knowledge from psycholinguistics for analysis. Ambiguity tolerance is characterized by an inclination to view uncertain scenarios positively, as opposed to a lack of tolerance, where such scenarios are seen as menacing. This idea, originally established on the research of Frenkel-Brunswik and subsequently elaborated by Budner in 1962, spans a broad spectrum of psychological aspects across different fields of psychology, like personality psychology, developmental psychology, and social psychology. Traits linked to a lack of tolerance for ambiguity involve a desire for clarity and a leaning towards the known, which affect various behaviors and mindsets, including a tendency towards authoritarianism and a reluctance towards alteration. This notion highlights the intricate psychological reactions of individuals to uncertainty, affecting aspects of their lives that are personal, societal, and professional.

In the study, the author discovered that although there is ample research on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and psycholinguistics, there seems to be a lack of precedent for combining the two. The author realized that integrating them for analysis within the same text could yield fruitful results. The study utilizes Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory in conjunction with methods from psycholinguistics to conduct an in-depth analysis of cross-cultural communication as depicted in the movie, revealing the specific manifestations of cultural dimensions in real life and their profound impact on interpersonal communication. Through this research, the paper points out that enhancing cultural sensitivity and psychological flexibility can help people better adapt to a multicultural environment, promoting understanding and respect among people from different cultural backgrounds.

4. Individualism And Collectivism

4.1 Movie Analysis

In the film "The Farewell" the grandmother of the protagonist, Billi, is diagnosed with cancer, with only three months left to live. The family unanimously agrees to keep this information from her and, under the pretext of a cousin's wedding, returns from the United States and Japan to their home in Changchun, China, to spend the final moments with the grandmother. As a Chinese-American born in the United States, Billi struggles to comprehend her family's actions. Having grown up in the U.S., she naturally believes that her grandmother, as an independent individual, has the basic human right to know about her illness, leading her to question, "What if there are things Grandma still wants to do?"(Wang,2022) However, the family believes that fear often kills the patient, not the cancer itself. Keeping the diagnosis a secret is intended to alleviate her mental burden and shift the stress onto the family. Billi's conflict with her family reflects the clash between individualistic values and familial collectivism. Billi's uncle explains that in Western society, life belongs to the individual, while in the East, life belongs to the collective, emphasizing interpersonal bonds. The conflicting viewpoints between Billi, representing Western individualism, and her family, embodying Eastern collectivism, are evident. One could say that Western societies are characterized by interactions with strangers, while Eastern societies emphasize connections with familiar individuals. In East Asian countries, social relationships are intricate, and boundaries are weak. Lives are intertwined, making it difficult to avoid interference. For example, upon Billi's arrival, a group of middle-aged male drivers surrounds her, enthusiastically calling her "beautiful." This behavior, not respecting physical or linguistic distance, offends Billi. Similarly, when Billi checks into a hotel, an excessively curious receptionist cannot conceal her fascination with the American-born Chinese, persistently asking various questions, from the lobby to the room, questioning whether America or China is better. Such behavior contrasts with the strong sense of personal space and avoidance of overly personal questions typical in American culture.
The difference between individualism and collectivism is also reflected in the distinct names of the movies in Chinese and English. To cater to both the Chinese and American markets, the production team chose names that were more suitable for each cultural background. The Chinese name, "bie gao su ta" (The Farewell), signifies a focus on respect for family and elders, aligning with the emphasis on collectivism in Eastern cultures. In contrast, the English name, "The Farewell," emphasizes the shared emotional experience of family members facing the grandmother's final moments, reflecting the value placed on individual feelings and expression in individualistic cultures. In individualistic cultures, the independence of individuals and their emotional experiences are highly regarded, with farewell serving as both a sign of respect for the deceased and a release and expression of individual emotions. The name "The Farewell" highlights the respect for family and elders, reflecting the emphasis on family and social relationships in collectivist cultures. In the East, protecting the emotions and harmony of the family is often considered more important, and occasionally, information may be concealed to maintain family stability and uphold the dignity of elders.

Additionally, the level of directness or indirectness in speech can also vividly reflect the characteristics of individualistic and collectivistic societies. In the movie, a joke was told that aptly illustrates the Chinese emphasis on indirectness: a husband informs his wife about the death of their cat and is chastised for not being subtle enough. The wife suggests that he should have softened the blow by first mentioning that the cat climbed onto the roof. Later, with great caution, the husband informs his wife that her mother climbed onto the roof. In individualistic cultures, individuals tend to express their opinions and needs directly, emphasizing personal independence and self-expression. They may articulate their views directly, with less concern for others' feelings, and prioritize individual rights and freedoms. In communication, they are more inclined to express their opinions and expectations straightforwardly, without overly considering others' feelings. This direct communication style reflects the importance of individual self-worth and autonomy in individualistic cultures. Conversely, in collectivistic cultures, people tend to use more indirect and subtle ways to express their opinions and needs, emphasizing the interests of the society or group over individual interests. They may prioritize maintaining group harmony and avoiding direct conflict and confrontation. In communication, they are more inclined to convey their opinions through implicit language and indirect hints, while considering others' feelings and the interests of the group. This indirect communication style reflects the importance of social cohesion and cooperative unity in collectivistic cultures. In the movie, Mama tells her daughter about a unique mourning culture in China, where not participating in the mourning rituals is seen as lacking filial piety, even to the extent of hiring professional mourners. This cultural phenomenon highlights a significant aspect of collectivistic cultures, where individual behavior and emotional expression are often influenced by societal and cultural expectations(Liu, 2021). In China's collectivistic society, people are expected to act in a manner that conforms to social norms and expectations, rather than simply expressing their true inner feelings. Therefore, while mourning rituals may appear as straightforward emotional expressions on the surface, they are actually deliberate acts conforming to societal norms. By participating in these cultural practices, individuals can express respect and care for their family, ancestors, and society, aligning with the values of social cohesion and common interests in collectivistic cultures. Furthermore, the phenomenon of hiring professional mourners underscores the adherence to societal expectations in collectivistic cultures. People may choose to hire professional mourners to uphold this cultural tradition, not only to meet societal expectations but also to uphold family honor and tradition. This behavior reflects the tendency in collectivistic societies for individuals to sacrifice personal interests to align with the collective interests of society. Thus, mourning culture and the hiring of professional mourners in the movie effectively demonstrate the influence of collectivistic culture on individual behavior and emotional expression.
4.2 Psychological analysis

The decision by the family not to inform the grandmother about her illness stems from a desire to alleviate her psychological burden and transfer it onto themselves. From a psychological perspective, this coping mechanism can be seen as a form of avoidance and stress response, attempting to mitigate the emotional burden on family members by controlling the flow of information. This strategy involves an avoidance coping mechanism, where family members may try to protect themselves and their loved ones from facing the harsh and painful reality. This avoidance strategy, known in psychology as "denial," involves individuals attempting to negate or evade unpleasant realities or emotions to avoid emotional distress. Additionally, this decision is also related to emotional regulation processes, where family members may attempt to regulate the flow of information about the illness to reduce emotional arousal among family members and maintain stability and harmony within the family. This point illustrates the intricate and complex relationship between language use and cultural values, highlighting the significant role cultural dimensions play in shaping not only the use of language but also the psychological underpinnings of communicative practices.

However, this approach may lead to dissatisfaction and anxiety among individualistic individuals like Billi, as they may feel that the grandmother's rights and autonomy should be respected. This dissatisfaction and anxiety may stem from the psychological need for autonomy, wherein individuals desire control over their rights and decisions. The family’s decision to exclude Billi from the decision-making process may deprive her of the right to participate in decisions, thus triggering psychological discomfort. This psychological discomfort may further exacerbate the tension between individualistic individuals and family members, potentially leading to conflicts and contradictions within the family.

At the same time, this scene thoroughly explores how language use and cultural norms shape interpersonal dynamics and communication within the narrative, underscoring the deep influence of cultural dimensions on language and psychological processes, especially in the context of a collectivist society. The film vividly illustrates the collectivist cultural standards through the nuanced language use and contextualized speech patterns of the family members. They employ euphemistic language and deliberately avoid directly mentioning cancer to align with the collective norm of prioritizing family harmony and unity over the expression of individual emotions. This approach of selecting indirect communication methods in specific contexts to handle sensitive issues mirrors the group's expectations of individual behavior, emphasizing the collective endeavor to preserve family harmony and unity.

This situation also reflects the cultural conflict between individualistic and collectivistic values. In situations with significant cultural differences, individuals may feel confused and unadapted, requiring adaptation and understanding to resolve cultural conflicts. In the film, Billi may need to gradually understand and accept the concept of familial collectivism through communication and compromise with her family, while her family also needs to understand and respect Billi's individualistic beliefs. This cultural conflict may trigger cognitive dissonance within individuals, where discrepancies between personal values and the cultural environment result in psychological discomfort. In such situations, individuals may face cognitive and emotional tension, necessitating proactive psychological adjustment mechanisms. For instance, individuals may adopt cognitive restructuring strategies to reinterpret and explain cultural differences, thereby alleviating negative emotions resulting from cognitive dissonance. Furthermore, individuals may alleviate psychological pressure resulting from cultural conflicts through social support and emotional regulation, such as seeking understanding and support from family or friends, and engaging in cultural exchange and cross-cultural experiences to promote psychological adaptation and cultural integration. Therefore, in this scene, apart from Billi's personal psychological adaptation and adjustment, emotional interactions and cultural understanding among family members are also crucial pathways to resolving cultural conflicts.

As for Mama's explanation of mourning culture to Billi, from a psychological standpoint, this phenomenon can be understood as the social and cultural shaping and influence on individual
behavior and emotional expression. According to social cognitive theory, individual behavior and emotions are often influenced by social and cultural factors, with collectivistic cultures emphasizing the interests and unity of the social community. Therefore, individuals are expected to act in accordance with social and cultural norms to maintain social and family harmony. In this context, mourning culture reflects society's specific expectations for mourning and commemoration, whereby individuals are expected to demonstrate respect and mourning for the deceased through specific rituals and expressions. This differs from individualistic cultures, which emphasize individual autonomy and authentic emotional expression. Thus, individuals in collectivistic cultures may feel pressure from societal and cultural expectations, needing to conform to behavioral and emotional norms to avoid being perceived as disrespectful or deviating from societal expectations. This social and cultural expectation may influence individuals' self-identity and emotional experiences, leading to internal tension and pressure during mourning. Individuals may face identity dilemmas, where conflicts arise between personal genuine feelings and societal expectations, necessitating social support and emotional regulation to alleviate emotional pressure. Additionally, individuals may adopt behaviors and expressions that align with societal expectations to maintain social relationships and family harmony, despite causing inner discomfort and conflict.

5. Power Distance

5.1 Movie Analysis

In the movie, family members participate in and influence family decisions based on different perceptions of power distance. Like China, Japan is also a high-power-distance country, as reflected by the uncle who immigrated to Japan. Billi, out of concern for her father's health, attempts to prevent him from smoking. However, her uncle warns her, "Don't interfere with him, he's your father, you shouldn't interfere with him." This scene reflects how in East Asian societies like China and Japan, the opinions of elders are often considered supreme, and their decisions are typically deemed unquestionable (Wang, 2022). This notion reiterates the importance of authority and respect in traditional Chinese culture, emphasizing the power of the elderly in both family and society. Additionally, in the movie, the grandmother personally arranges her grandson's wedding with utmost dedication, from taking wedding photos to sending out invitations and arranging meals meticulously. However, when she falls ill, Billi believes she should rest or be hospitalized instead of wasting time on a fake wedding. Yet, her mother points out, "Grandma likes to command those around her, which makes her feel more important and in control." (Hu, 2021) As her mother explains, the grandmother is a typical Chinese-style patriarch, an authority figure and leader of the family. Her mother clarifies to Billi that the reason why her grandmother doesn't want to come to their home in the United States is that she would lose the power to command others.

When Billi attempts to communicate in an equal and direct manner, she faces disapproval and suppression from the high-power society. Despite immigrating to the United States early in life and being influenced by Western liberalism, Billi's mother still retains aspects of China's high power distance. Collaborating with Billi's father, they concealed the grandfather's passing from their daughter. Billi deeply resents their unilateral decision-making, even when justified as "to not disrupt Billi's studies." Later, they repeat this behavior by attempting to hide the news of the grandmother's cancer from their daughter. Their presumptuous concealment reflects their exercise of parental authority, disregarding others' wishes and right to knowledge. This conduct illustrates their influence from Chinese culture, where elders and those in authority are granted excessive power. Furthermore, at the beginning of the movie, the mother asks Billi how many dumplings she wants. Initially answering five, Billi's mother expresses dissatisfaction, deeming it insufficient. Billi then changes her order to twelve, but her mother firmly responds, "Just ten." This incident reveals that the mother had already decided on the number of dumplings she wants, merely asking Billi as an afterthought.
without genuinely seeking her opinion. Eventually, the mother ceases asking altogether, making decisions unilaterally.

This scene highlights the authority and influence of elders in Chinese society, as well as their significant involvement in family affairs. In the cultural context of China, elders are often expected to assume the role of "head of the family," where their opinions and decisions are regarded as supreme. Conversely, the opinions of younger generations are often deemed insignificant and unworthy of consideration. When younger individuals raised in a low power distance society attempt to engage in equal dialogue with their elders, they are frequently perceived as disrespectful and challenging the authority. This phenomenon further underscores the characteristic of high power distance society in China, where authority and respect are considered highly essential values.

5.2 Psychological analysis

When Billi attempted to intervene in her father's smoking habits but was rebuked by her uncle, the uncle emphasized her father's authority within the family: "He's your father, you shouldn't interfere with him." This exchange profoundly reflects the dynamics of power within the family and the psychological relationship between individuals and authority figures. In collectivistic cultures, especially in East Asian families, individuals are typically constrained by the authority of elders and accustomed to following their guidance and decisions. Living within this power structure for an extended period, subordinates often develop a mindset of obedience, identifying with the authority's words and refraining from questioning or resisting them. This is precisely the attitude that the uncle and father expect to see from Billi.

However, Billi, having grown up in a culture with lower power distance, has not fully developed the habit of complete obedience to authority. She is accustomed to equal communication and expression, and she feels discontent and concern about her father's smoking habits, intervening out of concern for his health. Initially, her father, upon hearing Billi's advice, intended to put out his cigarette, indicating his familiarity with equal communication and being persuaded in the American environment where he lives with his daughter. However, after the uncle defended him and reprimanded Billi, his attitude changed, and he calmly continued smoking. This suggests his internal conflict between two cultures. Having grown up in China and later immigrated to the United States, he has been influenced by both cultures. Under Billi's criticism, he instinctively intended to put out his cigarette, but the uncle's intervention changed his decision, as if he received permission to indulge himself and believed that his daughter should not interfere with his behavior. This also reveals individuals' subconscious preference for self-indulgence and unconscious reverence for authority.

This scenario highlights the psychological struggle under authority pressure and cultural conflicts among family members through their interactions. The uncle represents traditional family authority, and his words trigger Billi's internal conflict between obedience and resistance. The role and status of individuals within the family also influence their attitude toward authority, and Billi's behavior reflects her anxiety and struggle under authority pressure.

6. Long-Term Orientation and Short-Term Orientation

6.1 Movie Analysis

This cultural difference not only influences individuals' behaviors and attitudes but also reflects different cultural values regarding money and time. In the film, "The Farewell," Billi, as a Chinese-American, exhibits significant cultural differences from her parents who were born and raised in China, particularly in her attitude towards money and consumption. Compared to her parents, Billi appears to lack awareness of saving money, often spending extravagantly and even delaying paying rent. In one scene, her mother advises her to change her extravagant lifestyle, but Billi seems indifferent to her financial situation, jokingly referring to herself as "poor but sexy." This difference
in views on money and consumption reflects the cultural dimension difference between long-term and short-term orientation.

Therefore, Billi's behavior of using a credit card to buy a plane ticket to visit her grandmother in China may be seen as unusual or even inappropriate in the cultural context of China, where people typically avoid consumption methods that may increase debt, such as using credit cards. In Chinese long-term oriented culture, individuals tend to consider future long-term benefits and avoid excessive debt and unnecessary expenditure. People like to save money for a rainy day. In contrast, in the United States, the culture encourages "premature consumption," with widespread use of credit cards and loans, and being in debt is normalized. Consequently, Billi's values and behavior influenced by American culture may face questioning and opposition in Chinese society, as they conflict with the values of money and future planning in Chinese culture.

Moreover, this cultural difference also manifests in the expression of emotions. Chinese people tend to be more reserved and restrained in expressing emotions, while Americans are more direct and straightforward. Initially, Billi's parents hid her grandmother's illness from her, and even after it was discovered, they still refused to let Billi return to China to see her grandmother because they believed Billi couldn't conceal her sadness and frustration. Upon returning to her grandmother's home, Billi did indeed appear melancholic, contrasting with the seemingly unaffected demeanor of others. Among these people, only Billi grew up in a culture with a short-term orientation. Similarly, the uncle's family, who are also immigrants, come from Japan, a country like China with a long-term orientation. People there are adept at concealing and suppressing their thoughts and emotions. In the film, the grandmother, as the object of the concealed illness, also conceals information from her family. Firstly, when her husband passed away, she did the same to her children as they did to her. Secondly, despite frequently going to the hospital for check-ups and feeling unwell, when asked by her granddaughter about her concerns, she acted as if nothing was wrong, pretending to be in good health. This is because cultures with a long-term orientation tend to express emotions more subtly and tactfully. They prioritize maintaining social relationships and family harmony, thus emphasizing respect and humility in emotional expression. People may be inclined to conceal their emotions, avoiding direct expressions of anger or dissatisfaction, and instead opting for non-verbal cues such as smiles, eye contact, or indirect hints to convey messages. They may consider others' feelings more and strive to avoid conflict or discomfort. In contrast, cultures with a short-term orientation tend to express emotions more directly and openly. They prioritize individual freedom and straightforwardness, thus preferring to express their thoughts and feelings directly and frankly. Individuals in such cultural backgrounds may find it more challenging to hide their emotions, preferring to express their inner feelings through direct language, with less concern for others' reactions or societal norms.

6.2 Psychological analysis

In the film, the deep psychological dynamics brought about by cross-cultural communication are delicately revealed. This not only shows how individuals search for and shape their self-identity when facing different cultural values and expectations but also explores the diversity of expressing personal emotions through verbal and non-verbal means, as well as the complex process of psychological adaptation when encountering cultural conflicts and family pressures. These deep psychological explorations unveil the rich layers of individual behavior and emotional expression against a cross-cultural background.

The analysis of discourse style deepens our understanding of the psychological mechanisms by which individuals establish and maintain social relationships in different cultural backgrounds. Billi's direct communication style highlights her strong emphasis on self-expression and self-actualization within a short-term oriented culture, encouraging individuals to express their true feelings and positions as the foundation for building sincere relationships. In contrast, within collectivist cultures, such direct expression might be viewed as disrespectful or too aggressive, as these cultures place a greater emphasis on social harmony and collective interests. This cultural difference not only shows
how individuals use different psychological strategies to adapt to cultural expectations and norms but also reflects the process of psychological adaptation in the face of cultural diversity.

Future orientation further reveals how individuals form their conception of time and future planning based on their cultural background. Cultures with a long-term orientation tend to emphasize future planning abilities, preferring to sacrifice short-term benefits for long-term gains. This psychological tendency not only reflects a deep consideration for the welfare of future generations and social responsibility but also presents a strategy for dealing with uncertainty. Conversely, individuals in short-term oriented cultures may focus more on immediate satisfaction and achieving short-term goals, reflecting an appreciation for the present moment and a flexible attitude towards adapting to environmental changes.

The film's portrayal of the cross-cultural psychological adaptation process, especially Billi's exploration of finding a balance between her Chinese and American cultural expectations, involves not only understanding and adapting to different styles of cultural communication but also how to maintain one's personal identity while understanding and respecting different cultural concepts of time and future planning values. This cross-cultural adaptation process involves deep psychological dynamics, including the exploration of a sense of identity, the construction of belonging, and the internalization of multicultural values. The film, with its rich plot and delicate character portrayals, provides a valuable perspective for deeply understanding the psychological challenges and growth processes of individuals in cross-cultural environments, thereby facilitating a deeper appreciation of the complexity of human psychology against a backdrop of cultural diversity.

7. Uncertainty Avoidance

7.1 Movie Analysis

In the movie, when faced with uncertainty and change, family members respond differently based on their individual levels of uncertainty avoidance. When the grandmother is diagnosed with a terminal illness and time is running out, although everyone is deeply saddened, it is only Billi who displays extreme emotions. Upon returning to her grandmother's home, unlike the others, she appears particularly gloomy, with hardly a smile. Billi's behavior is a reflection of high uncertainty avoidance. Superficially, this seems contradictory to her cultural background, as the United States is a low uncertainty avoidance country. However, in reality, individuals may differ from the national culture as a whole. National data is derived from millions of people, while the individual is insignificant within that context. Moreover, there are complex emotional factors at play, along with Billi's unique identity as a Chinese-American. Therefore, when applying the theory of uncertainty avoidance, it is essential to consider the specific circumstances.

7.2 Psychological analysis

Billi's behavior and emotional response in the movie, when analyzed through the lens of tolerance for ambiguity, reflect the complex interplay of her inner psychological mechanisms and cultural background. Her intense emotional reaction, possibly stemming from a low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity, becomes particularly evident during a significant family crisis. Furthermore, Billi's bicultural identity—rooted in both Chinese traditional values and influenced by American culture—adds complexity to her tolerance for ambiguity. This highlights the need to consider how cultural factors and personal experiences collectively shape an individual's psychological responses and adaptation strategies to ambiguous situations.

8. Discussion

This study utilizes Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the perspective of psycholinguistics to conduct an in-depth and extensive analysis of the film "The Farewell." This analysis not only reveals
the profound impact of cultural differences in cross-cultural communication but also demonstrates how psycholinguistics can uncover the subtle differences in how people process information and emotions across different cultural backgrounds. This research provides a solid foundation and an insightful model for future studies in this field. Based on the findings of this study, subsequent research could expand to analyzing more texts or exploring the subtle differences in cross-cultural communication from a psycholinguistic viewpoint across different cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, by comparing the results of this study with existing literature, we gain a deeper understanding of how various cultural dimensions intricately shape people's attitudes towards family, illness, and death. This is especially evident in how different cultures influence family dynamics in dealing with terminal illness and the concept of the right to know at the end of life. The study also explores the complex interaction between cultural norms and individual psychological adaptation mechanisms, emphasizing the importance of effective cross-cultural communication in a globalized context and the necessity of integrating cultural sensitivity and psychological flexibility in this process.

By highlighting the limitations of applying broad cultural theories to the analysis of specific interpersonal relationship dynamics, this research paves new pathways for further studies, emphasizing the need to consider the diversity and complexity within cultural groups. Future research could enhance our understanding of the psychological dynamics in cross-cultural communication by exploring similar narrative structures in different texts or investigating individual differences within specific cultural contexts. Additionally, future studies should emphasize the interplay between language, culture, and psychology in shaping interpersonal relationships and explore how films and other narrative forms can reveal the potential of these complex interactions. Overall, this study not only offers new perspectives for the psychological research of cross-cultural communication but also points out diverse pathways for researchers to explore this field further.

9. Conclusion

This study conducts a detailed exploration of cross-cultural communication through the film "The Farewell", utilizing Hofstede's cultural dimensions and psycholinguistics. The analysis reveals the complexity of family dynamics when faced with terminal illness and subtle cultural differences regarding the right to know about impending death. Simultaneously, the research underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and psychological flexibility in global interactions and cross-cultural communication. It suggests future research could expand to include cultural diversity within groups and explore narratives across different cultures.

The study initially dissects characters in the film using Hofstede's cultural dimensions in the context of the prominent theme of "the right to know about impending death". It then employs psycholinguistic knowledge to delve into the intricacies of the movie plot and cultural dimensions, facilitating an in-depth exploration of cross-cultural communication. It highlights the complexity of individual and collective responses to terminal illness, emphasizing the influence of cultural values on communication and emotional expression. By examining subtle interactions within a bicultural family, the study provides a template for understanding psychological subtleties in future research on cross-cultural communication, advocating for increased cultural sensitivity and flexibility in global interactions.

However, the study may have limitations, such as relying on a single case study (the movie "The Farewell") to analyze cross-cultural communication, which may not comprehensively cover cultural diversity and individual differences within cultures. Additionally, while Hofstede's cultural dimensions offer a useful framework, they may oversimplify complex cultural dynamics. Future research could draw from broader cultural backgrounds and explore more nuanced methods to understand individual differences within cultural groups.

Moreover, extrapolating findings from movie narratives to real-world settings could be another limitation, as movies may not always accurately depict the complexity of cultural interactions in real
life. Methodologies that analyze cultural phenomena through film narratives may inherently favor narratives constructed for entertainment, potentially distorting descriptions of cultural customs and attitudes. Additionally, focusing on psycholinguistics within specific cultural frameworks may overlook language diversity and its impact on cross-cultural communication. Broadening the scope of research methods and incorporating different linguistic perspectives could further enrich the study.

Future research could enhance understanding of psychological dynamics in cross-cultural communication by exploring similar narrative structures in different texts or investigating individual differences within specific cultural contexts. Furthermore, future research should emphasize the interaction between language, culture, and psychology in shaping interpersonal relationships, while exploring how movies and other narrative forms reveal the potential of these complex interactions. Research could explore cultural dynamics beyond "The Farewell", combining a wider range of films or real-life scenarios to study cross-cultural communication. Adopting mixed methods, combining qualitative and quantitative data, could capture the complexity of cultural interactions more comprehensively. Additionally, investigating individual differences within cultures could deepen understanding of cultural diversity and attitudes, thus enhancing understanding of global communication patterns. By revealing the limitations of broad cultural theories in analyzing specific interpersonal dynamics, this study paves the way for further research, emphasizing the need to focus on the diversity and complexity within cultural groups.

References


