

Cross-Cultural Adaptation: A Content Analysis of Two Chinese Online Media — Mitbbs vs. Wenxuecity

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Abstract: Using a content analysis, the study aims to examine cross-cultural adaptation that is demonstrated in people's online communication. Specifically, it compares and contrasts two Chinese online media, namely Mitbbs and Wenxuecity, both targeting overseas Chinese. The degree of cultural adaptation is revealed in the percentages of U.S. related topics or themes found among the posts in the "living abroad" columns of the two target media as well as the exact levels of intercultural sensitivity that Bennett theorized in his Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). Intercultural sensitivity on the site of Wenxuecity has a greater ripple effect than Mitbbs. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Cross-cultural adaptation, (Inter-)cultural sensitivity, Chinese online media, Content analysis

1. Introduction

China as the second largest economic power in the global market inevitably attracts people's attention (e.g., Silver, Devlin & Huang, 2019). The so-called "trade war" between the U.S. and China has made it an even more of a media sensation (e.g., Tuzov, 2021). U.S. media update its audiences about the "trade talk" between the two countries on a regular basis (e.g., NPR, 2019). Chinese media also inform its audiences about the trade affair (Shao, 2019). Thanks to the Internet, overseas Chinese could check out things they are interested in on both media systems and even more. Acknowledging the large audiences that both mainstream and dominant media have, the author of this paper witnesses the important role overseas Chinese media plays in this and many other issues. More importantly, she is curious about the attributes of their media contents, in particular, the cultural sensitivity demonstrated in their online posts since little research can be found that studies overseas Chinese media in this regard. To fill up the gap, a content analysis was designed to compare and contrast two important overseas Chinese online media platforms, namely Mitbbs and Wenxuecity, in their posts found in their respective "living abroad" column. Findings about the cultural sensitivity revealed in the target media contents in the current study can help people understand not only how Chinese live their overseas life, but also what it means for them, including their respective audiences, to live in the world with a good cultural sensitivity.

2. Conceptual Frameworks

The current study follows largely the two theoretical frameworks used in the author's previous research with another scholar. They are Carbaugh's (2007) theory about cultural discourse analysis and Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS, Bennett, 1986, 1993, 2017). They not only guide the study in theory, but also lend the operationalization tools to its key variable, intercultural sensitivity.

2.1. Cultural Discourse Analysis

Carbaugh's (2007) cultural discourse analysis focuses on exploring how communication practices constitute personhood. It can be very well applied to the individual level of analysis when screening the online posts on the target media platforms for culturally related contents and later on coding each unit. It also applies to the group level analysis to find differences between one media outlet vs. another in the dependent variable under study.

Using Carbaugh's (2007) conceptual framework, the two target online media platforms can be compared and contrasted in the following (1) five modes of inquiries and (2) five communication dimensions as far as the analysis of the cultural meanings and cultural sensitivity of the posts on each target platforms are concerned. Whereas the five modes concern largely the process of communication inquiry, the five dimensions guide the specific analysis of individual cases of communication, in the current study the possible different levels of (inter-)cultural sensitivity reflected in the online posts on the two online media platforms.

Of the five modes of inquiry, the first is the theoretical mode. It addresses the primary concerns of communication and culturally particular meanings associated with communication practices. Carbaugh's (2007) theory distinguishes communication from culture. They are separate concepts even though they very often overlap. In the case of the online posts in the current study, some could have nothing to do with culture while others have a clear cultural or intercultural message.

Descriptive mode is the second one. It concerns the ways to describe the actual "communication acts, event, or styles" (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 172). As far as the target media contents in content analysis research are concerned, this means that the researcher as well as their coders must be able to describe the contents before coding each unit. This is especially important when coders do not agree with each other on certain items.

The third mode is the interpretive mode. In this mode, the investigations of specific meanings, normative rules, and cultural premises associated with the communication practices take place. As far as content analysis is concerned, it is the actual coding, that is the quantification of the target unit of analysis according to the coding scheme which operationalizes each variable under study so that the target contents could be analyzed in their meaning, normative property and cultural attribute.

The comparative mode focuses on studying similarities and differences between different practices and meanings. In terms of content analysis, it is when the coded data is analyzed to find possible differences between groups, between posts on different online media platforms in the present case. And any found differences or similarities should be clearly explained.

The last is the critical mode. Carbaugh (2007) suggests three approaches in this model of discourse analysis. They are natural, academic and cultural. The focus of the natural approach is on the participant's own view and interpretation of the communication. The focus of the academic approach is on theoretical and methodological significance. The focus of the cultural approach is on the natural viewpoints and practices from a particular standpoint, by making the particular "ethical juncture" explicit so that we understand the culture as is and a bit better. Since the current study focuses on (inter-)cultural sensitivity revealed in people's online posts, the critical mode encompasses both theoretical and practical implications of the findings about the online posts.

Besides the above five general modes of communication inquiry, namely (1) theoretical, (2) descriptive, (3) interpretive, (4) comparative, and (5) critical, Carbaugh (2007) also points out

five communication dimensions that address cultural specific meanings in discourse analysis. They include (1) being, (2) relating, (3) acting, (4) feeling, and (5) dwelling. The dimension of being involves identity and identification expressed or invoked in the communication activities. Culture, or how one looks at a culture is reflected in what they identify vs. not identify with. In the case of online posts, what people write in their posts informs the audience in effect about their cultural stance.

The relating dimension concerns the association between an identity and other people and other situations. When a person can put him/herself in the context of other human beings and/or different situations, culture becomes a social rather than individual phenomenon. By putting things in context, we create a platform for possible responses from others.

The acting dimension is about the enactment of the situated actions. This dimension puts culture in action so that culture exists not only in our mind, but also exhibits itself in our behavior. Instead of putting others in the dark, we let our action speak for itself. In this Internet age, we do not hesitate to get online and express our ideas and advocate our beliefs. The targeted online posts in the current study are situated actions.

The feeling dimension looks at emotions that the communicator holds deep and dear. Different ways in which we say something stimulate different emotional reactions. This is true when we communicate face-to-face or online. Just because one is not speaking in front of us does not mean that we cannot detect the emotions stimulated in us when we read or watch online or hear from the radio.

The dwelling dimension reflects the way of living and conducting one's own life. Each individual lives their own life. Unique life experiences create the multi-facet culture we live in. In this sense, culture can only be found in individual experiences. To understand how people communicate on the two Chinese online media platforms, we have to look at what people post there. By analyzing their posts, we can understand not only their experiences, but also their life and their (inter-)cultural sensitivity as part of it.

2.2. Intercultural Sensitivity

Of the many intercultural sensitivity theories or models (for a recent review, see Leung, Ang & Tan, 2014), some are domain specific whereas others are not. Of the former, Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS, Bennett, 1986, 1993, 2017) can best guide the current study since it focuses on intercultural attitudes and worldviews while other domain specific theories or models center on intercultural personality traits or intercultural capability. For a content analysis study of people's online posts such as the current one, DMIS is a good theoretical model because it makes it possible to position people's (inter-)cultural sensitivity by analyzing the positions people take when talking about their cultural experiences. In contrast, a survey of human subjects is needed to study their intercultural personality traits or their intercultural capability.

DMIS (Bennett, 1986, 1993, 2017) treats (inter-)cultural sensitivity as a process of psychological development, with the crude ethnocentrism on one end and the ideal ethno-relativism on the other. He identifies six dimensions on the intercultural sensitivity continuum. Since being ethnocentric is "natural" whereas "cultural sensitivity is not natural" (1993, p. 21), education and training are needed for people to change from having ethnocentric attitudes and behaviors to endorsing ethno-*relative* attitudes and behaviors.

Bennett (1986, 1993, 2017) divides the six dimensions, or levels of intercultural sensitivity, into two major stages, with the first three, namely “denial,” “defense” and “minimization” labeled as the “ethnocentric stages,” and the last three, namely “acceptance,” “adaptation” and “integration” labeled as the “ethno-relative stages.”

In the “ethnocentric stages,” “denial” is the level of (inter-)cultural sensitivity that is characterized by isolation or separation. Individuals and groups at this level not only are physically isolated from each other, they could also be psychologically separated from each other. Bennett (1993) uses the term “parochial” to describe the psychological isolation where “cultural difference is not experienced at all; it simply has no meaning” (p. 31). Separation is “the intentional erection of physical or social barriers to create distance from cultural difference as a means of maintaining a state of denial” (p. 32). Quarrels are avoided not because people understand each other’s perspectives, but because they keep distance from each other to find peace.

“Defense” level is characterized in denigration, superiority and reversal. Denigration is especially demonstrated in negative stereotyping of others and other groups usually because of their race, religion, age, gender or sex orientation. Superiority is different from denigration in that cultural differences are not cast in a negative light. Instead, emphasis is put on how one’s own culture is better than others’ and one’s worldview is “an acme of development” (Bennett, 1993, p. 37). Going beyond both denigration and superiority, people at “reversal” neither evaluate other cultures negatively, nor promote one’s own for its supremacy. They disavow their own culture and values, turning totally against their own but not necessarily embracing the other or others.

The third level under the “ethnocentric stages” is “minimization.” It is characterized by physical universalism and transcendent universalism. Physical universalism recognizes the basic human physical needs such as eating and drinking, and physical developments such as birth and death. Transcendent universalism, on the other hand, realizes that human beings, wherever they live and whichever culture they are born into, “are products of some single transcendent principle, law, or imperative” (Bennett, 1993, p. 43). People upholding this tenet think and behave under “the assumption that there is a single truth, or best way, and that with sufficient education all people will discover this truth within themselves” (Bennett, 1993, p. 44).

In the “ethno-relative stages,” the “acceptance” level is shown not only in respect for behavioral differences but also in respect for value differences. Different behaviors, both verbal and non-verbal, and different communication styles are acknowledged as the results of cultural differences. Better still, different worldviews and cultural values are recognized and respected in the sense that people “value or assume relative goodness or rightness about the phenomena” (Bennett, 1993, p. 50) that exist in the world.

“Adaptation” is found in people showing empathy for other cultures. It is also reflected in the advocacy for pluralism. Empathy refers to “the ability to experience differently in a communication context” (Bennett, 1993, p. 53). It means to put reality into cultural context by feeling from others’ perspectives. Advocacy for pluralism is even a step further than empathy in that one does not rest on feelings only, one takes action by speaking up for a bicultural and/or multicultural world or solution.

Finally, the ideal stage of intercultural sensitivity is “integration.” An individual at this level is what Adler (1977) called “the multicultural person” whose “essential identity is inclusive of life patterns different from his own and who has psychologically and socially come to grips with

a multiplicity of realities” (p. 25). Depending on their contextual evaluation, one moves freely from one culture to another (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003).

3. Target Media Platforms: Mitbbs and Wenxuecity

The two online websites, Mitbbs and Wenxuecity, are chosen because both are housed in the U.S., serving largely overseas Chinese audiences, and both claim to be the premium overseas Chinese platforms. Mitbbs is a Chinese bulletin board system established in 1996. It aims to serve overseas Chinese. It claims itself to be the first overseas Chinese website, and has hundreds of thousands of registered users (See <http://www.mitbbs.com/>). Wenxuecity is a Chinese language tabloid website. It claims to be the largest overseas, serving millions of people across 190 countries and regions (See <http://www.wenxuecity.com/>). The large online audiences that both websites have render them good media platform targets to study overseas experiences, including the (inter-)cultural sensitivity demonstrated in those experiences that Chinese share on their sites.

4. Research Questions

As an expansion of the author’s past research with another scholar, the current study targets the two afore-mentioned overseas Chinese language websites, in order to examine how people talk about their overseas life on each site. It also aims to compare and contrast the two sites in people’s (inter-)cultural sensitivity revealed in their online posts, whereas in the previous study we analyzed the intercultural sensitivity of people’s online posts in reaction to the news reports about their president’s interactions with a foreign leader abroad. Since no known research can be found that studied the two overseas Chinese websites in terms of (inter-)cultural sensitivity shown in people’s online posts, the current study proposes to answer the following research questions.

- RQ1. How do online users talk about their overseas life? Are their posts mainly (inter-)culturally related topics?
- RQ2. Are they (inter-)culturally sensitive when talking about their overseas experiences? In specific terms, what level of (inter-)cultural sensitivity do their posts show?
- RQ3. Is there any difference in the two websites as far as the (inter-)cultural sensitivity revealed in their respective online posts is concerned?
- RQ4. Do people show more (inter-)cultural sensitivity in recent years than in the past?
- RQ5. How big a ripple effect of (inter-)cultural sensitivity does each site have?
- RQ6. Is one site bigger than the other in their ripple effects?

5. Method

Content analysis was used to study the above research questions. The online posts from Mitbbs and Wenxuecity were analyzed after they were coded using the intercultural sensitivity levels theorized by Bennett (1986, 1993, 2017) and validated by Hammer et al. (2003).

5.1. Samples

On Mitbbs website, there are several topic categories that are designated to life abroad. After looking into each, the author decided to focus on one category entitled Da Hua Xi You [Experiences in the West] (see <https://www.mitbbs.com/bbsdoc/Gowest.html>) because it seems to have more “West”/overseas life related posts than other categories. The same was found with Wenxuecity. It too has quite a few topic categories about overseas life. Of them, Ren Zai Ta Xiang [Life Overseas] (see <https://bbs.wenxuecity.com/na/>) appears to have more overseas life related posts. Therefore, its posts were chosen.

After deciding which column or topic category to sample their contents from, the author went on and selected posts from the post archive each site provides. In the selection process, she found that both websites provide a list of the most popular posts, therefore, she decided to target those that pop up on top of the screen when people go to read the said columns. As a result, there were $n = 90$ top popular posts in Da Hua Xi You (“Experiences in the West”) and comparably speaking fewer ($n = 80$) in Ren Zai Ta Xiang (“Life Overseas”) at the time of data collection for the current study, October 2019 to be exact. The time span of the sampled Mitbbs posts is from July 1999 to October 2019 whereas that for Wenxuecity posts runs from January 2019 back to June 2012.

Of the 90 Mitbbs posts, only $n = 44$ (48.89%) are culturally related. In comparison, only $n = 24$ of the 80 Wenxuecity posts (30%) have something to do with culture. These posts were coded using the following coding sheet before they were analyzed in terms of intercultural sensitivity.

5.2. Coding Sheet

The author created a coding sheet based on Bennett (1986, 1993, 2017) and validated by Hammer et al.’s (2003) theories of (inter-)cultural sensitivity. According to them and as reviewed in the above Intercultural Sensitivity section, intercultural sensitivity falls into 2 stages with 3 levels in each. The “cultural ethnocentrism” stages include “denial,” “defense” and “minimization” whereas the “cultural ethnorelativism” stages are made up of “acceptance,” “adaptation” and “integration.”

Following the above conceptualization of the 6 levels of intercultural sensitivity by Bennett (1986, 1993, 2017), a coding sheet was created to operationalize this variable, together with others in the current study. The author then trained her coder, a Chinese person who is fluent in both Chinese and English, so that he understood how to code each post as far as the dependent variable, the 6 levels of intercultural sensitivity, is concerned. The following is the specific coding sheet we used to code each variable in the current study.

To screen culturally related posts from those not related, the author coded all the sampled posts using the following codes.

Types of topics. Code “1” if (inter-)culture-related and code “0” if not.

5.3. Dependent Variables: Intercultural Sensitivity and Number of Times Viewed

The author and a coder blind to the purpose of the study coded the intercultural sensitivity of all (inter-)culture related posts.

Denial. Code number “1” any comments that show denial of other culture(s) as Foreign or Immigrant.

Defense. Code “2” any comments that defend “Us” against “Other(s)” as a Threat.

Minimization. Code “3” any comments that still hold “Us-Other” stance but DO NOT see Other(s) as Threat.

Acceptance. Code “4” any comments that accept “Other(s)” as Equal Human(s), showing value relativity.

Adaptation. Code “5” any comments that show cultural Empathy, Bi-or Multi-culturality.

Integration. Code “6” any comments that show cultural Integration in such a way that one moves comfortably “In” and “Out” Cultures depending on context.

Other. Code “7” any culture-related comments that DO NOT find their place in the above 6 categories.

In addition to the cross-coding of the intercultural sensitivity variable, the author herself coded the second dependent variable, namely “number of times viewed” in the RQs 5 and 6.

Number of times viewed: Enter the number of times each post was viewed as indicated on the sites.

5.4. Independent Variables: Different Sites and Time

The author coded all the following independent variables herself.

Different sites: Code each Mitbbs post “1” and code each Wenxuecity post “2.”

Time: Enter the last two digits of the year when each post was published. For example, if a post was published in 2012, it was coded as “12.” If a post was published in 2000, it was supposed to be coded as “0” and 1999 as “-1.” However, none of the sampled posts was published in 2000, therefore the only 2 posts published in 1999 (nothing earlier was sampled) were coded instead as “0” to avoid possible computation mistakes in the final analysis.

5.5. Inter-coder Reliability for Intercultural Sensitivity

The target contents were coded by the author of this paper and a Chinese-English bilingual. Disagreements on certain items were discussed either face-to-face or via email. The final inter-coder reliability with the Mitbbs sample is 98% and 96% with the Wenxuecity sample. After arriving at such high levels of agreement between the two coders, the coded data were analyzed using SPSS to find the answers to the six RQs in the current study.

6. Results

To find the answer to RQ1 [“How do online users talk about their overseas life? Are their posts mainly (inter-)culturally related topics?”], all the sampled posts from the two target websites were compared using the *Chi-square* test. Results indicate that the two sites are significantly different from each other in their posts. There are fewer (inter-)culture related posts ($n = 44$ for Mitbbs vs. $n = 24$ for Wenxuecity) than (inter-)culture irrelevant posts ($n = 46$ for the former vs. $n = 56$ for the latter, $p = .01$). Therefore, the answer to RQ1 is a “no.” Judging by the case distributions, Wenxuecity is the driving force to the difference. Its (inter-)culture irrelevant posts are more than double (inter-)culture relevant ones. In summary, people talk in their posts more about things that have nothing to do with culture than their cultural experiences.

To find the answer to RQ2 [“Are they (inter-)culturally sensitive when talking about their overseas experiences? Specifically, what level of (inter-)cultural sensitivity do their posts show?”], all the (inter-)culture related posts ($n = 44$ from Mitbbs vs. $n = 24$ from Wenxuecity) were aggregated for analysis. Descriptive results show that the (inter-)cultural sensitivity of the posts across the two platforms leveled at $M = 4.35$ ($SD = 1.00$) on a 6-point scale, with higher values indicating greater intercultural sensitivity. With scores ranging from 2 to 6, the average score of $M = 4.35$ suggests that Chinese are (inter-)culturally sensitive when talking about their overseas experiences, a positive answer to RQ2.

As far as the 6 levels of intercultural sensitivity are concerned, the score range of 2-6 with “1” missing means that of those who talked about their cultural experiences, none was at the “denial” stage. In other words, they do not feel isolated or separated from the culture they live in or experience abroad. The score of “2” suggests that some people are at the “defense” level. Of the three characteristics people typically have at this stage, namely denigration, superiority and reversal, the first is found in a few posts. The author of one post wrote that China will be used by the U.S. as the scapegoat for its own power downfall just as Jews by Hitler in Nazi Germany (See Example 1 in the Appendix for its original Chinese text.). Denigration features the political, cultural and communication climate that encroaches upon the scapegoat. Any individual or social group that have ever been treated as such in history or at present can better tell the ailment of the culture they live in than those who point their fingers. “Defense” together with “denial” and “minimization” keep people in the “ethnocentric stages” that Bennett (1993) defines. At these stages, individuals or social groups look after at best their own self-interests.

An example of the stage of “integration” (as indicated by the higher end of the score range of 2-6) is found in a person talking in the post about how Chinese immigrants in the U.S. should change some Chinese traditions they are used to, and educate themselves about American laws so as to protect themselves from domestic violence (See Example 2 in the Appendix for its original Chinese text.). Obviously, the author understands Chinese traditions very well and is also adaptive when it comes to the host culture, thus illustrating how one moves comfortably “In” and “Out” cultures depending on the context, a critical trait at the level of “integration”. At this ideal stage of intercultural sensitivity, people identify and live with bi- or multi-cultures for good or bad, approximating different aspects of the reality.

The average score of $M = 4.35$ indicates that their experiences are at the “acceptance” stage. It is manifested in accepting differences and living with them. This finding gives an overall answer to Q2 [Are they (inter-)culturally sensitive when talking about their overseas experiences? In specific terms, what level of (inter-)cultural sensitivity do their posts show?]. A case in point is one post in which the author described the life in a little town in the U.S. The choice of words seems to be quite positive when the author talked about crowds of people at its weekend restaurants and their love for sports. In contrast, a helpless tone is clearly felt when the author related the quiet and boring life in small towns to drinking and drug problems prevalent across the country (See Example 3 in the Appendix for its original Chinese text.). Frustration on the part of the author is clearly demonstrated in “it is what it is” kind of attitude toward life there. With no value judgement, it outcries for value relativity. Please note “acceptance” is one of the three levels of intercultural sensitivity, “adaptation” and “integration” being the other two, that Bennett (1993) calls “ethno-relative stages.” At these stages, people dare to step out of their immediate ethnocentric interests in their thoughts and behaviors.

When the two sites were compared with each other to find possible differences between their levels of intercultural sensitivity using only (inter-)culture related posts, *t*-test results show that

they are not different from each other. Therefore, the answer to RQ3 [“Is there any difference in the two websites as far as (inter-)cultural sensitivity revealed in their respective online posts are concerned?”] is a “no” and in a good sense since the posts on both websites appear to have the same level of intercultural sensitivity ($M = 4.23$, $SD = .99$ for Mitbbs vs. $M = 4.58$, $SD = 1.02$ for Wenxuecity), both at the “acceptance” stage.

To answer RQ4 [“Do people show more (inter-)cultural sensitivity in recent years than in the past?”], only (inter-)culture related posts from the two websites were compared. A correlational analysis of the time variable, coded by the year in which each post was published, and intercultural sensitivity shows no time effect on intercultural sensitivity. In other words, recent posts are not more (inter-)culturally sensitive than those published some years ago. Therefore, the answer to RQ4 is a “no” as far as (inter-)culture related posts are concerned.

Interestingly however, the two sites are different in terms of time their most popular posts were published ($M = 18.18$, $SD = .39$ for Mitbbs vs. $M = 14.96$, $SD = 1.78$ for Wenxuecity, $p = .00$). The difference means that the popular posts on Mitbbs were published more recently, in fact mostly in 2018 whereas those on Wenxuecity were published further back in years, as reflected in the time span of their sampled posts going as far back as 2012.

Since time made a difference between the two target sites when comparing only (inter-)culture related posts, the author went on and conducted a couple of tests to find whether time makes a difference in the two sites’ overall posts by comparing (inter-)culture related posts ($n = 102$) with (inter-)culture irrelevant posts ($n = 68$). T-tests show again significant time differences ($M = 17.04$, $SD = 1.90$ for cultural posts vs. $M = 16.00$, $SD = 3.32$ for non-cultural posts, $p = .01$). People published more (inter-)culture related articles on the two sites in recent years than in the past, therefore the answer to RQ4 is a positive “yes” when comparing the number of (inter-)culture related posts with that of (inter-)culture irrelevant ones across time. In general, people have become more (inter-)culturally sensitive as they talk more about (inter-)culture related topics online in recent years than in the long past.

Is the above finding also true for each individual website? The answer is a “no.” The significant relationship found across the two platforms in terms of time effects on the number of posts published is not found among either Mitbbs posts or Wenxuecity ones.

Finally, the ripple effects of intercultural sensitivity of each site vs. across the two sites were analyzed. To find the answer to RQ5 [“How big a ripple effect of (inter-)cultural sensitivity does each site have?”], the sensitivity level of each post was multiplied by its number of views. If a post was coded “2” in terms of intercultural sensitivity and it received 135 views, the ripple effect of this post is computed as $R = 2 \times 135 = 270$. The average ripple effects of the intercultural sensitivity on Mitbbs site is $M = 2272.21$ vs. $M = 6659.83$ on Wenxuecity site. When the two sites were compared using the independent t -test, its p -value is .05. The ripple effects of intercultural sensitivity on Wenxuecity is significantly bigger than that on Mitbbs, thus answering RQ6 (“Is one site bigger than the other in their ripple effects?”).

7. Discussion

The current study aims to answer six RQs by examining cross-cultural adaptation that is demonstrated in people’s online communication. Using a content analysis research design, it compares and contrasts two Chinese online media, namely Mitbbs and Wenxuecity, both targeting overseas Chinese. On each site, the most popular posts archived in the topic area designated for people to talk about their overseas experiences were selected to examine their

levels of intercultural sensitivity as conceptualized by Bennett (1986, 1993, 2017). The author finds that people posted more (inter-)culture irrelevant topics than (inter-)culture relevant ones, answering RQ1 [“How do online users talk about their overseas life? Are their posts mainly (inter-)culturally related topics?”]. This finding suggests that even when people live abroad, culture is not necessarily something they always want to write about. People simply do their things rather than striking the (inter-)cultural chord. Such a situation is actually good. It means that people are not on their toes all the time because they do not have to see the world through a pair of cultural lenses.

Among those who share their (inter-)cultural experiences, a positive sense of intercultural sensitivity is clearly present ($M = 4.35$ on a 6-point scale, $SD = 1.00$; bigger number means greater intercultural sensitivity). Such a level of intercultural sensitivity suggests that on the whole overseas Chinese seem to feel comfortable acknowledging their host culture while carrying on their own cultural heritage. They have reached the “ethno-*relative* stages” that Bennett (1986, 1993) talks about. Specifically, they are in the “acceptance” level which is characterized by respect for differences in values, worldviews, beliefs and behaviors. At this level, people not only know cultural differences, but also respect those differences. As a good answer to RQ2 [“Are they (inter-)culturally sensitive when talking about their overseas experiences? In specific terms, what level of (inter-)cultural sensitivity do their posts show?”], it sends out an important (inter-)culture sensitive message to their online readers, helping them hopefully cultivate their own (inter-)culturally sensitivity as well (See *Cultivation Theory* by Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986).

Although no difference was found between the two Chinese online websites as far as intercultural sensitivity is concerned [RQ3. Is there any difference in the two websites as far as (inter-)culturally sensitivity revealed in their respective online posts is concerned?], such a result is welcomed because posts on both sites are interculturally sensitive ($M = 4.23$, $SD = .99$ for Mitbbs vs. $M = 4.58$, $SD = 1.02$ for Wenxuecity). With the Internet as an open resource for people to expose themselves to all kinds of information, it is certainly a more pleasant experience to come across such a good intercultural sensitivity when browsing websites than reading less sensitive materials online.

The non-significant relationship between time and (inter-)cultural sensitivity [RQ4. Do people show more (inter-)culturally sensitivity in recent years than in the past?] among the (inter-)culturally related posts has a couple of implications. Theoretically speaking, we live in an age when globalization is on-going and no one can stop it (e.g., Appadurai, 1996; Beck, 2018). As a result, our society demands us to be sensitive to differences in almost everything, with culture at the core. Without it, it is very difficult for us to come together and make things work. In practice, it is only a matter of time. The sooner we get engaged in (inter-)cultural talks, the better chance we have to create a win-win situation, in other words an interculturally sensitive world, for ourselves as well as for others. It is good that the two Chinese websites have been doing this more in recent years than in the past [time effects on (inter-)culture related posts vs. (inter-)culture irrelevant posts] and what is even better is that they host authors who show on average a good sense of intercultural sensitivity in their online posts.

The intercultural sensitivity ripple effects of each website [RQ5. How big a ripple effect of (inter-)cultural sensitivity does each site have?] found in the current study provide a baseline for future research. With online communication becoming increasingly important in our life, its ripple effects should be studied in a systematic way. In this sense, the current study is only a pilot.

The significant differences found between the two target websites in their ripple effects of intercultural sensitivity [RQ6. Is one site bigger than the other in their ripple effects?] speak of their comparative edge in the multicultural world we live in today. By finding one site bigger in their influence in intercultural sensitivity on their audiences, even though both demonstrate a good level of intercultural sensitivity, the author of the current study calls for more intercultural sensitivity research of online communication and across different languages. Such research can better tell us the (inter-)cultural landscape we have. One practical implication of the RQ6 finding is that we can compete in creating a better world by spreading intercultural sensitivity in our own online communication.

Limitations of the current study. The current study has a couple of limitations. The first is the small sample sizes. Not only is the post pool small ($n = 90$ for Mitbbs and $n = 80$ for Wenxuecity), but the articles pertinent to culture are even smaller in number ($n = 44$ for the former and $n = 24$ for the latter). A follow-up study is likely to overcome such a shortcoming when more people post on these sites, therefore including more (inter-)culture relevant pieces in their online archives. Other researchers could avoid this limitation by targeting bigger pools of media contents. Another limitation is that the study is largely exploratory in nature. Future studies should be more theory-oriented, focusing on testing hypotheses instead of only answering research questions. As we live in a more diverse or diversified society and understand more about online communication, intercultural sensitivity theories are at a better position to guide hypothesis-testing studies. Findings from the current study serve at least as a benchmark for future research that investigates overseas websites that other ethnic groups host, or domestic websites vs. overseas websites in general.

8. Conclusion

In spite of the fact that most people on the two overseas Chinese websites do not talk about things particularly related to cultural issues, an emerging trend is that more started to talk about culture(s) in recent years than in the past. And they demonstrate a good level of intercultural sensitivity, showing in general their respect for cultural differences in their online communication. Such intercultural sensitivity is obviously needed when we travel, study, work or live abroad. It is also a desirable psychological property even when we live within the borders of our own country where multi-cultures and diversity are recognized and hopefully appreciated (Martin & Nakayama, 2014).

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Appendix

Example 1: “Defense” Level of Intercultural Sensitivity

...

把美帝穷兵黩武造成的衰退歪曲成中国人的责任，这个和希特勒反犹是一模一样的。失败民族要找个替罪羊，纳粹是这样，川普也一样。

...

川普贸易战如果占了大便宜也罢了，如果没占到便宜，就会进一步渲染中国人的罪恶，那时候中国人离犹太人在纳粹德国的遭遇也就不远了。

...

United States wrongfully blames China for its downfall caused by its own obsessive use of military power, just as Hitler did wrongs to the Jews. A failing nation needs to find a scapegoat. Nazi did that, so does Trump.

...

Trump’s trade war with China works if U.S. wins big. If it loses, it will push further its “evil Chinese” campaign. When that time comes, Chinese are not far from undergoing the sufferings that the Jews experienced in Nazi Germany.

...

Example 2: “Integration” Level of Intercultural Sensitivity

...

华人中的家暴问题，应该引起华人群体的高度重视，来美移民应该改变已有的一些传统习惯，重注心理健康，同时学习和了解美国相应法律，家暴受害人要站出来保护自己，华人社区要通过各方努力，逐渐减少和杜绝家暴，避免发生难以挽回的极端行为。在拥枪者日益增加的华人群体中，枪支安全问题也应该得到高度重视，民众应该认识到，并不是有了枪就安全了，重要的是要有安全管理和防范意识。

如果不清除产生家暴的因素，不重视拥枪者的心理健康和法律教育，不重视对枪支进行严格完善的管理，拥枪就确实可能成为双刃剑，这是所有华人都应该认识到的问题。

...

Chinese communities should pay great attention to family violence in their society. Chinese immigrants should change some of their traditions, attach importance to their mental well-being, and at the same time understand and learn relevant American laws. Family violence victims should step up and protect themselves. Chinese communities must try in various ways to reduce and get rid of family violence, and to avoid irreversible extreme behaviors. With more and more people owning guns in Chinese communities, the gun safety issue should be much heeded. People in the communities should realize that owning a gun does not provide safety. More

importantly, people must be equipped with a good sense of safety management and crime prevention.

Without ruling out the causes of family violence, paying special attention to gun owners' mental health and their knowledge of gun laws, or strict and improved safety management, gun ownership could be a double-edge sword that all Chinese must realize.

Example 3: "Acceptance" Level of Intercultural Sensitivity

...

周末，小镇餐馆，酒吧近乎爆满，去餐馆慢慢享受一顿周末大餐是人们的一大消遣。而周末晚上，大家潮水般地到电影院欣赏最新上映的大片，一年四季，从早到晚，运动场，体育爱好者身影络绎不绝，美国小镇大部分家庭都持有枪支，然而，凶杀案，犯罪率比例却非常之低，显然，枪支之间的制约，遏止了高犯罪率，或许是小镇太过于宁静，人类世界宛若一把双刃剑，寂寞随时与宁静形影相随，多年如一日的的生活，令一些人感到极度空虚，颓废，自然而然地，他们将触角伸向酒精和毒品，小镇不乏酗酒和吸毒的人，很多人由此毁掉一生，当然，酗酒和吸毒不仅是美国小镇的一大毒瘤，也是全美国的一大毒瘤，它困扰了这个国家很多年，当社会高度发达，人们无需为温饱发愁，解决了物质世界之后，随之而来的是要满足人类精神世界，而通往精神世界的道路，要比通往物质世界的道路要艰难得多，在这条崎岖路上，一些人不断掉队，他们错误地用酒精和毒品来麻醉自己。

...

...

On weekends, restaurants in the small town are filled up to their fullest capacities. One of the most popular pastimes that people enjoy here is a weekend feast. On weekend nights, people flood into movie theaters for the latest releases. Sports fans can be seen all year round, and from dawn to dusk. Most families in American small towns own their guns. However, murder and crime rates are quite low. Obviously, guns function as a check and balance, preventing crimes from going up. Small towns are perhaps too quiet. Human life is like a double-edge sword, tranquility accompanied by loneliness. Day in and day out, such kind of life make some people feel extremely bored and depressed. Then they naturally reach out to alcohol and drugs. Alcoholics and drug addicts exist in small towns. Many people ruined their life because of such bad habits. Alcoholism and drug problems are the cancer of not only American small towns, but also American society as a whole. The country is alcohol and drug ridden for many years. When a society is well developed, people no longer need to worry about food in their stomach and clothes to dress their body. After their material needs are met, people find ways to satisfy their psychological and spiritual needs. However, the way to mental and spiritual gratification is much more difficult than that to material satisfaction. Many people slip off the uneven track and resort by mistake to alcohol and drugs to numb themselves.

...