

# **A Brief Analysis of the Differences and Similarities between Chinese and Western Views of Success from the Perspective of Collectivism and Individualism --Take "Leap" and "Forrest Gump" as Examples**

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**Abstract**

Drawing on the theory of intercultural communication. The paper discussed the similarities and differences between collectivism represented by Chinese culture and individualism represented by western culture in judging an individual's success. The paper starts with the differences between collectivism and individualism and discusses the cultural background and historical reasons for the differences, and demonstrates the similarities and differences reflected in the protagonist's language, behavior, thought and interaction with the outside world from the two representative films, "Leap" and "Forrest Gump". Through the analysis, the paper explores the cultural reasons for these differences, which leads to the conclusion that the significance of the success of the individual is often influenced by the cultural environment.

**Keywords:** views of success, collectivism, individualism

**1. Introduction**

"Leap" tells the story of the Chinese women's volleyball team from the first champion in 1981 to the competition between China and Brazil in the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, which explains the legendary experience of several generations of women volleyball players who have gone through ups and downs but always been struggled for better scores. "Forrest Gump" describes the story of a small-town boy with congenital mental retardation. Gump is an imbecile with an IQ of 75. To avoid the bullying of other children in school, he listened to his friend Jenny and started to "run". He ran to avoid the teasing of others. In high school, he ran into a school football field to avoid others, and so he ran into college. Forrest Gump was broken in and became a football superstar, receiving an audience with President Kennedy. After graduating from college, Gump was drafted back into the Army and went to Vietnam. There, he made two friends: Bubba, an avid shrimper, and Captain Dang Taylor, a feared officer. By this time, Jenny had fallen from grace and was living a life of debauchery. Gump has always loved Jenny, but Jenny does not love him. At the end of the war, Gump was received by President Johnson as a hero. At a peace rally, Gump met Jenny again, and the two met and parted in a hurry. Under the guidance of the credo of "Do what you say you will do", Gump eventually made a piece of his sky. In his life, he met many famous people in the United States. He denounced the Watergate eavesdroppers, went to China as a member of the U.S. ping pong team, and was instrumental in establishing diplomatic relations between the United States and China. Elvis Presley and John Lennon, two musical superstars, also made many popular songs through their association with him. Finally, Forrest Gump became an entrepreneur through shrimping. To honor the memory of Bubba who died, he founded Bubba Gump and gave half of the company to Bubba's mother, and went to work as a gardener himself. Gump has experienced the world through various historical periods of change, but he

remains the same, pure and kind, no matter when, where or with whom.

## **2. Body**

Collectivism is an ideological theory that advocates that individuals are subordinate to society and individual interests should be subordinated to the interests of the group, the nation, and the state. It is a spirit that the highest standard is that all speech and actions conform to the collective interests of the people. Individualism is a kind of political, ethical, and social philosophy that emphasizes personal freedom, personal interests, and self-control. In essence, it is a kind of world outlook which takes the individual as the center to view the world, society, and interpersonal relations.

### **2.1 The collectivism and “Leap”**

China is the oldest and most representative country of collectivism. Chinese collectivism originates from the isomorphism of family and country, and adapts to the ancient feudal system. The core of collectivism in Chinese traditional culture is its patriarchal nature. Patriarchal collectivism can not separate from the feudal patriarchal system. In ancient China, the feudal society is based on blood ties, combined with the national system, which is to maintain the hereditary rule and hereditary privilege behavior of parents, patriarchs, and nobles. The feudal society formed a feudal patriarchal system composed of political power, theocracy and dictatorship, which leads to a hierarchical patriarchal system.

Although new China was founded, the patriarchal system does not exist. The idea of collectivism is inherited and deeply engraved in the Chinese gene. The theme of "Leap" is to emphasize the spirit of the women's volleyball team. The director gives the Chinese people an impression through times by reappearance. The core of the spirit of the women's volleyball team is a solid foundation, hard training, fearless, tenacious struggle, strong team spirit, united fight and bravely fight for a better score. In fact, the responsibility of the Chinese women's volleyball team of last century is not to win a competition, but to make the world mention China. Therefore, the women's volleyball teams of the old generation show a strong sense of national honor. Lang Ping, the main character said: "our only goal is to raise the national flag and play the national anthem". At this time, volleyball is not only a competitive sport for every woman volleyball player but also a responsibility. Compared with what Lang Ping said to the American team, "this is your game", there is an obvious difference between them.

Chen Zhonghe, another protagonist in "winning the championship", is still worth considering. If he was not thoroughly described in the film, most Chinese of the new generation may not have too much impression of this athlete. However, he had a very important influence on the Chinese women's volleyball team. As the coach for the training of the old generation of women volleyball players and the head coach of the new generation of

women volleyball players, he has no chance to compete in the competition. From the view of individualism, he did not complete his achievement and value in the field of a volleyball player. However, from the perspective of collectivism, his selfless dedication, silent dedication and ignorance of fame and wealth are worthy of everyone's respect. In the culture of collectivism, the interests of the collective are higher than the interests of the individual. When the individual devotes interests to the group, it achieves the greatest goal of the individual, which is individual success in the culture of individualism.

The film also emphasizes a problem, which is that Lang Ping transformed the former small national team into a big national team after she handled the national team again. The national team's training is in accordance with the number of players, everyone who gets training would have the chance to play in the games. Lang Ping advocates that the number of trained players is far larger than the number of players in the game. As a result, not all athletes who have received daily hard training would be able to have the choice to play the games. Maybe some people have worked hard but won't get the honor. As for individualism, which emphasizes personal interests, it is easy for people to be divided. But for Chinese women volleyball players and Lang Ping, they have to accept to try different combinations to improve the chance of winning the national team, and the possibility of gaining collective interest will become greater. When each individual's spiritual life is connected, it will be a more powerful collective spirit and national spirit.

## **2.2 Individualism and “Forrest Gump”**

The core idea of individualism is: the boundary between the individual and others, society; all people are equal; individuals are responsible for their behavior. It was also mentioned in the “declaration of independence”: “all men are equal, and they have rights that can not be deprived, including the right to life, the right to freedom and the right to happiness”. Although the founding of the United States is not long, individualism still has its historical origin. The first is the root of religion. Americans believe that “they are their saviors” in religious thought, which has influenced generations of Americans. From Benjamin Franklin, a brilliant example of Americans, to Obama, the current president of the United States, from Jordan, a basketball superstar, to Bill Gates, the great emperor of Microsoft, all have proved the value of Americans as their saviors. The second is the root of thought, American Transcendentalism, which emerged in the 1830s, is the most important ideological liberation movement in the history of American thought. Under the guidance of this thought, Americans began to emphasize the importance of the individual. The third point is the political root. Since the 41 Puritans signed the May Flower Covenant on board the May flower, they have declared that the pursuit of freedom and happiness in the new world should be led by a certain government, and the establishment of a new government must be based on the principles of justice and equality. In the view of Americans, equal freedom and individual

rights are the most basic rights of life. The highest mission of the society and the country is to protect the individual's rights of equality and freedom. The fourth point is the economic root, the "American Dream" which embodies individual struggle that arises under the economic system of free competition at the historic moment. It is believed that in the United States, as long as through unremitting personal struggle, rather than relying on the assistance of specific social classes and others, we can get a better life. The last point is cultural origin. Deeply influenced by the tradition that God created nature and man in Western civilization, American culture believes that the relationship between man and nature is humans master nature. Therefore, it especially emphasizes the role of man, advocating independent personality, individual heroes and other life principles that embody individualistic values.

In the 1994 movie "Forrest Gump", Americans put their individualistic values on the big screen. As a child with mental retardation, Gump can finally become the life-winner that most people envy. What we can feel is the individualistic view of success represented by American culture. It is also reflected through Forrest Gump's growth experience. Because only when his behavior and experience are in line with the values conveyed by culture, people will give him recognition, and he can have a complete life that most people admire at the end of the film.

First of all, "Forrest Gump" emphasizes that the only way to personal success is to persist in struggle and continuous efforts. Gump was born with leg problems, which made him unable to walk normally. Because of continuous running he became the fastest runner. He insisted on running, so he got the chance to enter the football team and university. This is impossible for a child with mental retardation, these impossibilities become possible because of his persistence.

After he became a soldier, more focused training than ordinary people made him outstanding in the army, even though he doesn't have high intelligence. What the movie wants to tell us is that people can achieve success in many ways, not only through the advantage of intelligence. This can give a lot of ordinary people confidence and strength in life, making them work hard on their own, making them believe that as long as they persist, there will have their day. Although the transmission of such values is deceptive to some extent, "Forrest Gump" is successful because of the opportunity which is different from ordinary people, we still can not deny the encouragement that the film brings to each individual.

Finally, let's focus on the supporting role in the film. Jennie is the only child who doesn't look down on Forrest Gump. They are inseparable in the process of growing up. Although Jennie has not fulfilled her dream of becoming a singer, she has the most important characteristic of a successful person on the road to pursue her dream - self-confidence. "I would be fame." is not only Jennie's vision for her future, but also every American's desire for success. If Forrest Gump represents the few who can succeed with hard work, in fact,

Jennie is the representative of the majority in our lives. They have dreams, but they don't have the talent, and finally give up the dream. As for a film, *Forrest Gump* is the protagonist, and most people want to pay attention to would be *Forrest Gump's* success.

### **3. Analysis**

#### **3.1 Differences**

The values represented by the two thoughts are opposite, and there are great differences in their views of success. First of all, the two cultures have different views on the relationship between collective interests and individual interests. Collectivism holds that individual interests and collective interests are dialectically unified. Individuals should put collective interests in the first place, even giving up individual interests for collective interests, and sacrifice their lives to protect collective interests when necessary. During the Anti-Japanese War, Huang Jiguang and a series of Anti Japanese heroes dedicated their lives to protect the collective interests. Individualism holds that individual interests should be prior to collective interests. If collective interests infringe upon individual interests, it will infringe upon their sacred and inviolable private sphere. During the outbreak of the pandemic, the farce that the United States refused to wear masks led to the outbreak wildly came from the value.

The second difference is the difference in successful methods. There is an old Chinese saying that "everyone gathers firewood and the flame is high", which is the reason that it is easier to achieve success through collective cooperation. Under the influence of collectivism, people believe that teamwork can make people learn from each other. For example, the discovery of artemisinin is not just Tu youyou's achievement. At first, the artemisinin was discovered by a whole research team. Under the influence of individualism, people believe that the final results are personal efforts. For example, Madame Curie's successful experience of overcoming loneliness and radiation in the extraction of radium and finally winning the Nobel Prize is the most typical representative of individualism.

#### **3.2 Similarities**

There is no shortcut to success, so neither of them denies the importance of hard work and personal initiative. The Chinese women's volleyball team in "*Leap*" has the strength to become the champion of the Olympic Games only after the devil training day by day. *Gump* only in the process of being chased constantly running, hard training in the army, and perseverance in shrimp catch, get the final achievement.

### **4. Conclusion**

Success is not easy. Success is not an easy thing for any kind of thinking. They are different in the methods and goals of realization. "*Leap*" and "*Forrest Gump*" are both classic films, which also bring people a lot of spiritual inspiration. No matter how many differences

there are between collectivism and individualism, they will come to the same end in the end. The significance of success to individuals is often influenced by the cultural environment.

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