

Cultural Differences or Political Differences? Flipping Over the Hofstede's 6-D Model of Culture in Terms of Conservatism and Political Views

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Hofstede's 6-D model of culture is one of the most widespread taxonomies regarding the cultural differences across the countries, but it has also faced many fierce antagonists. Most criticisms of the Hofstede model include identification of nations and cultures, superficial and narrow theoretical backgrounds, and suggestions of rival hypotheses. Especially, there is some evidence that suggests that the allegedly cultural differences may actually stem from political backgrounds or people's traits related to their political circumstances; Therefore, I expect that most of Hofstede's dimensions are associated with political traits of people and most national differences in Hofstede's dimensions will disappear if the influence of political traits are controlled. The political differences across nations may rather indicate the global commonality, not the differences dichotomously divided without consideration of the dynamic natures of culture.

The Hofstede Model of Culture

- Hofstede proposed six dimensions of cultural differences between countries with data gathered in IBM
 - **Individualism vs. Collectivism:** personal goals vs. group goals
 - **Power Distance:** whether people justify inequality and gaps in social strength
 - **Uncertainty Avoidance:** whether people accept or evade ambiguous or less obvious situations
 - **Masculinity vs. Femininity:** masculine values such as wealth, success, and competition vs. feminine values such as empathy and care
 - **Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation:** long-term success vs. present performance
 - **Indulgence vs. Restraint:** gratification and enjoying life vs. prefer to control desires
- But how much could we trust it?
 - People usually want easy-to-understand explanations of human differences.
 - If such explanations are found, they can easily stick to it without thorough verification of it because it fulfills the need for explanation and control of the world.
 - Although many scholars have pointed out the serious flaws in this model, it is still getting the roaring attentions and believed to be true without sufficient follow-up studies.

The Cultural Fantasy

- The 'easy-to-understand' explanations
 - **Facile dichotomy**: We are like this, and the East is like that!
 - Oversimplification and stereotypes of differences
 - Cognitive categorization: Outgroup members should be different from us!
 - **Outgroup homogeneity effect**: All Easterners would be the same!
- Are cultural differences outdated?
 - Globalization and development of the information technology
 - Increasing intercultural communications, reducing cultural differences
 - We can easily contact contents from different cultures via YouTube!
 - The hyperconnected society is making global norms and values.



Violent video games are the only problem of Westerners, isn't it?



Only Easterners are clamorous for video game addiction. Look at that country. It's quiet!

Criticism of the Hofstede Model

- The brutal comments on Hofstede
 - Baskerville (2003): *Hofstede never studied culture!*
 - Hofstede's model is not widely accepted in sociology and anthropology.
 - His approach is extremely universalist, contains many practical and logical flaws, and even is challenging the mainstream social science and denying its principles without control.
 - McSweeney (2002): 'the failure of scholarship'
 - His theory is profoundly problematic and he does not want to hear and accept the criticism.
- Three main critiques of Hofstede Model
 - **Equates nations and cultures**: Borders and cultural boundaries are different!
 - Should take into account the within-country diversity as well
 - Each dimension of the model is based on superficial and naïve understandings.
 - Tailors various cultural dynamics by unfounded single series of criteria
 - **Culture is dynamic and complex** – arbitrary cutting and reduction would rather harm the diversity
 - Each index is related to extraneous factors: There may be **different factors** that affected such differences?

Cultural Differences or Political Differences?

- Relationship between socioeconomic or demographic characteristics and Hofstede's dimensions
 - Power distance decreased along with the increase in educational level (Hofstede, 1984).
 - Uncertainty avoidance was associated with age, anxiety-related behaviors, and death rates.
 - **How about if this relationship stemmed from political differences?** Conservatism is linked to age (Truett, 1993) and inversely correlated with educational level (Pew Research Center, 2016). It is known that threat, instability, and mortality salience are all related to the revelation of conservative beliefs (Jost et al., 2003; Burke et al., 2003).
- Other clues that indicate the effect of political aspects
 - Baskerville (2003) suggested the Hofstede model's potential relationship with political characteristics.
 - Masculinity and uncertainty avoidance have changed depending on the particular political circumstances (Søndergaard, 1994; Newman & Nollen, 1996).
 - Indications of the direct relationship between conservatism and the Hofstede model
 - Conservatives are more collectivistic than liberals (Talhelm et al., 2015),
 - more likely to avoid ambiguity and uncertainty (Jost et al., 2003), and
 - more motivated to justify the inequality and power distance (Jost & Andrews, 2011).

From Difference to Commonality

- **If cultural differences are related to conservatism...**
 - They do not indicate differences anymore, but *commonality*.
 - They are all in the **same dialectical process between the universal social change and the resistance to it.**
 - They indicate the commonalities beyond various temporal and spatial backgrounds in terms of the direction of development of human society.
- Our attitudes towards cultural diversity
 - Focus only the differences and overlook the commonalities
 - Because we are all trapped in the water, we don't realize that we all have the same fins, tails, eyes, gills, and scales and focus merely on the difference in skin color.
 - **Diverse cultural dynamics cannot be simplified.**
 - Simple and dichotomous divisions of culture have rather violated cultural diversity and its dynamics.
 - *Cutting the beauty of pristine stones into square bricks?*
 - To respect their diversity as it is, not to arbitrarily judge differences at one's will, would be the imperative first step to head for the global commonality.

As we have different colors with each other, we are different.

