

# Contrastive Narratives of Overseas Bloggers from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication

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**Abstract:** In China's intercultural communication practice, presenting a truthful, multidimensional, and comprehensive image of the nation to overseas audiences and gaining their acceptance and recognition is of vital importance for measuring communication effects. The research focused on the contrastive narratives of videos released by overseas bloggers about their trips to China on YouTube with the "#chinatravel" tag from the perspective of intercultural communication. The research shows that the video contents of overseas bloggers focused on three major themes: "travel", "culture", and "technology", with sentiment analysis featuring a polarized characteristic, predominantly positive but still containing negative contradictions. From the narrative perspective, the sample videos generally adopted a contrastive narrative strategy, forming three core themes of contrastive narratives and mostly present China through a first-person perspective. The contrastive narrative strategies played a positive role in breaking down stereotypes and enriching the narrative dimensions of real China, while the intercultural communication of Chinese culture still faces challenges from cognitive differences.

**Keywords:** Intercultural communication; China travel; Contrastive narratives

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## 1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of accelerating globalization, cultural exchanges between countries are becoming increasingly frequent, and the importance of intercultural communication in shaping a country's image and promoting cultural understanding is becoming increasingly prominent<sup>[1]</sup>. As a country with a long history and rich culture, China is committed to enhancing its international influence through intercultural communication and showing a true and comprehensive national image. The president of the CCP put forward the important guidance of "telling Chinese stories well and spreading Chinese voices", which has clarified the direction for intercultural communication<sup>[8]</sup>.

As the world's largest video sharing platform, YouTube is one of the key positions for international communication. After China liberalized its transit visa exemption policy in November 2023, many overseas bloggers came to China to shoot and post travel videos. These videos vividly show the reality of China from a

first-person perspective, providing international audiences with a new perspective that is different from traditional Western media reports <sup>[11]</sup>. Among them, many bloggers created and continued to use the #chinatravel tag when posting videos, and the video content presents authenticity and diversity, which has attracted much attention.

Intercultural communication theory emphasizes understanding and transcending cultural differences to achieve effective communication and mutual understanding <sup>[12]</sup>. Contrastive narrative is a narrative strategy that uses contrasts and differences to construct stories that can stimulate curiosity and inquiry in audiences, prompting them to gain a deeper understanding of different cultures. In the videos of bloggers who came to China, contrastive narratives were widely used to form a distinct thematic cluster, which provides a unique entry point for the research of intercultural communication <sup>[4]</sup>.

## 2. Research methods

This research focused on the contrasting narrative characteristics of overseas bloggers' travel videos in China from the perspective of intercultural communication, and its impact on the intercultural communication of China's images. The researcher selected YouTube as the source for sample collection, systematically screening long videos published from July 2023 to April 2025 that carried the #chinatravel hashtag as research samples, ultimately determining 10 videos for in-depth analysis (**Table 1**). The videos were created by creators from various countries such as the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, and Japan, and covered a variety of travel modes such as solo travel, backpacker budget travel challenges, group tours, and family outings, ensuring the diversity and representativeness of the sample <sup>[2]</sup>.

The research employed textual analysis methods, transcribing and encoding the video content. The researcher utilized Python and NVivo text analysis tools for sentiment analysis, word frequency analysis, and keyword extraction, delving into the cultural connotations and narrative patterns of the video content. Additionally, the research leveraged the Apify application to crawl and filter video comments, ultimately selecting 1,400 high-popularity comments as samples to further examine the video's dissemination effectiveness. Through a comprehensive analysis of both video content and audience comments, the research reveals the role and impact of contrastive narratives in intercultural communication <sup>[3]</sup>.

**Table 1.** Basic information of #chinatravel video samples

ID	Title	Duration	Content views (thousands)	Account	Followers (thousands)	Nationality
1	SHANGHAI. Largest and Richest City in China!	37:46	3,008	@realcoolvision	941	USA
2	China: Utopia or Dystopia? I Investigated	41:45	4,222	@baldandbankrupt	4,360	U.K.
3	The Side of China The Media Won't Show You	50:13	11,371	@mikeokay	682	U.K.
4	First 48 Hours in Beijing I can't believe THIS is China?!	23:16	94	@travelforphoebe	205	Australia
5	The TRUTH about our trip to CHINA	34:27	727	@TheHutchinsons	105	U.K.
6	CHINA: What You Can Buy With \$20 (A LOT)	24:10	14	@KouroshKamyabi	33	Canada

**Table 1 (Continued)**

ID	Title	Duration	Content views (thousands)	Account	Followers (thousands)	Nationality
7	First Impressions of SHANGHAI, CHINA!	14:25	736	@doug_barnard	623	USA
8	Secrets from China's \$150 Billion Ghost City	40:42	476	@SmallBrainedAmerican	624	USA
9	中国ってこんな感じか..【1日目   上海】	1:17:38	597	@osadalife	199	Japan
10	I Ignored the Media and Visited China	43:21	1,349	@harryjaggardtravel	2,350	U.K.

Note: The statistics are as of April 15, 2025

### 3. Results and discussions

Among all the 488 video transcripts analyzed, Cultural Characteristics and Life Experiences accounted for 319 entries, making up a significant proportion of 65.37%, indicating that overseas bloggers' firsthand experiences with China's local culture and daily life scenes are the primary themes presented in their videos (**Table 2**). Cultural Exchange and Integration between China and Foreign Countries constituted 19.67% of the content, such as the blogger @travelforphoebe mentioned, "Everyone here is so warm and welcoming and just so lovely. I was worried the language barrier might be a thing, but it's not. People have been helping me everywhere." The YouTube bloggers also maintained continuous attention on China's urban infrastructure development and tourism industry growth, as well as placing importance on culinary experiences and presentations during their travels. Overall, the content of overseas bloggers' videos centered around culture, extending multidimensionally into intercultural communication, urban development, and tourism and food, comprehensively showcasing the diverse charm of China <sup>[5-6]</sup>.

**Table 2.** Extraction of video topic clustering labels

Clustering labels	Count	Percentage (%)
Cultural characteristics and life experiences	319	65.37%
Cultural exchange and integration between China and foreign countries	96	19.67%
Urban transportation construction and tourism resource development	37	7.58%
Travel Exploration & Culinary Specialties	36	7.38%
Total	488	100.00%

#### 3.1. Themes of contrastive narratives

According to the results, sentiment analysis of the videos exhibited obvious polarization characteristics (**Table 3**). The proportion of positive emotions reached 63.11% and was concentrated in modern service scenarios, such as Alipay, high-speed trains, and related content, receiving 100% positive evaluations. Negative emotions primarily stem from traditional cognitive conflicts, such as language barriers; neutral content mostly involves objective descriptions of price, consumption, etc. Notably, technology-related keywords demonstrated significant duality, when issues such as surveillance (content related to "tracking" had 100% negative emotional proportion) and

data security (content related to “privacy” had 66.67% neutral emotional proportion) are involved, emotional evaluations declined significantly, creating a narrative tension between technological empowerment and privacy concerns [7].

**Table 3.** Video content thematic cluster analysis

Theme category	Keywords	Sentiment inclinations
Technological contrasts	Alipay/VPN	Positive/ negative
Spatial contrasts	Skyscrapers/ancient buildings	Positive/ positive
Cultural adaptation contrasts	Language barrier/food	Negative/ positive

**Technological Convenience and Using Barriers:** The videos widely demonstrated the widespread application of Alipay in daily life scenarios and the convenience brought by technological development, such as the hotel robot food delivery service, the high-speed and smooth operation of high-speed rail, and the convenience of the bike-sharing system. However, bloggers also faced problems such as complicated registration processes and communication difficulties caused by network firewalls. This technological contrast allows the viewer to understand China more comprehensively and objectively.

**Traditional China and Modern Cities:** In sample videos, the juxtaposition of historic buildings and skyscrapers illustrated the interweaving of Chinese cities. For example, bloggers showed Shanghai’s Nanjing Road, where both owned a century-old Shikumen block and holographic projection shops, and Beijing’s ancient buildings, such as the Forbidden City and the Great Wall were set against modern cafes and hotels, creating a sense of time and space between tradition and modernity.

**Contrasting Experience of Cultural Adaptation:** Language barrier was an important problem encountered by bloggers in the process of cultural adaptation, but in communications, they also felt the enthusiasm of Chinese people. In addition, the difference in price levels and the uniqueness of food culture have brought the bloggers a sharp contrast in cognition. For example, a blogger showed that a hotel room that cost 20 pounds per night was equipped with a smart toilet, and a meal that cost 115 yuan could feed 4 people. These contrasting experiences vividly show the true situation of Chinese society.

### 3.2. Strategies of contrastive narratives

**Individual Perspectives Instead of Grand Narratives:** According to the results, 10 videos all deliberately eschewed grand narratives, opting instead for a first-person perspective for recording, focusing on bloggers’ everyday experiences and personal intuitive feelings, breaking through the fixed perceptions of international audiences through firsthand experience. This strategy allows the audience to understand China in a more realistic and palpable way, avoiding the seriousness and obscurity of grand narratives.

**Portraying Images of China through Real-life Scenes:** The bloggers focused on many concrete life scenes and cultural elements, transforming China’s diverse images from abstract concepts into concrete and tangible scenes. For example, bloggers showcased the autonomous driving buses in Ordos City, the prosperous night view of the Bund in Shanghai, and the smooth, quiet high-speed train compartments—the achievements of infrastructure construction. As well as technology application scenarios like mobile payments, shared bicycles, and hotel service robots, vividly demonstrate the depth and breadth of China’s technological development.

### 3.3. Effectiveness of intercultural communication

Through the analysis of the 1,400 high-popularity comments, it was revealed that the comments displayed diverse emotional traits (Table 4). Specifically, 46.57% consisted of neutral expressions, 31.86% belonged to positive emotions, and 20.43% constituted negative emotions. The audience's focus was centered on three dimensions: Urban Experience, Network Environment, and Cultural Cognition. Cultural Cognition was further divided into Political Cognition and Cultural Conflicts. This shows that the video content has aroused the emotional resonance of audiences from different dimensions to a certain extent, and successfully presented the core elements and characteristic topics of China to the audience. However, it also reflects the challenges posed by the cognitive differences in the construction of Chinese images faces in cross-cultural communication<sup>[9-10]</sup>.

**Table 4.** Cluster analysis of video comment topics

Topic clustering	Keywords	Sentiment inclinations
Urban experience	Shanghai/Xiamen/Chengdu	72.34% positive
Network environment	Network firewalls/VPNs	83.33% neutral
Political cognition	Government/Taiwan region/propaganda	61.54% negative
Cultural conflicts	Freedom/security/Western media	Polarization

In summary, the video content of overseas bloggers mainly revolves around the three major themes of “travel”, “culture”, and “technology”, showing extreme emotional polarization, with a positive sentiment ratio of 63.11%, demonstrating China's achievements in modern technology, urban construction, and cultural exchanges. Through the contrastive narrative strategies, overseas bloggers presented diverse images of China from individual perspectives and detailed real-life scenes, providing viewers with a more authentic and relatable cognitive perspective. The contrastive narratives play a positive role in breaking Western stereotypes about China and enriching the narrative dimensions of China's intercultural communication, but they also require attention to potential conflicts that may arise from sensitive topics.

## 4. Conclusion

The research conducted an analysis of travel videos posted by overseas bloggers on YouTube with the hashtag #chinatravel. The results revealed the characteristics and influence of contrastive narratives used by the bloggers in intercultural communication. The research showed that the contrastive narrative strategies and themes adopted by overseas bloggers are highly consistent with China's objective of “telling Chinese stories well and spreading Chinese voices”, which provides an innovative approach for improving and innovating the narrative system. In the future, it is appropriate for institutions and individuals to actively explore and flexibly use contrastive narrative strategies in the practice of foreign exchanges. By constructing the narrative tension under the differences of cultural context, it can effectively stimulate the cognitive interest of overseas audiences, gradually promote the in-depth dissemination of Chinese cultural symbols and values, and realize the leap from cultural cognition to emotional resonance. However, there are still limitations in this research; the samples were concentrated on the YouTube platform and limited by time and tags. Future studies can be expanded to other social media platforms and include more bloggers from developing countries to present a more comprehensive intercultural communication perspective. At the same time, bloggers with different identities and backgrounds

can be categorized to further explore their understanding and awareness of intercultural communication<sup>[13–15]</sup>.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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