

A Comparative Study of Chinese and British Tea Culture from the Perspective of Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory

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Abstract: This study conducts a comparative analysis of tea culture differences between China and Britain using Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory. By applying Hofstede's framework, the study highlights that Chinese tea culture tends to embody characteristics of individualism and masculinity, while British tea culture reflects individualistic traits alongside more feminine qualities in its drinking etiquettes. The ultimate goal of this research is to enhance understanding of the cultural variances between the two nations, reduce conflicts stemming from cultural misunderstandings, promote effective cross-cultural communication, and provide valuable insights for cultural exchange initiatives and encourage the dissemination of cultural knowledge between China and Britain.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication; Chinese and British Tea Culture; Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory

1 Introduction

Tea culture, originating in ancient China, traces its mythical beginnings to Emperor Shen Nong (2737 BCE). Evolving from medicine to a cultural staple, tea influenced Chinese art, literature, and social customs. Through trade and diplomacy, tea spread globally, reaching Europe via traders in the 16th century. Today, tea remains special to Chinese and British identity, as a major social tool and trading product on an international stage. Understanding tea culture between

China and Britain enhances mutual respect by highlighting their distinct characteristics and values, which is vital for fostering cultural exchange and friendship. It also offers insights for preserving and innovating tea traditions by learning from each other's practices. Additionally, recognizing these cultural differences aids in effective intercultural communication, helping to prevent misunderstandings and promote smoother interactions between the two cultures with tea as a tool.

2 Literature Review

This study aims to analyze the difference between Chinese and British tea culture from the Perspective of Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory. In this segment, researches on these two aspects are examined respectively through the presentation of their origins and expert comments. To make the literature review more objective and comprehensive, domestic literature about the thesis topic should be focused on as much as overseas literature.

2.1 Previous Studies on "Cultural Dimensions"

Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social psychologist, is widely recognized as a pioneer in cross-cultural research, leaving a significant academic legacy. His most notable contribution is the development of cultural dimensions that compare values across different countries. Hofstede's work in cultural and cross-cultural psychology is especially relevant in today's globalized world. The foundation of his theory emerged from an extensive survey conducted in the 1960s and 1970s, analyzing value variations among diverse divisions of IBM, involved over 100,000 employees from 50 countries across three geographic regions (Hofstede, 2001).

Hofstede initially delineated four salient cultural value dimensions: individualism and collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity and femininity. Subsequent scholarly inquiry by Chinese sociologists revealed an additional dimension, encompassing fifty facets, concerning long-term versus short-term orientation (Bond, 1991). Finally, a replication study, spanning 93 discrete nations, corroborated the presence of the original five dimensions while identifying a novel sixth dimension denoted as indulgence and restraint.

2.2 Chinese and British Tea Culture

In ancient China, tea held significant cultural, social, and medicinal importance, manifesting in various aspects of daily life. Its utili-

zation encompassed ceremonial, social, medicinal, and philosophical dimensions, reflecting a deep-seated appreciation for its multifaceted attributes. Individuals of lower status were required to offer tea as a sign of respect to those of higher status. For example, (Li Jiamei, 2022) younger generations were expected to offer tea to their elders, students would offer tea to their teachers when apprenticing, and individuals would offer tea to their parents before marriage. While in Britain, tea, as a representative symbol, is something that people of all ages and genders can enjoy in China. However, when it was first introduced to England, it was popular primarily among the royal palace and the nobility before gradually spreading to lower classes with the development of trade (Jin Jingbo, 2018).

In the limited available literature, there is a plethora of studies examining the comparative aspects of Chinese and British tea culture, focusing primarily on tea types and the drinking etiquettes associated with tea consumption. However, there is a notable dearth of literature contextualizing Chinese and British tea culture within the framework provided by Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory. If so, the studies limited on the perspective of individualism vs collectivism on discussion the different value between Britain and China. For instance, Zeng hao (2018) suggests China and the UK embody distinct values—collectivism and individualism—rooted in their unique historical contexts, leading to notable linguistic differences. Jiang feng (2017) and Peng chen (2021) indicate Chinese tea embodies a collective consciousness, whereas the British, particularly under the development of capitalism, emphasize individualistic spirit.

The study of Chinese and British Tea Culture can serve as a media which bridge the gap between the two different cultures. This study can facilitate conflict reduction, thereby fostering the dissemination and evolution of Chinese culture in other countries, and advancing intercultural exchange and integration.

3 Methodology of the Study

In regard of taking deep insights of the differences between Chinese and British as the aspect of tea culture for successful intercultural social communication. This paper mainly answers the following research questions:

- 1) Utilize Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory as a framework to explore the cultural factors behind the differences in tea culture between China and Britain.
- 2) Provide beneficial guidance for cultural exchange, promoting cultural dissemination and communication between China and Britain with tea as a social tool.

This study employs a methodological approach that combines descriptive research and comparative analysis. The mixture of qualitative and quantitative research is applied. Specifically, the study will proceed through the following steps:

Interview: An interview will be designed to people who have lived Britain and know about both Chinese and British tea culture, aiming to discern variations in their cognition, attitudes, and behaviors towards tea culture between the two countries.

Data Analysis: Statistical analysis will be conducted on the results obtained from the questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory will be employed to explore the cultural factors underlying the differences in tea culture between China and Britain.

Discussion and Suggestions: Based on the research findings, conclusions will be drawn, and corresponding recommendations will be proposed to provide beneficial guidance for cross-cultural communication.

4 Research Design

This study uses a literature review to compare Chinese and British tea culture, differing from prior methodologies, and conducts interviews to explore their historical, typological, and consumption distinctions. Ten college teachers who had the experience of living in Britain were interviewed. Interview questions, based on Hofstede's six cultural dimensions, are adapted for each country to enable a nuanced cross-cultural comparison. The correspondence between specific questions and cultural dimensions is shown in the table below:

Table 1. Cultural Dimensions Associated questions in tea-drinking practice

Dimensions	Definition	Associated Questions
Power Distance	It signifies the degree to which a society acknowledges and tolerates the unequal distribution of power within institutions and organizations.	Do you perceive any noticeable manifestation of power distance when drinking tea with high-ranking individuals (elders, superiors, etc.) from China/Britain, such as waiting for them to sit first or allowing them to drink tea first? Do you consider the seating arrangement important when drinking tea with high-ranking individuals from China/Britain?
Individualism vs. Collectivism	It refers to the degree to which individuals prioritize personal interests and autonomy over group harmony and collective goals, or vice versa.	Do you perceive any evident display of individualism or collectivism when drinking tea with Chinese/ British people? What other manifestations of individualism and collectivism do you see?
Masculinity vs. Femininity	It relates to the distribution of roles and values within a society along gender lines.	When you hear about a social tea gathering among Chinese/ British people, do you tend to picture them a gathering of males or females?
Uncertainty Avoidance	It pertains to the extent to which members of a society feel uncomfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty in various situations.	Are Chinese/ British people willing to try new tea brands or flavors that they have not tasted before? Are Chinese/ British people willing to try new tea-drinking ways they are unfamiliar with?
Long-term Orientation vs. Short-term Orientation	It reflects the extent to which individuals within a culture focus on the future and value perseverance in the present.	Do Chinese/ British people prioritize immediate enjoyment or long-term health when drinking tea? Are Chinese/ British people willing to invest in expensive tea leaves and tea ware?
Indulgence vs. Restraint	It assesses a society's disposition regarding the fulfillment of fundamental human desires associated with the enjoyment of life and leisure pursuits.	If Chinese/ British people get tea leaves or tea ware they like, are they willing to prepay to indulge themselves? Are Chinese/ British people willing to adhere to traditional tea etiquette when drinking tea?

5 Data Analysis

The data reflects teachers' perspectives on differences in Chinese and British tea culture regarding power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, and masculinity vs. femininity. All participants noted a clear power distance when drinking tea with high-ranking individuals in both cultures, such as waiting for them to sit or drink first, and acknowledged the importance of seating arrangements. Participants agreed that British tea drinking demonstrates individualism, while in China, tea is primarily a social tool used by men; in Britain, women are more commonly seen at tea parties.

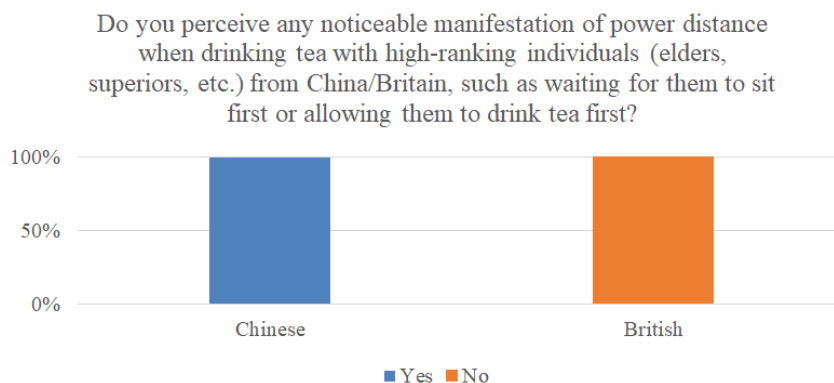


Figure1 power distance in social interactions in the context of drinking tea

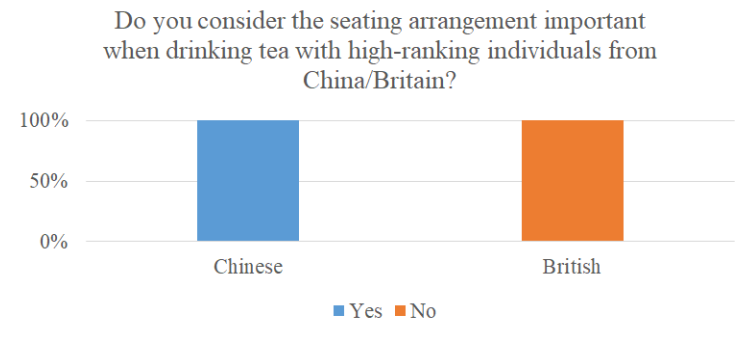


Figure2 seating arrangements in tea-drinking interactions

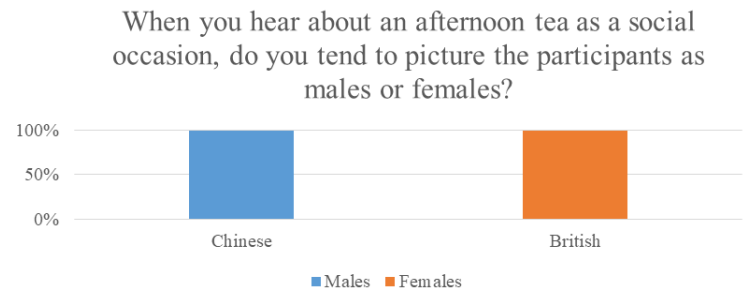


Figure3 gender associations with tea-drinking in social occasion

The data in Table 2 highlights participants’ views on cultural dimensions related to tea consumption. All interviewees agree that Chinese people are open to trying new tea brands and flavors, while 60% believe the British are similarly receptive. Furthermore, 80% think Chinese individuals are more likely to explore new tea-drinking methods, compared to just 50% for the British. In terms of long-term vs. short-term orientation, 80% view Chinese tea traditions as emphasizing long-term health benefits, whereas the British tend to prioritize immediate enjoyment. Regarding investment in quality, 30% of participants believe Chinese consumers invest in premium tea leaves and wares, while 40% think the British are more likely to do so. Concerning indulgence, 40% feel Chinese consumers are willing to prepay for preferred tea products, compared to 30% for the British. Finally, all participants agree that Chinese people adhere to traditional tea etiquette, while 40% believe the British often overlook it.

Table 2 participants’ vote of different tea-drinking habits between China and Britain

Question (multiple Choice Questions)	Votes	
	China	Britain
Are Chinese/ British people willing to try new tea brands or flavors that they have not tasted before?	10	6
Are Chinese/ British people willing to try new tea-drinking ways they are unfamiliar with?	8	5
Do Chinese/ British people prioritize immediate enjoyment when drinking tea?	2	8
Do Chinese/ British people prioritize long-term health when drinking tea?	8	2
Are Chinese/ British people willing to invest in expensive tea leaves and tea ware?	3	4
If Chinese/British people get tea leaves or tea ware they like, are they willing to prepay to indulge themselves?	4	3
Are Chinese/British people willing to adhere to traditional tea etiquette when drinking tea?	10	4

Chinese individuals are perceived as more open to experimenting with new tea flavors and methods, with a greater focus on long-term health benefits and adherence to traditional etiquette. In contrast, British individuals appear to prioritize immediate enjoyment and are considered more likely to invest in premium tea. Overall, these differences highlight varying cultural values related to tea, shaped by long-term versus short-term orientations and attitudes toward indulgence.

6 Research Findings: Compare Chinese and British tea culture from the perspective of Hofstede's Culture dimension

6.1 Similarity: Masculinity and Uncertainty Avoidance

According to Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Index (figure 4), both China and Britain are characterized by a masculine orientation and low uncertainty avoidance indicating motivation to achieve success and comfort with ambiguity. This explains the survey data (Table 2), highlighting the notable gender label that in both China and Britain, men drink tea for social purposes dominating tea consumption, often to pursue business cooperation, while women enjoy afternoon tea as a way to lead an elegant lifestyle. The data of this survey (Table 2) also suggests that Chinese and British people are more open to trying new tea brands, flavors, and methods, with majority agreeing that they are more adventurous in their tea experiences.

6.2 Distinction: Power Distance, Individualism, Long Term Orientation and Indulgence

Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Index (figure 4) also shows that China scores high on Power Distance, indicating a preference for hierarchical structures, whereas Britain has a low score, favoring egalitarianism. As in tea drinking etiquette, data of this study suggests all participants observed that power distance is manifest in Chinese cultures, with clear distinctions shown through seating arrangements and the order of drinking tea when in the company of high-ranking individuals, such as elders or superiors.

Hofstede believed that China is more collectivist, prioritizing group harmony over individual goals, while Britain is highly individualistic, emphasizing personal freedom. When it comes to tea culture, all interviewees believe that British people exhibit individualism when drinking tea, with a small percentage (10%) speculating that younger Chinese may adopt individualistic behaviors due to Western influence.

China demonstrates a long-term orientation and restraint, focusing on future rewards, while Britain has a short-term orientation, favoring immediate results. China tends toward restraint in social norms, whereas Britain is more indulgent, encouraging personal enjoyment. Interviewee in this study view Chinese tea culture as focused on long-term health benefits, while the British focus on immediate enjoyment.

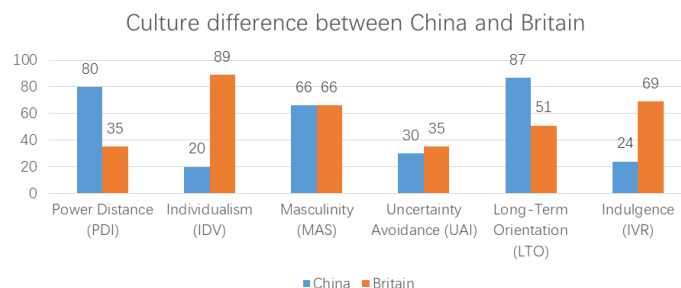


Figure4 Culture Dimension index between China and Britain

7 Conclusion

Regarding power distance, Chinese and British tea cultures reflect distinct values and social structures. In China, tea is integral to social order, with inferiors presenting tea to superiors as a sign of respect. In terms of individualism vs. collectivism, China's tradition is collective, with tea enjoyed in familial or community settings, while British culture emphasizes individualism, influenced by the Enlightenment. Regarding masculinity vs. femininity, Chinese tea culture sees men using tea for social purposes, while in Britain, women are more involved in tea parties. For uncertainty avoidance, Chinese tea-drinking is a flexible daily habit, while British tea culture is more adaptable to new information and changing plans. In terms of long-term vs. short-term orientation, Chinese tea drinking is rooted in long-term health benefits, while British tea culture focuses on immediate enjoyment. As to indulgence vs. restraint, Chinese people adhere to traditional tea etiquette, while British society is more indulgent, seeking enjoyment and pleasure.

8 Future Study

Although valuable findings are obtained, this study has limitations embedded within it. There are limitations in the scope of the interview survey. In the future study, it is necessary to expand the scope of empirical research on the relevant situation of both Chinese and British people, and conduct investigation in all age levels and genders. Meanwhile, reasons hidden behind these deviations can be broadened discussed and for further analysis.

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