Online Discussion of Sharon Stone’s Karma Comment on China Earthquake: the Intercultural Communication of Media Events in the Age of Media Convergence

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Abstract: Impelled by both the communication globalization and new-tech application, media convergence has become an inevitable trend for the media development of countries around the world. Based on the analysis of enormous controversies provoked by Sharon Stone’s “karma” remark, this article probes the role of media convergence in the cross-cultural communication of media events. Our research has four major findings. First, media convergence greatly promotes the communication of cross-cultural events, in that the advanced degree of media convergence determines the speed, span and depth of communication for cross-cultural events. The mutually complementary and reiterative feeding between traditional and new media in media convergence is very evident; yet, media convergence (to a certain degree) avoids the language barrier of cross-cultural communication. Second, media convergence reconstructs the communication rules of media events, in that journalism and communication transits from single-authority to multi-authorities, traditional media still plays the guidance role of public opinion, and network media is becoming the concourse of multi-authorities. Third, the weakening of cross-cultural interpretation for the key word is the important cause of cross-cultural conflicts, which is shown in the cultural conflicts in network nationalism frame and the subculture conflicts in the same ethical frame. Finally, the ideological opposition is the profound reason for cross-cultural conflicts. We conclude that the meanings of media convergence to the cross-cultural communication of media events manifest in multiple levels. On one hand, media convergence technologically creates enormous communication energy and consequently promotes the content communication for cross-cultural events and narrows the span of space and time between our culture and the others. On the other hand, the technology convergence has not yet produced the culture convergence; in contrast, intervened by multiple powers as nationalism, subculture conflicts and ideologies, media convergence intensifies, amplifies and increases cultural conflicts and prejudices, creating new barriers for cross-cultural communication. [China Media Research. 2012; 8(1): 25-39]

Keywords: media convergence, cross-cultural communication, Sharon Stone’s Karma comment on China earthquake

Introduction

Impelled by both the communication globalization and new-tech application, media convergence has become an inevitable trend for the media development of countries around the world. In China, the platform for public opinion based on the convergence of traditional and new media has turned into an important public domain, where the public come to participate in the significant and emergent news events when they happen. The public appeals under the media convergence show the new features of diversity, open and compatibility. The multi-media field brought by convergence has also become a brand new approach for the Chinese public to form cultural relations with others. The public participate in the national public affairs in a large and in-depth scale, and at the same time actively access, learn and take part in the international discussions, especially the cross-cultural events that are relevant to Chinese benefits, with the technology of media convergence. One typical case is the large-scale disputation about American movie star Sharon Stone’s Karma remarks on the Chinese earthquake in 2008. This article tries to probe the meaning of media convergence for the cross-cultural communication of media events through Sharon Stone’s case, viz. whether the media convergence reduces the cultural conflicts, or intensifies the cultural prejudice?

Literature Review

A. Media Convergence

According to the comparative analysis of both Western and Chinese research, the influence of media convergence on journalism and communication officially emerged in the United States from the 1980s, and diversified in early 21st century. Meanwhile, Chinese scholars began to observe and counteractively analyze China’s media convergence using Western research for reference.

According to the Western literature, the concept of media convergence was first advanced by Professor Ithiel de Sola Pool, a communication scholar form Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In his book Technologies of Freedom in 1984, Professor Pool describes the models for media convergence, and also indicates that the convergence is more centralized in the traditional media like television and newspaper. He
believes that the coming together of different media industries and products is the trend for media convergence, and finally, the electronic technology will integrate all of the communication platforms into one grand digital system. With the rapid development of network technology, the digital communication system is widely applied in Western media, and the application and research of media convergence has expanded from technology to the transform of industry, culture and society. In 2002, advances in technology allowed for the technological convergence which Howard Rheingold believes altered the "social-side effects [in that the virtual, social and physical world are colliding, merging and coordinating". The convergence paradigm that is currently emerging suggests that new and old media would interact in more complex ways than previously predicted. This interaction resulted in four dimensions of news convergence: integrated production, multi-skilled professionals, multiplatform delivery and active audience (Domingo and Salaverria, 2006). Also, a study which analyses changes in journalistic practice and workflow in the newsroom suggests that the emergence of two different models of newsroom convergence: the integrated model and the cross-media model, each with a different production system, newsroom organization, degree of journalists’ multi-skilling and business strategy (Avilés and Carvajal, 2008). Besides, media convergence signals an increasingly participation and interactive engagement between people and their media, within media as a business, as well as between professional and amateur media makers. “Convergence is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process. Media companies are learning how to accelerate the flow of media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets and reinforce viewer commitments. Consumers are learning how to use these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and to interact with other users. They are fighting for the right to participate more fully in their culture, to control the flow of media in their lives and to talk back to mass market content. Sometimes, these two forces reinforce each other, creating closer, more rewarding relations between media producers and consumers”. These multiple forms of media convergence are leading us toward a digital renaissance — a period of transition and transformation that will affect all aspects of our lives. Today, media convergence is sparking a range of social, political, economic and legal disputes because of the conflicting goals of consumers, producers and gatekeepers. These contradictory forces are pushing both toward cultural diversity and toward homogenization, toward commercialization and toward grassroots cultural production (Jenkins, 2004, 2006).

In early 21st century, China’s new media has presented some new characters. For network communication technology, the trend toward broadband, portability and interaction has been intensified. For network content, it is characterized by participation, creativity and vitalization. There are more and more pop issues about network communication that have become persistent focuses both in society and academy. Examples are blog communication, cell phone, media convergence and real name registration (Chen, 2007). Along with the advances in new media, the media convergence research in China’s communication academia has been diversified. For instance, there exists several different expressions in Chinese just for the concept itself, such as “Meijie Ronghe”, “Meiti Ronghe”, “Rong Mei”, “Tong Mei” and so on, all have the same meaning of “media convergence”. This indicates both the prosperity and jumble of research. Some researchers theorize that convergence media and convergence journalism is the cutting edge task for present media industry from a global development perspective. The reform for journalism and communication in the trend of media convergence includes: the change of news source structure and the news communicators, the change of media organization and procedure, the change of news carrier capability and communication approach (Cai, 2006, 2007). Other researchers describe four additional aspects of media convergence: operation form convergence, market convergence, carrier convergence and organization convergence (Peng, 2006). Apart from the media organization’s perspective, some scholars compare media convergence with the consumption terminal, asserting that convergence is an evolving process of media form that consists of content convergence, network convergence and terminal convergence, developing in the context of digital and network technologies and also orients itself to the demand of the information consumption terminal (Wang, 2007) And since Web2.0 has brought so much impact on communication, some researchers claim that “It allows the public to decide and organize the content and form of communication together, integrate everyone’s knowledge, passion and wisdom, and realize the participation in an aggregating space of optimized individual choices. And that is exactly the true value of new communication age.” (Yu, 2006). Web 2.0 will promote the multiplication of network energy, which is “mostly the new transformation of application—the information transmission. The transformation would bring great impulse to the change of relations between people and computer, people and information, and people and people (Li, 2006).

The main focus of media convergence researches both in China and the West is on the reform of communication practice brought by technological renovations. The reform will influence many aspects of media such as the adjusting of industry strategies, consumer choices, and the modes for news production.
B. Cross-cultural communication

Research of cross-cultural communication, in the United States, begun in 1950s, the key issues were how to communicate with others, how people from different cultural backgrounds come to understand and misunderstand each other, and how communication transcends the great gulf fixed in gender, nationality, race, ethnic, language and culture. Stuart Hall’s research shows that we build our cultural boarders with symbols and this eventually becomes a formed exclusive practice, which produce a form of Others with different representations (academy, exhibition, literature, painting), and deeply evolved into the power operation (Hall, 2003, p. 261). Cross-cultural understanding centered by self-speech may result in the misunderstanding, prejudice and conflict among cultures, showing a tendency of ethnocentrism, namely each culture tries to view alien groups or cultures from the perspective of one’s own. Every culture has a tendency to elevate their own cultural values in order to agglomerate the faith of their cultural group and get the eminent domain over other cultures, especially when there are cultural conflicts (Sumner, 1907, cited in Shan & Xue, 2008). Along with population migration, power struggles, the technological changes in information and communication, and the development of culture and anthropological research, the research of cross-cultural communication is undergoing significant pressure of internationalization. Confronting such a complicated and intense cross-cultural reality, we must consider the existing concepts of acculturation, assimilation, integration, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism which are now joined with new problems and challenges. For instance, we need to renew our understanding and practice of intercultural competence. Intercultural Competence can be defined as the general skill for cultures, which is a necessity for the interaction among people of different groups that experience feelings of unease caused by their incomprehension of the range of differences. As a kind of skill, intercultural competence produces culture by creating familiarity and thus cohesion amongst the individuals involved, allowing them to pursue their interactional goals. Besides, different languages can achieve communication through interpretation, but does communication consequentially bring cross-cultural understanding? David Pan straightforwardly point out that trans-cultural narratives would be impossible because sign systems is constitutive for the structure of perception, then an alternative sign system would lead to an alternative perception of the world (cited in Sell, 2007). Some other scholars (Yariv Tsafati, 2007) point out that according to the examinations of minority groups, minority perceptions that are strongly influenced by biased media coverage may indirectly lead to increased minority alienation. It is demonstrated that, over and above the effects of ideological, social, and demographic variables, hostile media perceptions and the perceived influence of media coverage affected minority groups’ perceived image and consequently their social alienation; they therefore, consider themselves as the strangers of alien cultures.

In the 1990s, the Chinese academia began to publish papers relevant to cross-cultural communication. China’s research in this field originally developed from conceptualizing and theories introduction to systematic speculation of cross-cultural communication. Shan Bo’s research (2003, 2005, 2006, 2008) indicates that there are two key psychological issues in cross-cultural communication—the acculturation and the cultural anxiety. The ultimate goal of cross-cultural communication is cultural convergence that aims for harmony as the highest value. Harmonious cross-cultural communication means that all kinds of cultures obtain new resources from dialogue and further begin some cultural creating process. Culture convergence is the main form of common cultural development achieved in the mutual influence and communication of different cultural concepts and values. This has minimized ethnic prejudice to some degree, and also dispelled linguistic intergroup bias on the basis of respecting the disparity of different cultural entities, so as to aggressively promote human cultural development to a whole new level. Some scholars postulate that cross-cultural communication is the interactive process among more than two heterogeneous cultures, and that misunderstandings are ubiquitous and inevitable (Xiong, 2008).

The research of cross-cultural communication both in China and the West are all taking into the full consideration of problems arising from cultural differences, and the multiple levels of culture have also lead to the hindrance in cross-cultural communication. Although researchers hold opposing views on whether cross-cultural communication can bring about the ultimate goal of culture convergence, they all rely on cross-cultural communication to create the connection and understanding among cultures, so as to put an end to the isolation and hostility of cultural egocentrism.

C. Media convergence and cross-cultural communication

In recent years, the research of cross-cultural communication has been obscured by a new era of variables: the rapid development of the technology for global information communication, the formation of digital network communities, the greater effect of global and regional economic organizations as well as multinational corporations surpassing that of national states, the stronger control of information technology over military conflicts, the large-scale migration, the rapid advancing of urbanization, the combination of
network technology and natural language, the expansion of global cultural market, the image identification of international brands. All these changes are directly reflected in the process of media convergence and communication globalization. Media convergence increases the flow of information, more abundantly, and more in depth around the world, and the language barriers among some cultural groups can be weakened by interpretation software and people learning other languages. The representation of cross-cultural communication is, increasingly, being disseminated directly from the media in larger amounts, more images and faster speed (Chen, 2001). So, does media convergence bring people a better cross-cultural communication? Can the strangeness, tension and conflict among cultures be solved in the technological framework of media convergence?

Some scholars hold an optimistic attitude toward that assumption. On Tuesday, November 25, 1997, Nicholas Negroponte, head of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Media Laboratory, told an information technology conference in Brussels, that the potential of the global computer network has actually been vastly underrated. He predicted that Internet would do no less than bring world peace by breaking down national borders. Twenty years from now, he said, children who are used to finding out about other countries through the click of a mouse "are not going to know what nationalism is." (Reuters, http://www.cnn.com/TECH/9711125/Internet.peace.reut (November 25, 1997) Referring to the changes brought about by the technological convergence of television and network communication, Chinese scholars deem that the convergence “objectively accelerate the dispelling of limit among different communication context, promote the exchanges and identification between sympatric cultures (homogeneous or heterogeneous) and exotic cultures, and as a result create a diversified structure for the culture of post-media era” (Wu Bin, 2003). Based on the canonization for the intercultural competence of media convergence, a large number of organizations (governmental, non-governmental), media (traditional, new) and people are attempting at culture convergence. In September 2007, The CRI and NHK jointly hosted a China-Japan network dialogue, from which both the sponsors and guests agreed that technology can shorten the communication distance, and moreover, Internet dialogue, can realize the culture exchange without people going outside (at: http://gb.cri.cn/news/other/07chi-jp3/).

However, most scholars cast doubts on the intercultural competence of media convergence. Some scholars consider that widely distributed networking and communications technologies have created an environment allowing instant access across cultural and geographic boundaries. This has opened an array of new opportunities and challenges related to language and cultural differences. Participants learn a new set of social and communication norms that differ in type and kind from face-to-face interaction. Without physical and verbal cues in interaction, communication indeed become subject to hyper-analysis by participants. As analysis reveals, this can lead to heightened sensitivity and subjectivity of interpretation for content and intent (St.Amant, 2007). In China, sensitivity and subjectivity in cross-cultural communication has transformed into significant network nationalism. In the 1990s, the Internet became a space for expressions of nationalism, what some scholars describe as a kind of social phenomenon—network nationalism (Zhu, 2004). A batch of network forums represented by Qiang Guo Forum of people.com.cn (established in 1999) is rising very rapidly to become the platform for the communication of network nationalism (He, 2004). Back then Chinese public opinion in network was characterized by nationalism toward the outside and critical realism toward the inside (Min, 2004). As a kind of social political power, network nationalism has shown its effect of both destructiveness and constructiveness. Destructiveness mainly manifests in extreme speech, exclusivity and trouble making, while constructiveness mainly in the awareness of Chinese social power for the political participation, which stimulates the formation of Chinese netizen society, and at the same time constantly express, shape and aggregate the national and ethnic identification for the Chinese (Wang, 2006).

Cross-cultural communication is very complicated under the circumstances of media convergence because it breaks through the existing cognition of media convergence technology and integrates the convergence of people and technology, the dynamic intersection of culture and technology, and the multidimensional perspectives among cultures. Moreover, scholars also remind people that media convergence does not necessarily promote cultural convergence; on the contrary, it may strengthen self-speech and lead to the dilemma of cross-cultural communication, which is reflected by the emergence of network nationalism.

Case Study: Sharon Stone’s Karma Comment on China Earthquake

On May 24, 2008, the well-known American movie star Sharon Stone was interviewed by a Hong Kong reporter on the red carpet during the Cannes Film Festival in France, and when she was asked about how she felt for SiChuan earthquake in China, Sharon Stone used “Is that karma?” to describe her feelings. Karma was originally interpreted into “Bao Ying” (Karma in Buddhism), which refers to a person’s acts in one of his successive existences, looked upon as deciding his fate in his next existence. (Oxford Advanced Learner's
Dictionary of Current English with Chinese Translation, 1984). But Karma has three common corresponding expressions in Chinese: Bao Ying, Yin Guo Xun Huan, Ye Bao. Bao Ying first means people receive good results for doing good things and bad results for doing bad things, and then gradually it only means the latter one. “Yin Guo Xun Huan”, a relatively neutral word, means the cause and result of things, namely a person’s acts in his present life will have results in his next existence. (Modern Chinese Dictionary, 1996) “Ye Bao” is similar to “Bao Ying”, just not as oral and intense as the latter one. Some scholar point out that karma in China’s Buddhism is different from both of Western karma (relying on the rewards and punishment by God) and Indian Buddhism’s karma (characterized by strict discipline, individuality, aloofness and spirituality), which has its own features. For instance, traditional Chinese family quality is integrated into the individuality of Indian Buddhism system, considered that karma will not only make a person stew in his own grease but also brings bad results to his family, household and offspring (Wan, 2006). To summarize, contemporary Chinese culture is very sensitive to the word karma, which generally means the bad results of one’s bad behavior and both the individual and the whole family and household will be affected by the bad results. The Hong Kong television media, largely impelled by media convergence, allowed this news to be transmitted rapidly in Chinese and English society. Because in Chinese society “Bao Ying” specifically refers to having bad results for doing something bad, the word karma which was translated into “Bao Ying” aroused the prevalent antipathy among Chinese people all over the world, who were suffering great grief caused by the Sichuan earthquake. Sharon Stone and her “karma” remark received overwhelming criticism and impugnation in Chinese society. With the large-scale transmission and impact, Sharon Stone’s comment was deemed as being the great network event of 2008 in China. (People.com.cn, at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYoZen9vlzE). By the end of March 27, 2009, this article has “googled” relative webs for “Sharon Stone, Karma (Bao Ying), China”, and the results are: www.google.com 119,000, www.google.cn 94,200. Comparing the Chinese and English websites we can reason that the lower search rate among Chinese as compared with English is just a result of the different interpretations of Karma. When we replace the key word “karma (Bao Ying)” with “karma (Yinguo Xunhuan)” and “karma (Ye Bao)”, the relative websites are respectively 3,960 and 65,400. As a result the Chinese websites from google have 44,560 over those of English, and that means the Sharon Stone case, was hot news in both the Chinese and English world, though it drew more attention in Chinese world than English.

This article adopts qualitative method to search and analyze the text content of the media event. Based on the Chinese and English pivotal reports and comments of high attention chronologically, we divide the Sharon Stone case into three stages, which are the producing and expanding stage; the out-bursting and disputing stage; and the cooling stage of media events. The following text will compare and analyze the mark incidents and speech of the three stages in Chinese and English context.

A. The producing and expanding stage of media event:
May 24, 2008- May 27, 2008

May 24
Hong Kong i-Cabel Entertainment Channel (CEN) broadcasted Sharon Stone’s earthquake remarks in Cannes after editing (Available at: http://www. youtube.com/watch?v=DYoZen9vlzE), and the three-minute on-spot interview was edited into a nearly one-minute video clip (Available at: http://ent.163.com/ 08/0601/20/4DCLEQ1U100032MT.html). There appeared two versions according to the key word “is that Karma?”

Before broadcasting video the chief news announcer translated “Karma” into “Yinguo Xunhuan”, and she said “Sharon Stone called the Sichuan earthquake a “Yinguo Xunhuan (Karma)” during the Cannes Film Festival. She said she was unhappy to see anyone unkind to anyone else, but is this remark a little unfriendly?” Then the following on-spot interview video used the caption “This should be a Bao Ying (Karma)” when Sharon Stone saying “is that Karma?”

This TV news was quickly uploaded to Youtube.com, titled: “Sharon Stone’s cold blooded speech about China’s earthquake”. The video was only transmitted among citizens and in the original comments many people began to express their strong anger in English. Some of the harshest words were: “brainless heartless bitch”, “stupid cow”; and there was also some bold satire placing aim directly at Sharon Stone’s intelligence: “Is she really highly intelligent?”, “Her logic disorders”; and “That’s the only way to get her a little publicity”. Some other comments (relatively) calmly criticized Sharon Stone’s incomprehension of the earthquake and as a result a confused usage of “Karma”: “do you ever know that about 19% people in the quake area are Tibetans?” “And tomorrow your whole family dies, is that karma too?”

May 24 was the producing stage of this media event. After the producing activity of Hong Kong CEN, Sharon Stone’s Karma remark about China’s earthquake was uploaded to youtube.com, the most famous video sharing website in the world, and soon aroused netizens’ strong critique.

May 25
The Sharon Stone “karma” event was not heavily covered by other traditional media and websites both in China and the West so it did not draw comprehensive
attention. In English society there were only a few polymeric websites that cover Hollywood stars (i.e. at http://www.theinsider.com/sitemap/news-20080525-3.html, The Insider's breaking celebrity news, photos and videos, TheInsider.com and on Insider Mobile.) transmitted the news, while in Chinese society the attention turned to personal blogs (i.e. Huang Yi: Those who are indifferent to life have no rights to discuss life, at http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4852f50a01009f6.html).

May 26
The Sun (HK)’s entertainment edition printed the condemnations from all parties and pointed out that “some TV stations that interviewed Sharon Stone had decided to cut down that part of video because they were concerned about it being considered as the stand of their own after the broadcasting.” The caution urged the transition of news and comments from traditional media to networks. 10:00 AM the same day, the well-known network entertainment channel in China’s mainland—V.sohu.com transshipped CEN’s video and the Sun’(HK) article with condensed pictures that selected from CEN’s video and caption on the Internet (Available at: http://yule.sohu.com/20080526/n257074185.shtml). 15:45 on Qiang Guo Forum at people.com.cn there was also a first post about the event titled “I want to know Buddhist’s attitude toward the earthquake form Sharon Stone’s remark!” expressing strong personal aversion toward Sharon Stone (At: http://bbs1.people.com.cn/postDetail.do?view=1&id=86418020&bid=27).

The “coolest website” tmz.com (At: http://www.tmz.com/about/) in America had hundreds of netizens’ comment on Sharon Stone’s Karma remark: “what a stupid, ignorant, selfish thing to say.” (At: http://www.tmz.com/2008/05/26/sharon-stone-calls-chinese-earthquake-karma/#comments); “Celebrities need to stay OUT of politics and religion.....they use that celeb thing to project their thoughts and beliefs on us!” (At: http://www.tmz.com/2008/05/26/sharon-stone-calls-chinese-earthquake-karma/#comments)

May 27
Many traditional media in China were however, still retrospective of the spectacle of the Cannes Film Festival with large space and mentioned nothing about Sharon Stone’s Karma remark (i.e. “The Chinese stars manifest ‘Chinese power’”, ChuTian Metropolis Daily, May 27, 2008, C33). In great detail, some newspapers in China’s mainland began to cover Sharon Stone’s Karma remark and the critiques from other countries’ reporters, all translated from the English video clip of CEN (Qiu, 2008). On the contrary, the network media in China actively transmitted the news and posted comments. Take the Qiang Guo Forum in people.com.cn as an example, on May 27 there were 14 posts relevant to Sharon Stone by netizens. Some netizens denounce Sharon Stone as “impudent”, “cold-blooded” and “losing the due humanistic care of a human being”. There was also comments claiming “this is just the voice of her own who was at most an old woman in American moviedom with falling career crawling on the ignorance way all by herself and that surely cannot represent a whole nation’s voice.” (At: http://news.xinhuanet.com/comments/2008-05/27/contnt_8267276.htm) The dayoo.com of Guangzhou Daily took advantage of the opportunity and pushed out the netizen debate: Sharon Stone’s “Karma remark”, would you still watch her movies? The intraday comments showed different opinions with most people denouncing Sharon Stone and “boycotting all the products with her image representatives” and a few people considered that “This should be viewed separately”, “We should not treat the good movies unfairly just because of her.” (At:http://news.dayoo.com/guangzhou/zhuanti/node_39821/2008/05/27/index.html) There were also netizens wrote as consumers to the Dior headquarters which was using Sharon Stone as its image representative, requesting Dior to suspend their collaboration with Stone or else they would boycott Dior’s products. More over some netizens triggered a 48-hour action claiming that “We request Dior to make the decision of dropping Sharon Stone’s image representative in 48 hours; otherwise, except from boycotting Sharon Stone we will also start to boycott all products of Dior.” The principal of Dior’s Shanghai office said that “we absolutely disagree with and cannot understand Sharon Stone’s illogical remark” but they had no comment for headquarters’ attitude in Dior France. (At: http://ent.xinmin.cn/bagua/2008/05/27/1170098.html)

In the four above-mentioned days, the news of Sharon Stone’s karma remark was first interviewed, edited and broadcasted by TV media and then more widely disseminated via Youtube, followed by newspapers coverage, and Chinese websites, whose reporting contents were fully adopted from the original communication framework and text of the TV interview with a selecting and emphasizing of the key word “karma” and “interesting”. The netizens started to pay attention to this event with bold and furious comments to express their opposition toward Sharon Stone’s remark, but their opinions were not consistent. Moreover, the netizens began to strike Sharon Stone’s advertising activity economically as consumers. Generally speaking, this stage was the producing and expanding period of the media event. The coverage of traditional media lacked in quantity and depth and the new media scales concerning this media event were still yet to form. The debates of netizens were just at their initial stage.

B. The outbursting and disputing stage: May 28, 2008—June 4, 2008

May 28
China’s most important official newspaper People’s Daily published a short review calling Sharon Stone’s
“Karma” remark an “instinctive ugliness”, “behind which is the ignorance, hypocrisy, prejudice and arrogance.” (Wen, 2008) This review indicated the formal declaration of Chinese main stream media, and because of the repute of People’s Daily, this review could also be seen as the China’s official response to Sharon Stone’s remark. The Guangzhou Daily titled a news in front page with “Sharon Stone heavily criticized for talking a lot of nonsense about the Wenchuan earthquake and 93% netizens say never see her movie again, advertising facing dropped” based on online surveys from their websites, and the way the news was handled, China’s traditional media seemed greatly concerned about this event. On the same day, all the traditional media in China’s mainland covered the story: Some newspaper posted the news on their websites saying that Sharon Stone’s cold-blooded remark caused raging waves of protests in Show Biz: (Xing, 2008). Some media reported that Chinese netizens have condemned and criticized Sharon Stone’s remark through video websites like Youtube. (Yang and Xie and Xu, 2008). China’s network media rapidly transmitted the review on People’s Daily along with other media’s reports, pushing Sharon Stone to where the wind and the waves are highest with a loud buzz of news coverage. Some websites not only featured news specials, they also created an online cartoon game called “throw stinky eggs at SharonStone” at: (http://ent.163.com /special/00032NOM/SharonStone.html#1, http://ent.163.com/special/000327LU/sts1st.html) In the afternoon, China’s tencent network (www.qq.com) (IResearch, 2009) which has 890 million registration users triggered the action of “global netizens sign to boycott Sharon Stone” claiming that “we can forgive ignorance but cannot stand insult.” “We need to show our stand and let the whole world know that the Chinese are very angry!” At the end of November 24, 2008, the total signatures in the action had reached 1,692,318 (Tencent, 2008).

Confronting the billowy criticism and strong will of boycott, 20:30 on that day Dior declared on the Internet that Sharon Stone had permitted her agent to give a statement saying she was deeply sorry and sad about hurting Chinese people with her inappropriate remark, “My improper behavior has caused the Chinese grief and anger and I am deeply sorry for that. I stress again that I would like to participate in any relief work for the China’s earthquake and do my best to help the Chinese in the disaster.” (Baidu Finance, 2008). However, the apology letter sent by the agent was generally considered as hypocritical and unacceptable (According to Tencent’s online survey, 99% netizens refuse Sharon Stone’s apology, at http://ent.qq.com/zt/2008/bt Sharon/topic_html/index.htm): “Unless you are not Chinese you would accept this kind of makeshift. The earlier remark was what really in her mind and now this apology is just something out of pressure. We cannot forgive her.” “Refuse the apology!” (Relevant comments in Laiba of Tianya: http://laiba. tianya.cn/laiba/CommMsgs?cmm=281&tid=260266577 0236701302)

In addition the English media made further reports about this event. The American CNN website published the news “Sharon Stone films banned in China after ‘Karma’ comment” (CNN,2008) which covered the boycott by the people and moviedom in China. Youtube and other website media continued to provide new contents and comments, like calling Sharon Stone’s remark a “stupid comment” and “really shot herself in the foot.” (At: http://www.hollyscoop.com/sharon-stone /sharon-stone-movies-banned-in-china_16208.asp)

May 29

Supported by the reviews and reports of official media like the People’s Daily, the relevant comments and topics exploded in China’s major portal websites and forums like Tencent, Sina, Sohu, NetEase and Tianya, which showed Chinese netizens’ extremely strong anger. As the state-run Chinese news agency, the Xinhua net published a series of sharp criticism. Some netizens directly claimed that “this woman is not only the enemy of all Chinese but also the public enemy of all mankind” because “She has lost humanity—the nature of human being—and crossed the bottom line of social morality, and that’s why she should be ranked as public enemy of all mankind and no longer considered as a human.” “Sharon Stone’s nonsense surely reminds us that the international anti-China power would not change their stands because of the Sichuan earthquake.” (Xu, 2008) There was also comment equated Sharon Stone’s event with the reports of Hong Kong newspapers which called earthquake a punishment by nature and also the opinions by China’s mainland scholars, saying that “there may be only a few of people calling earthquake a ‘karma’ but they are definitely more than just one or two which includes the internal, overseas, male and female” and described them as “contemptible scoundrel” with “hearts full of hatred” (Dou, 2008).

In the afternoon, China’s foreign ministry spokesperson Qin Gang remarked on the event in a regular press conference: “We have noticed Sharon Stone’s recent speeches and also the apology she made through her agent. We hope the relief work of Chinese government and people would be fully understood and supported by the international society and we also hope the people in Show Biz do more to promote the mutual understanding and friendship between nations.” (At: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ch/xwfw/fyrrh/1032/4441874 .htm) This remark indicated that the relevant department of Chinese government had some concerns on the subject of the Sharon Stone event and reasoned that her speech showed the misunderstanding of China in
international society to a certain degree and it spoiled the friendship between nations.

The public declaration of Chinese government and the large-scale strong boycott of netizens urged Dior’s statement on the Internet: immediately drop and stop any advertisement, market publicity and commercial activity related to Sharon Stone (At: http://finance.baidu.com/gongsi/2008-05-29/153607.html). But netizens expressed their discontent and suspicious toward this divorce statement saying “drop her only in China or the whole world? If only in China, people let’s keep boycotting!” Some people angrily shouted that “we should force out all Sharon Stone’s things! “That’s the thing every Chinese wanna do and should do at present and also in the future!!!!” Only a few netizens expressed their Buddhist tolerance: “Everyone should treat every citizen sincerely with a tolerant heart and we should be generous to her mistake because China is a country with good morality......We forgive people in serious penitence.” (Relavant comments in Tencent, at http://comment5.qq.com/comment.htm?site=ent&id=251498) CNN published the news “Stone reaps bad karma for quake comments” to report that Sharon Stone’s advertisement in Dior has been dropped. In the news the writer said: “The statement drew fire from citizens and government officials, and specifically quoted the latest remark of China’s foreign ministry spokesperson (At: http://www.cnn.com/2008/SHOWBIZ/05/29/stone.karma/ index.html?iref=mpstoryview). The Fox news network described Sharon Stone’s remark as sparking considerable anger of Chinese media, and other than the spokesperson’s review it also cited the title of the official Xinhua net saying “Sharon Stone is the public enemy of all mankind”. The Fox news network considered the explosive responses to Sharon Stone in China as the result of two events prior to the “karma remark”: The boycott for Olympic torch relay and the international criticism for the Tibet issue (Foxnews, 2008). In netizens’ comments appeared explicit expressions of “Chinese” and “American”: “Americans do not have civilization and history. All of you!” “You are hated by all Chinese.” (At: http://www.hollyscoop.com/sharon-stone/sharon-stone-movie s-banned-in-china_16208.asp)

May 30

On this day 31 traditional and network entertainment media in China declared: “We will permanently boycott Sharon Stone and forcing her name out of our reports forever.” (Sohu entertainment, 2008) The forcing-out action means they will completely reject and repel any entertainment news related to Sharon Stone. Netizens expressed their strong supports for this action saying that “People are getting more and more patriotic and we are really grateful for these media.” (http://comment2.news.sohu.com/viewcomments.action?id=257166409&pageNumber=45) “We should strike those freaks in the face who despise our Chinese in bones” (http://comment2.news.sohu.com/viewcomments.action?id=257166409&pageNumber=44) However, there was also some lonely “alien” saying, “I think this thing is over since she has already apologized. We cannot require everyone’s love.” Netizens criticized this comment mercilessly mocking “Are you her son? With this kind of speech I think we should also expel you—Shame on you, you are unworthy to be a Chinese.” (http://comment2.news.sohu.com/viewcomments.action?id=257166409&pageNumber=42) Besides, the original review on Xinhua net is relatively calm with a title of “Sharon Stone’s malevolent remark could only represent herself”, in this article the writer said “I still want to remind the furious people that even in the United States Sharon Stone is only a has-been old actress who surely could not represent the American government, not to mention the American people. We should separate her from other people and there is no need to transform the anger toward Sharon Stone into national sadness or even fierce confrontation and exclusive emotion.” (Tao, 2008).

On the same day the New York Times published the news “Dior Drops Actress From Ads After China Remarks”: “Christian Dior, the French fashion brand, has become the latest global company to learn a hard lesson about the danger of offending Chinese pride.” In this article the reporter attributed the event to the fact that “she suggested last week that the recent earthquakes in Sichuan Province were karmic retribution for Beijing’s treatment of Tibet.” “Despite efforts to keep attention on their affairs, companies have found that politics has a way of creeping into business in unexpected ways in China.” Following this logie the article classified Sharon’s event in the same category with China’s resistance to Japan in 2005 and the boycott to Carrefour in April, 2008, claiming that the gaffe by Ms. Stone also provoked a call for boycotts of films in which she appears. When citing the review “public enemy of all mankind” in Xinhua net this article considered it as “sharp criticism” and emphasized Xinhua’s role as “the state-run Chinese news agency” (Jolly, 2008).

May 31—June 3

Very dramatic reports appeared both in China and America during those four days.

First of all, Sharon Stone expressed conflicting views in two days through two of the most authoritative media in the United States. On May 31, CNN covered the news “Actress says she misspoke on China” reporting the statement released by Stone's publicist and entitled “In my own words by Sharon Stone.” In the statement Sharon Stone said “I could not be more regretful of that mistake. It was unintentional. I apologize. Those words were never meant to be hurtful to anyone,” Stone said. “They were an accident of my
distraction and a product of news sensationalism.” There have been numerous reports about what I said in Cannes. I would like to set the record straight about what I feel in my heart and end all of the understandings,” (At: http://edition.cnn.com/2008/SHOWBIZ/Movies/05/31/sharon.stone/index.html)

Second day on June 1, the New York Times released the news “Actress Stone and Dior Differ Over Apology”, revealing a secret that the apology statement by Sharon Stone’s agent on May 28 was not her true intention. On the contrary Stone “didn’t believe she had done anything wrong”, “I’m not going to apologize.” According to this article, Sharon Stone had a 45-minute telephone interview with NYT’s reporter on the night of May 29, “Ms. Stone was at first strident and then contrite about her remarks.” “She insisted her comments in Cannes had been taken out of context.” “She also said that she resisted Dior’s efforts at damage control, and that the apology issued in her name distorted her words” Stone said her intention was to tell the reporter the Buddhism she believed in brought her mental transition and made her help a organization that might encourage people to give money to the relief. “My intention is to be of service to the Chinese people” “a 10-second poorly edited film clip has besmirched my reputation of over 20 years of charitable services on behalf of international charities” “I am really sorry that it created such a thing, I misspoke for four seconds and it’s become an international incident.”(Horyn, 2008) Sharon Stone’s variable attitudes immediately became the news of highest attention for Chinese media and audiences.

From June 1 Chinese people and the media released a large amount of news and comments related to Sharon Stone both in traditional and new media, bringing unprecedentedly intense controversies between public and media as well as among the public.

Wee hours on June 1, a well-known young writer in China talked about Sharon Stone event in his blog and issued some opinions that later caused a giant stir on the Internet. He straightforwardly pointed out that “the wrong media” quoted Sharon’s remark out of context. “I think Sharon Stone made a wrong confession at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and to the wrong media. The key point is the wrong media.” “Although I don’t like her tone, I believe many people haven’t seen her original remark, which actually describes her mental transition and has been summed into ‘The earthquake is interesting and China receives Bao Ying (Karma)’ by the media.” (Han, 2008). Because of this article some websites claimed that netizens have reviled the writer an “imbecile” (at: http://comment.news.163.com/news_shehuu6_bbs/4DDGFJ2P00011229.html). Some netizens considered it as the ideological controversy between the leftist and rightist of China’s mainland, claiming that “Rightist’s bullshit mislead our country. Sharon Stone’s ultimate intention is quite clear so why the hell they think the truth is missed?” (at: http://bbs1.people.com.cn/postDetail.do?view=1&id=86518345&bid=1)

In morning that day the China Youth, which was considered as one of the most important index for China’s public opinion, released a review titled “ Why should we tolerate Sharon Stone”, opposing that someone confuse the criticism of Sharon Stone with the interference of freedom of speech. “Chinese always hold the earnest desire for the freedom of speech. However, it is quite unsatisfactory and confused to keep my mouth shut just for others’ speech freedom---- Why shouldn’t I have the freedom of anti-curse while others get the freedom of cursing me?” “The interference with speech freedom by the public power like administration is truly a serious problem, but it has nothing to do with this case or this kind of case.” “The only thing we should worry about is the interference with the minorities’ speech freedom by the ‘majority tyranny’. It is true that the violence of public opinion would hurt some people’s speech freedom with “pseudo public power”, which is one of the most horrible nightmares for the elite in Internet era (Zhang, 2008).

Thereafter HK CEN, the producer of “karma” event decided to publish the three-minute full version of Sharon Stone’s interview on that night as a response to the criticism for their garbling by Sharon Stone and other comments. CEN’s high-level manager insisted that “CEN’s principle is to present the complete truth to the audience. All our reports are in broadcasting form so quoting out of context is impossible. Besides, the Sichuan earthquake is a tremendous grief to all Chinese people so it is absolutely impossible for us to edit the video and sensationalize the news.” (At: http://ent.163.com/08/0601/20/4DCLEQU100032MTM.html)

Moreover, Stone’s capricious speech aroused extreme anger among the Chinese netizens: “Let’s force out Sharon Stone forever and there is no need to think about anything anymore. She is a human being living on earth just like all of us but how dare she say something like that and never admit it. Isolate her from the world of our Chinese people forever.” (at http://comment.ent.163.com/star_ent_bbs/4DCLEQU100032MTM.html)

On June 2 The Global Times (2008) with a circulation of two million in China’s mainland claimed that according to the analysis by foreign media “In recent times the patriotic emotion released by the Chinese folks has made many organizations and individuals apologized for insulting China. This suddenly emergent power has drawn much attention of international observers and shocked them again and again.” The article quoted the German expert’s speech that “Nowadays China’s policies are becoming more and more transparent and especially when the Internet releases the power of China’s public the whole world
cannot help but re-recognize this power again. In Sharon Stone event the anger expressed mainly by common Chinese is the most powerful force impressing the whole world.” An American professor said that “there are some geopolitical reasons for this event. After all China is a remote place for them and traditionally Hollywood has a suspicion for the so-called ‘autocratic government’ and ‘sympathy for the political aliens’ and that kind of political atmosphere is prevalent in Hollywood.”(Gao, 2008) Some netizens commented below this reports saying “Culture shapes a person and I think her ignorance and lack of humanity is affected by the environment. Specifically speaking it’s an individual’s pity and generally speaking it’s the whole nation’s pity. Her nation and she herself is really pathetic and we should stand in silent tribute for them.”(At: http://comment.ent.163.com/star_ent_bbs/4DE75P0Q00031H2L.html)

At noon the president of one Hollywood corporation who was shooting a documentary film in China released an open letter to Sharon Stone via network claiming that Sharon Stone’s remark “deeply offend and sadden me” and “behind it all lurks the vicious bias against China by the Western media” (Tianshan net, 2008). It was quite interesting that this letter didn’t draw much attention in both Chinese and English society with only 598 websites in the search of google.cn and one English report from the English version of china.org.cn (Cable TV exposes full footage to refute Stone. at http://forum.china.org.cn/view_thread.php?id=1238&extra=page%3D2). In addition, China’s network media also reported that there were citizens from Kunming suing Sharon Stone, ascertaining her criminal responsibility for the crime of insulting (at http://xian.qq.com/a/20080603/000039.htm).

On June 3 the financial channel of a famous websites in China published their survey for “Sharon Stone’s cold-blooded remark” and it showed that: until 17:30 that day the amount of participants was 334,293 in which 88.67% netizens believed that Sharon Stone’s remark “deeply offend and sadden me” and “behind it all lurks the vicious bias against China by the Western media” (Tianshan net, 2008). It was quite interesting that this letter didn’t draw much attention in both Chinese and English society with only 598 websites in the search of google.cn and one English report from the English version of china.org.cn (Cable TV exposes full footage to refute Stone. at http://forum.china.org.cn/view_thread.php?id=1238&extra=page%3D2). In addition, China’s network media also reported that there were citizens from Kunming suing Sharon Stone, ascertaining her criminal responsibility for the crime of insulting (at http://xian.qq.com/a/20080603/000039.htm).

**June 4**

Sharon Stone apologized again for her earthquake remark through the People Magazine in America under the huge pressure of public opinion. This apology letter was exactly the same as that of May 31 only more clearly stated, “Yes, I misspoke.” The article emphasized Sharon Stone’s friendship with Dalai Lama and a long history of political activism, and also her rejection by the Shanghai International Film Festival (At: http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20204534,00.html). There was some English websites specifically wrote a news for the rejection of Shanghai International Film Festival with comments saying “who cares about China. They are our enemies.” Some other comments sharply criticized the political system and the dangerous buildings in the earthquake in China (At: http://www.tmz.com/2008/06/04/sharon-moo-goo-gai-banned-by-shanghai-fest/2#comments). The debates among netizens were also presented on Internet. A netizen thought that “most of the people who commented on here are pro-Chinese, so no surprise as to why there are so many haters on here. MANY MANY people were thinking the same thing she only had the balls to verbalize it... so what she’s gonna have bad karma for having freedom of speech?????” Another netizen refuted that “a lot of Westerners do not really understand the situation in Tibet. Westerners are outspoken but do not have much brain. Your answer has shown to the world how narrow minded you are.”(At: http://www.hollyscoop.com/sharon-stone/sharon-stone-movies-banned-in-china_16208.aspx)

At this moment the public began to cast doubts on the original TV reports after CEN had broadcasted the full version of the interview. Some websites discovered that CEN’s caption on June 1 was totally different with that of May 24: “It obviously has been revised from the original two-minute caption. Especially the most stirring ‘That is Bao Ying (Karma)’ has been replaced by ‘Is that a Yinguo Xunhuan (Karma)?’ ‘Is that Karma’ might had been misinterpreted into ‘That is Karma’ in the original news.” Facing the queries the executive director of CEN also admitted the report “might have some flaws” but “there was no problem in the original intention and motivation of their TV station.” (At: http://ent.163.com/08/0605/09/4DLRB7G800031H2L.html)

May 28 to June 4 in 2008 is definitely the outbursting and disputing stage of the media event both according to the flow of coverage and the influence of key incidents. On May 28 the review of People’ Daily sparked the event and accelerated the rapid growth of relevant reports in media especially on the Internet. The major portal websites in China all made specials for the reports and netizens’ furies quickly expanded via the Internet. Along with the remarks by China’s Foreign Ministry, Dior’s dropping Stone as their spokes model, and the three apologies with different intentions by this movie star, public opinion was intensively centralized in network media with marked anger, boycotting and scolding. It is worth notice that different public opinions showed in traditional and network media not only enrich the meaning of public opinion but also expand the expression space for the public.

**C. The cooling stage of media event: After June 4, 2008**

On June 4th public opinion seemed to fade away from this media event and as it transitioned into the
cooling stage after Sharon Stone’s last apology. The active comments only appeared on the reports of CEN’s flaw admitting news. The post with most transshipments and comments was the one wrote at noon on June 5 saying: “The Hong Kong journalists are so disgusting. It was them who started the sensationalization!” “Media’s misleading is undoubtedly loathsome but blindly following others and pretending patriotic are more hateful!” “Karma is a polysemous word meaning destiny, fate, causal cycle and so on. The instant reflection for Karma by native speakers of English is ‘destiny’” “Why are the Chinese so parochial?” (At: http://comment.ent.163.com/star_ent_bbs/4DLRB7G80031H2L.html#middlePage) These straightforward criticisms for China’s public opinion aroused the attention of many netizens and in the following comments 81% netizens expressed their objections and 19% showed supports.

Later on little news was updated on Sharon Stone in Chinese media, with the only report covering her plan to visit Sichuan (At: http://ent.qq.com/a/20080529/000191.htm) and gossip news (At: http://ent.moocity.com/om/2009/79800254641034.html).

**Findings**

The focus in the formation and controversy around the Sharon Stone event is the different understandings of Karma based on which multimedia communication expedites the expressions of public opinion and the conflicts of meanings. So to speak, the Sharon Stone event is a typical case of media convergence influencing and accelerating the cross-cultural communication of media events. This article observes and analyzes the approach, diction and tendency of meaning expression in this case with double-dimensions and here are the research findings:

**A. Media convergence greatly promotes the communication of cross-cultural events**

Sharon Stone’s case indicates that media convergence greatly promoted the communication of cross-cultural events in three levels.

1) **The advanced degree of media convergence determines the speed, span and depth of communication for cross-cultural events.**

The media event produced by TV media was uploaded to a well-known international video website in just a couple of hours and easily achieved global communication. Furthermore, new media mainly as network media and traditional media constantly amassed a plethora of views and then transmit different meanings to the world, shaping new ideas and controversies and producing new media events. The speed, span and depth of cross-cultural event communication is the inevitable results of the advanced application of media convergence technologies.

2) **The mutually complementary and reiterative feeding between traditional and new media in media convergence is very distinctive.**

Traditional media was the initial source for cross-cultural communication of Sharon Stone event, and when the news product enters the new media platforms the communication process presented a complex version of media convergence. Subsequently, in the process of meaning creation and communication the information converging and exchanging between traditional media (i.e. television, newspaper, magazine) and new media (i.e. network, blog, mobile paper, and mobile television) are of large abundance and it is quite prevalent that these two kinds of media service as each other’s sources. It is worth mentioning that furious public opinions in network are presented simultaneously in the news reports of both traditional and new media, becoming the very important factors for the production of news. One extreme example is the scrambled transmission of a net-made rumor (On May 28, 2008, many China’s mainland network media released news saying Chinese movie star Ziyi Zhang slapped Sharon Stone in her face at the concluding banquet in Cannes Film Festival, which was proved later as a hearsay. At: http://ent.163.com/08/0529/10/4D3R602J00031H2L.html) as many media’s source.

3) **Media convergence avoids the language barrier of cross-cultural communication to a certain degree**

Language barrier is an important restriction for cross-cultural communication in traditional media age but in Sharon Stone’s case it is no longer a handicap for cross-cultural communication and on the contrary, the Chinese and English mutual expressions among and between media and the public appear pretty unobstructed, and the transnational communication time lag is not attributed to language but to the time difference. However, this breakthrough features a unidirectional degree with the Chinese world actively entering the English world but adversely the English world being extremely indifferent and exclusive to the Chinese world. For instance, it is easy to find out from the comments analysis (For instance, many commentators use the common expressions and contents in Chinese society such as “You don’t know China”, “Let me introduce to you a real Tibet”, “You should come and see China in person”, “Chinese Buddhism culture pursuing......”, and some commentators call themselves with exoteric names like “chinalover”) that many reviewers in English Forum have Chinese cultural backgrounds whose opinions were, in some instances distrusted by other English speakers. In addition to one American expressing his opinion on Chinese website our research finds no more similar cases. Apparently the weakening of language barrier in Sharon Stone’s case results from the effort of Chinese world.

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B. Media convergence reconstructs the communication rules of media events

The above-mentioned findings revealed that media convergence impels the encoding, decoding, re-encoding and re-decoding of news contents and public opinions and this cycling process will not fade away until the cooling stage of media event. Therefore, media convergence is reconstructing the existing communication rules of media events and the traditional media, new media and we media (in forms of blogs etc.) are carrying out the convergence of communication approaches and contents in an interplaying process and furthermore renovate the communication concepts.

1) Journalism and communication transit from single-authority to multi-authorities.

Communication rules in this mass communication age feature the authority of one-way communicating, which is to say in the media field built by nation, market and the public, traditional media establish the single-authority through the one-to-many communication model. In new communication age of media convergence, this single-authority is immersing and restructuring. With the advent of we media (mainly in form of blog) and new media (mainly in form of network), the public and websites are creating authorities through meaning production in media communication so as to create bidirectional or even multidirectional authorities together with traditional media. This has been illustrated by the shaping of key incidents in Sharon Stone’s case which includes both the reports and reviews from traditional media such as TV, newspaper, magazine and from the network media as well as individual’s blogs. All the key incidents determine the development of public opinions in this media event.

2) Traditional media still guide public opinion.

It is remarkable that in multi-authorities background the traditional media still plays the direction role of public opinion. Sharon Stone’s case clearly indicates that with more sources, more information and more contents brought by media convergence the public have a more urgent demand for authorized information sources. Therefore, every review by traditional media becomes the key incident guiding the public opinions. The shocking attention to Sharon Stone event on May 28 is the result of a review by People’s Daily. This indicates that media convergence will not threaten the influence of traditional media but on the contrary promote their communication effect.

3) Network media is becoming the concourse of multi-authorities

The analysis for Sharon Stone’s case also shows that network media is becoming the concourse of multi-authorities which shapes a new communicating authority of incomparable power. In media convergence the news producing of traditional media has inevitable restrictions such as the scarcity of production factors (like page and time); the persistence of existing standpoints for traditional media (like the political stands of China’s state-run media); and the traditional media stick to professionalism of journalism (like the principle of truth for journalism and communication). All these factors make it impossible for traditional media to become the concourse of massive information, multiple stands and multiple truths (sometimes rumors). However, network’s subversion to traditional media makes it the concourse of multi-authorities, exerting communication impact that is hard to control.

C. The weakening of cross-cultural interpretation for the key word is the important cause of cross-cultural conflicts

The key point to the enormous controversies about Sharon Stone’s case is the different understanding and usage of Karma in Chinese and foreign cultures. However, it is such a pity that media and the public did not make an effort to define Karma but built their debates mainly on the perceptual knowledge of the word. Despite the fact that media convergence has avoided the language barrier in cross-cultural communication, it is still hard to go beyond the cultural conflicts behind languages and as a result, the cultural differences extend to the nationalism controversies. However, it is worth pondering that the cross-cultural conflicts provoked by karma in this event is not limited in the frame of nationalism but extend to the subculture conflicts in the same ethical framework.

1) The cultural conflicts in network nationalism frame

According to the analysis of key words in relevant reviews and the follow-up comments in the second part of this article, the debates of Sharon Stone’s case ultimately turned into the conflicts between “Chinese” and “Americans”, “The White” and “The Yellow”, “Asian” and “European”, and there are plenty of expressions like this: “We should keep level-headed that we are Asians cultivated by Confucianism and they are Europeans cultivated by Darwin’s evolutionism, and many foreigners cannot understand us and our nation.” (At: http://comment5.qq.com/comment.htm?site=ent&id =252344) Moreover, there are many comments full of extreme emotions. Our research has noticed that the English words of high frequency include: bitch, idiot, stupid; Chinese words of high frequency include: pig, boycott, and idiot. Apparently media and the public’s focus for this cross-cultural event is no longer the cultural differences. People show little interest to the different usage and the cultural reasons behind them in the Chinese and English context for Karma, and there are just a few blogs and netizens’ comments concerning personal unsystematic knowledge in Chinese world and BBC’s “what is Karma” pointing out karma’s confusing
meaning in different religions and cultures (BBC, 2008).

As to cross-cultural communication, the network nationalism greatly intensified the cultural subjectivity of the nation and even dissimilates and amplifies the superiority of individual cultural identity, finally, deepens the conflicts and dramatic change among cultures and make it impossible to shape the cultural relations of mutually listening, tolerating and understanding, which adds much more difficulties to the ideal goal of cultural convergence for cross-cultural communication.

2) The subculture conflicts in the same ethical framework.

The study shows that the many controversies provoked by Sharon Stone’s case are centralized in the same ethical framework. Taking he incident of young writer’s blog as example, when the writer believed there were some misunderstandings for Stone’s remark and criticized the media, he received billowy scolding and little support. This phenomenon should not be limited in the violence of network public opinions; actually it is also the subculture conflicts in the same ethical framework.

The concept of subculture was originated from the research of mass business culture (David Riesman, 1950), generally means the distinctive group of the larger culture distinguished with age, ethnicity, class, location, gender and religion, or the culture types different from mainstream culture. Chinese netizens’ comments show the distinctiveness of subcultures in the same mother culture: Some people view the case from the flawed interpretation of the English and intend to tolerate and understand the Western cultures, believing Stone’s “karma” remark to be an unintentional mistake; Some others do not agree with the “flaw” idea and incline to believe in alien culture’s inherent misunderstanding and prejudice toward the Chinese culture, deeming that Stone’s “karma” remark represents the real thoughts of many Westerners. These two subcultures shaping in different attitudes toward the Western cultures are not new to us; in fact, there have been disputes ever since China’s reform and opening-up, and furthermore divided into the “leftist” and “rightist”. The ideological controversies between these two subcultures present themselves again in Sharon Stone’s case.

The cross-cultural difference among subcultures should surely be easier to harmonize than that in ethnic framework, but the research of Stone’s case indicates that the conflicts between subcultures are extremely acute. The communication even developed into sneer, vituperation and threatening language, showing the obstinacy for self-speech and hostility for others’ speech, and as a result decreased the social tolerance.

D. The ideological opposition is the profound reason for cross-cultural conflicts

Our research also finds that the ideological opposition is the deep reason for cross-cultural conflicts. First of all, the reviews representing political powers all turned into the signs affecting the development of event and became the sources and foundation of all kinds of opinions. For example, the reviews by People’s Daily and Xinhua net as well as by China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson all became the focuses of media and the public all around the world. Second, there were always some pan-political speech involved in the debates of Stone’s case both in Chinese and English world, especially in English the media and netizens were accustomed to relate the event with China’s democratic system, the Tibetan issues, human rights issues and so on and furthermore, ideologically review or even criticize them.

Conclusion and Limitation of Research

Our conclusion is that the meanings of media convergence to the cross-cultural communication of media events manifest in multiple levels. On one hand, media convergence technologically creates enormous communication energy and consequently promotes the content communication for cross-cultural events and narrows the span of space and time between our culture and the others’. On the other hand, technological convergence has not yet produced cultural convergence; in contrast, intervened by multiple powers as nationalism, subculture, conflicts and ideologies, media convergence intensifies, amplifies and increases cultural conflicts and prejudices, creating new barriers for cross-cultural communication.

This research has three limitations. The first limitation is the research approach. This article adopts qualitative study and therefore could not cover more comprehensive network materials to elaborate on our analysis to a smaller unit, which affects the accuracy of our research. The second, is the subjectivity limitation of the cross-cultural interpretation. The researchers are also subjects in a specific culture and therefore, it is inevitable to show some unconscious bias due to the limitations of native cultures while analyzing the cross-cultural texts. Third, some of the research is not in-depth. Limited by the case itself and the length of the article, some issues need further research, including: the influence on cross-cultural communication of the concrete modes of media convergence as web2.0; how media convergence increases network nationalism; the relations between media convergence and subculture conflicts and so on, which could all be selected as future research subjects.

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Qiang Guo Forum (established in 1999). bbs.people.com.cn. (It is one of the earliest news and political forum by Chinese news website. Now Qiang Guo Forum has grown into a large comprehensive community with 45 branch forums, 710 thousands registrators and also the services of social bookmark, debate, blog and dig. As the net platform of People’s Daily, Qiang Guo Forum

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features most for its ability to use the governmental resources for guest interview. June 20 in 2008, the online communication between President Hu Jintao and netizens obtains a total amount of two million netizens’ participancy. In addition, the relative openness to sensitive issues and post writing makes the forum “the special region of speech”, which is considered as the “weather glass” of China’s political status by foreign observers.

Secondary sources from http://www.jfdaily.com /gb/jfww/node8816/node8817/userobject1ai20529 97.html


