

**Юань Сюэцзин**

Магистр

Казахский национальный университет им. Аль-Фараби

Алматы, Казахстан

**ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНАЯ ИЕРАРХИЯ И МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНАЯ АДАПТАЦИЯ: ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ СЕМЕЙНОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ В ТЕЛЕСЕРИАЛЕ «ВСЁ ХОРОШО» С ПОЗИЦИЙ ТЕОРИИ ВЫСОКО- И НИЗКОКОНТЕКСТНОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ**

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются особенности семейной коммуникации в китайском телесериале «Всё хорошо» с позиции теории высоко- и низкоконтекстной коммуникации Э. Холла. Цель исследования заключается в выявлении влияния профессиональной иерархии и межкультурной адаптации на формирование различных коммуникативных моделей внутри современной китайской семьи. Показано, что Су Миньюй, находящаяся на высокой управленческой позиции, демонстрирует рациональный, прямой и низкоконтекстный стиль общения, ориентированный на правила и личные границы. Су Минчэн, напротив, сохраняет высококонтекстную модель, основанную на семейной этике, эмоциональности и неявных ожиданиях. Су Минчжэ представляет смешанный тип коммуникации, сочетающий китайские традиционные ценности с западными низкоконтекстными поведенческими установками. Делается вывод, что конфликты в семье Су отражают не только личностные противоречия, но и более глубокую внутреннюю дифференциацию китайской высококонтекстной культуры в условиях модернизации, рыночной трансформации и глобализации.

**Ключевые слова:** Высококонтекстная Коммуникация, Низкоконтекстная Коммуникация, Семейная Коммуникация, Профессиональная Иерархия, Межкультурная Адаптация.

**Yuan Xuejing**

## **WORKPLACE HIERARCHY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION: A HIGH-LOW CONTEXT INTERPRETATION OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION IN ALL IS WELL**

**Abstract.** This article examines the features of family communication in the Chinese television drama All Is Well from the perspective of Edward T. Hall's theory of high- and low-context communication. The aim of the study is to identify the influence of workplace hierarchy and cross-cultural adaptation on the formation of different communicative models within the contemporary Chinese family. It is shown that Su Mingyu, who occupies a senior managerial position, demonstrates a rational, direct and low-context communication style oriented toward rules and personal boundaries. Su Mingcheng, by contrast, preserves a high-context model based on family ethics, emotionality and implicit expectations. Su Mingzhe represents a mixed type of communication, combining traditional Chinese values with Western low-context behavioral patterns. The article concludes that the conflicts within the Su family reflect not only personal contradictions, but also a deeper internal differentiation of Chinese high-context culture under the conditions of modernization, market transformation and globalization.

**Keywords:** High-Context Communication, Low-Context Communication, Family Communication, Workplace Hierarchy, Cross-Cultural Adaptation.

### **Introduction**

In the context of accelerating modernization, marketization and globalization, family communication in contemporary China is no longer determined solely by traditional kinship ethics, but is increasingly reshaped by professional identity, institutional hierarchy and cross-cultural experience. As a basic unit of social interaction, the family functions as a concentrated space in which broader social transformations are reflected through everyday verbal conflicts, emotional

negotiations and value confrontations. Therefore, the study of family communication provides an important perspective for understanding the internal differentiation of Chinese high-context culture under modern conditions.

Edward T. Hall's theory of high- and low-context communication offers a productive analytical framework for examining these transformations. High-context communication relies heavily on implicit meanings, shared background knowledge, interpersonal obligations and emotional resonance, whereas low-context communication emphasizes explicit verbal expression, logical clarity, individual boundaries and rule-based interaction. Although Chinese culture is commonly regarded as a typical high-context culture, contemporary social mobility, bureaucratic workplace structures and overseas cultural adaptation have generated more complex and heterogeneous communicative patterns within Chinese families.

The television drama *All Is Well* provides a representative cultural text for observing such contextual differentiation. The Su siblings embody three different communicative models shaped by distinct social experiences: Su Mingyu demonstrates a low-context, rational and boundary-oriented style formed through senior corporate management; Su Mingcheng maintains a traditional high-context pattern rooted in grassroots workplace relations and familial ethics; while Su Mingzhe, influenced by long-term residence in the United States, presents a mixed communicative mode combining Chinese high-context values with Western low-context behavioral norms. Their conflicts are therefore not merely personal disputes, but manifestations of structural tensions between rules and relationships, individualism and collectivism, efficiency and kinship morality.

Based on Hall's high-low context theory, and drawing on related perspectives from power distance theory and cross-cultural adaptation studies, this paper analyzes the communicative conflicts among the Su siblings in *All Is Well*. It aims to reveal how workplace hierarchy and cross-cultural adaptation contribute to contextual differentiation within the family, and how such differentiation reflects the broader transformation of contemporary Chinese social relations.

## **Core Theoretical Foundations of High-Low Context**

In high-context cultures, substantial information is embedded in situations, relationships and collective consensus, with implicit and euphemistic verbal expressions emphasizing interpersonal harmony and restraint. In low-context cultures, core information is explicitly conveyed through linguistic texts, featuring direct expressions that prioritize efficiency, boundaries and rationality [1]. The East Asian Confucian cultural circle generally exhibits high-context characteristics, yet market-oriented workplaces and overseas life experiences can break inherent contextual inertia [2].

Hofstede's power distance theory states that higher organizational hierarchies correspond to more standardized, direct and result-oriented communication [3]. Senior management roles focus on efficiency, division of rights and responsibilities, and rule enforcement, inherently favoring low-context communication; grassroots positions rely on personal connections and implicit group understandings, retaining traditional high-context communication habits [4]. This theory provides sociological support for interpreting the communication differences among the three Su siblings.

Berry's cross-cultural adaptation theory indicates that individuals residing long-term in low-context Western countries develop direct expressive habits and a strong sense of personal boundaries. However, they cannot fully abandon the value foundations of their native culture, ultimately forming a "dual-context mixed" communication mode that easily leads to misunderstandings in their original family environment [5].

### **Workplace Hierarchy Differences: Endogenous Contextual Differentiation Among the Su Siblings**

As a senior manager in a large enterprise and someone long immersed in a market-oriented bureaucratic environment, Su Mingyu displays stable low-context communication traits. First, her verbal expression is direct, pragmatic and solution-oriented. When dealing with elderly care, property division and family disputes, she consistently focuses on facts, workable arrangements and individual accountability,

rather than accepting emotional blackmail or implicit moral pressure. Second, she attaches great importance to interpersonal boundaries. She clearly separates voluntary family responsibility from coercive familial obligation, and refuses to accept the traditional high-context Chinese assumption that “kinship overrides rules.” Third, her communication is relatively de-emotionalized. Instead of responding through quarrels, accusations or moral appeals, she tends to rely on rational explanation, contractual awareness and problem-solving logic, which corresponds to the efficiency-oriented principles of modern low-context workplaces [Там же 6].

However, this style also makes Su Mingyu an “outlier” within her family of origin. Her rational, explicit and boundary-conscious expressions are often interpreted by her relatives as indifference, selfishness or a lack of affection. In essence, this misunderstanding reveals a deeper structural conflict between low-context rational logic and high-context relationship-centered thinking. What Mingyu regards as clarity and fairness is perceived by others as emotional distance; what she understands as reasonable boundary-setting is judged by the family as a refusal of kinship responsibility.

By contrast, Su Mingcheng, who is embedded in an ordinary grassroots workplace, largely follows traditional Chinese high-context communication norms. First, his expressions are often indirect and implicit. He depends heavily on subtext, shared background knowledge and others’ unspoken understanding, while avoiding clear refusals or explicit positions. Second, he frequently uses kinship, filial piety and personal favors as communicative resources. In family negotiations, he tends to replace factual discussion with moral judgment, and gives priority to interpersonal sentiment rather than formal rules. Finally, his communication is strongly emotional. He repeatedly returns to past grievances, amplifies emotional conflict, and avoids rational, issue-specific solutions. Su Mingcheng’s style therefore represents the intersection of relationship-oriented grassroots workplace culture and traditional familial high-context norms. It is precisely this overlap that often turns ordinary

family disagreements into moralized conflicts in traditional Chinese households [Там же 2].

Thus, workplace hierarchy shapes different levels of tolerance for direct expression. Senior managerial positions encourage decisive, explicit and efficiency-oriented communication, with less dependence on emotional accommodation. Grassroots roles, by contrast, require greater attention to group harmony, face-saving and implicit courtesy. The clash between efficiency logic and relationship logic consequently intensifies the Su family's verbal conflicts, transforming practical issues into ethical confrontations and emotional disputes [Там же 4].

### **Cross-Cultural Adaptation: Dual-Context Mixing and Communication Conflicts of Su Mingzhe**

Having settled permanently in the United States, Su Mingzhe is a typical case of cross-cultural adaptation, combining underlying high-context cultural roots with low-context behavioral patterns [Там же 5]. On one hand, overseas life has cultivated Western low-context traits: he values personal boundaries, articulates demands directly, recognizes individual independence and opposes excessive familial entanglement. On the other hand, deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture, he stubbornly upholds high-context values such as the eldest son's responsibility, family reputation and filial piety.

This ideological divide results in severe contextual dissonance: he attempts to define personal boundaries with Western rational rules while demanding sacrifices from his siblings based on Eastern kinship morality. In critical matters including paternal elderly support, family resource allocation and responsibility sharing, his double standards intensify conflicts constantly: his direct demands are interpreted by his family as evading accountability, while his moral preaching contradicts Western individualism. Su Mingzhe's dilemma vividly illustrates the familial communication crises caused by contextual mixing among individuals experiencing transnational mobility.

### **Cultural Reflections on High-Low Context Conflicts**

Deviations emerge in the process of information decoding: direct low-context expression is easily interpreted as emotional coldness from a high-context perspective, whereas implicit high-context insinuation may be perceived as hypocrisy or manipulation from a low-context standpoint, thereby producing systematic misunderstandings in verbal interaction [Там же 1]. Second, these communicative conflicts reveal an opposition of core values. The standardized, rule-oriented and individualistic logic cultivated by modern workplaces comes into profound tension with the collectivist orientation and relationship-based ethics embedded in traditional family structures. Third, such conflicts reflect broader social transformation. The family disputes in *All Is Well* are therefore not reducible to individual personality differences; rather, they constitute a cultural symptom of internal contextual differentiation within Chinese high-context culture under the combined influence of modernization, marketization and globalization.

Accordingly, contemporary family communication requires a more inclusive interpretive framework. Differences caused by workplace hierarchy, institutional experience and cross-cultural exposure should be recognized, rather than judged through unilateral moral standards. High-context communication may benefit from greater explicitness and clarity, while low-context communication should incorporate emotional empathy and relational sensitivity. Only through such mutual adjustment can a balanced communicative model be established between normative rules and interpersonal bonds.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis demonstrates that the family conflicts represented in *All Is Well* are rooted not only in emotional disagreement or individual personality differences, but also in deeper contextual divergences shaped by workplace hierarchy and cross-cultural adaptation. Su Mingyu's direct, rational and boundary-conscious communication reflects the low-context logic cultivated by modern corporate bureaucracy. Su Mingcheng's implicit, emotional and relationship-oriented expression embodies the continuity of traditional Chinese high-context norms within

grassroots workplace and family structures. Su Mingzhe's communicative contradictions, meanwhile, reveal the instability of dual-context adaptation, in which Western low-context behavioral habits coexist with persistent Chinese high-context moral expectations.

These three communicative models together illustrate the internal differentiation of Chinese high-context culture under conditions of modernization, marketization and globalization. The Su family's disputes over elderly care, responsibility distribution, property and kinship obligations are therefore symbolic of broader social tensions: the conflict between institutional rules and personal relationships, between individual autonomy and collective morality, and between explicit rational negotiation and implicit emotional expectation. In this sense, *All Is Well* functions not only as a family drama, but also as a cultural text reflecting the transformation of contemporary Chinese communicative order.

From a theoretical perspective, the study confirms the explanatory value of Hall's high-low context theory in analyzing intra-cultural rather than only intercultural communication. It further shows that contextual differences may emerge within a single national culture due to social stratification, occupational experience and transnational mobility. In practical terms, the findings suggest that contemporary family communication requires a more flexible and inclusive model. High-context communication should strengthen explicitness and problem-oriented clarity, while low-context communication should incorporate emotional sensitivity and relational empathy. Only through such mutual adjustment can modern families establish a more balanced communicative framework between rules and affection, autonomy and responsibility, and rational negotiation and interpersonal solidarity.

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