



# An Appraisal-based Comparative Study on English and Chinese Movie Review

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**Abstract:** With appraisal theory as its theoretical foundation and basing on a self-built small-scaled Chinese and English movie review corpus, the research is conducted from the perspective of types of attitude. Combining qualitative method and quantitative method together, the author tries to make in-depth analyses about the differences of distributions of attitudinal resources in English and Chinese movie reviews. The research concludes that the movie reviewer's culture background will influence their way of using attitudinal resources.

**Keywords:** Chinese and English movie reviews, types of attitude, appraisal theory, comparative studies

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Movie review is an introduction and evaluation of the movie or a study and explanation of the form and content of the movie. (BiFu, 1993) It can help people make decisions about whether seeing the movie or not, offer directors and actors valuable suggestions directing their films and performance.

Appraisal theory which is concerned with how the language is employed to evaluate, to express attitude has been employed in the analyses of many kinds of discourses such as political speech, historical discourse etc. However, there are rare researches on movie review under the framework of appraisal theory. And, nearly all the studies focus on the English movie reviews, there's few studies basing on Chinese resources, let alone the comparisons of attitudinal analysis between Chinese and English movie review. In this paper, we aimed at having a close look at English and Chinese movie review from the perspective of different types of attitude and conducting comparative analyses of the semantic features of the attitudinal resources between Chinese and English movie reviews.

## 1. Research background

### 1.1 Theoretical researches on appraisal theory

Appraisal theory (AT) originates from a literacy project of "Write It Right" in 1990s, which was executed by J. R. Martin and his colleagues. And it developed very fast in later of 1990s. In 1996, Martin read his essays about appraisal theory in ISFC23; and then in 2000, Martin's another masterpiece *Beyond Exchange: Appraisal Systems in English* was included in the collected papers *Evaluation in Text: Authorial Stance and the construction of Discourse* edited chiefly by Hunston & Thompson, and in this paper AT was founded; In 2003, Martin and Rose cowrote *Working with Discourse: Meaning beyond the Clause*, the framework of AT was systematically introduced in the paper. In 2005, *The language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English* written by Martin and White was published, which is the first treaties about AT and made the study of AT more systematic. In 2006, Martin read his *Appraisal Analysis: Exploring Evaluation* in ISFC 33, Which symbolized the maturity of AT.

In China, The development of AT started from Zhang Delu in 1998, however, people didn't pay much attention to it because of the unfinished framework of AT. And then, in 2001, Wang zhenhua introduced appraisal system in detail in his *Appraisal System and its Operation*, the background information of AT, the theoretical framework and application are all inclusive, thereby the study of AT in China was truly launched. But it was the two Appraisal Theory Workshops held respectively in Henan University in 2005 and in Beijing Normal University in 2006 that established the status of AT in the domestic linguistics world.

Since AT has been introduced into China, Many scholars has contributed to it. However, although AT has made great progress, it lacks great breakthrough.

### 1.2 Empirical researches on appraisal theory

AT showed bright empirical future at the very first of its establishment. Idema, Cheyne, Coffin etc. has studied AT from the perspective of mass media, historical voice, evaluation of informal conversation and analysis of narration mass science.

In China, the empirical researches of AT cover the field of discourse analysis, foreign language teaching, translation etc. Wang zhenhua (2004) analyzes the attitude system of hard news; Li jun, Zhang Delu (2010) analyze interview discourses in CCTV 9's Dialogue Program under engagement system; Zhao Xia and Chen Li (2011) analyze Elizabeth's conversation in *Pride and Prejudice* under the engagement subsystem of AT.

Since its establishment, AT has been widely spread and applied. It's fruitful both in theoretical and empirical studies. However, there are less studies of appraisal theory focusing on movie review. The theory is still in its progress.

### 1.3 The researches on movie review

People have studied movie reviews in different fields including mass media field, movie film industry field, computer field and linguistics field. And scholars have also studied movie review from the linguistics' perspectives. The studies of movie review under AT are especially prosperous including studies of movie review under the whole appraisal theory, under attitude system, engagement system and graduation system.

Although the studies of movie review under AT have made some progress, there are comparatively few studies under AT, and the comparative studies of the attitude resources on Chinese and English movie reviews are much less. This leaves rooms for the present study to carry on.

## 2. Theoretical basis

Appraisal theory is comprised of three subsystems: attitude, engagement, graduation. And among them, attitude is the central part. Attitude is concerned with people's character and feelings, including emotional reactions, judgments of behavior and evaluation of things (Martin and White, 2005). Three semantic regions which are referred to as emotion, ethics and aesthetics respectively are termed as affect, judgment and appreciation.

### 2.1 Affect

Affect concerns emotions; it registers people's positive or negative feelings reacting to behavior, text/process, phenomena etc. In terms of the types of attitude, there are three variables: un/happiness, in/security/ and dis/satisfaction. Un/happiness variable transfers emotions about 'affair of the heart' such as sadness, hate, happiness and love etc. (Martin and White, 2005) The in/security variable transfers our feelings of peace and anxiety about our environs such as anxiety, fear, confidence and trust etc. The dis/satisfaction variable relates to the emotions in the pursuit of goals such as ennui, displeasure, curiosity and respect etc. (Martin and White, 2005).

### 2.2 Judgment

Judgement concerns ethics, which transfers our attitude towards people and the way they behave-their character (how they measure up) (Martin and White, 2005). Generally, there are 'social esteem' judgement and 'social sanction' judgement.

### 2.3 Appreciation

Appreciation concerns aesthetics, which evaluate text/process, natural phenomena. (Martin and White, 2005) Generally, there are three subcategories of appreciation: reaction, composition and valuation.

## 3. Research data

The 12 target films of the film reviews covering four genres are chosen basing on the two standards: firstly, they are among the top10 of top-us-gross titles of each genre in <http://www.imdb.com>. IDMB was set up in 1993, and it is the first website whose contents are all about films such as the actors, the grades and critiques about film, it's the world most popular and authoritative source of movie. So the target films possess enough box office appeal; and the chosen films were released after 2005, which ensure the timeliness of the research.

All the movie reviews come from professional and authoritative movie review websites, the 14 Chinese movie reviews with the length of 24656 words comes from <http://i.mtime.com>, the most professional and popular movie and teleplay and movie reviewer data bank which owns the sharpest movie reviews in China; the 36 English movie reviews with the length of 24744 words come from <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/>. The movie reviews bear nearly the same length in their Chinese and English versions. The main data source for this paper is a 49400 word corpus which is made of two sub-corpora, and the concrete information of the corpus is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. The concrete information of research data

	Source
36 English Movie reviews	24744 <a href="http://www.rottentomatoes.com/">http://www.rottentomatoes.com/</a>
14 Chinese Movie Reviews	24656 <a href="http://www.mtime.com/">http://www.mtime.com/</a>

## 4. linguistic realization

### 4.1 Linguistic realization of different types of attitudes in English Movie Review

#### 4.1.1 Linguistic realization of Affect of English movie reviews

Affect is the core of appraisal theory, according to Martin (Martin & White, 2005, 49), affect can group emotions into three major sets having to do with un/happiness, in/security and dis/satisfaction. The following are the samples.

(1) As counterpoint, his life back home with his new wife Taya (Sienna Miller, pictured below with Cooper) and two children becomes strained, as she realises much of him isn't there, but remains combat-ready for his Navy SEAL comrades, who matter to him more than anyone. (Clint gives a patriot super-soldier's view of Iraq, in a leanly effective combat film. January 14, 2015, Rotten tomatoes)

Extract (1) is from a review of historical movie America Sniper. The America Sniper Kyle isn't used to the usual family life anymore while he still cares for his Navy Seal comrades. The reviewer uses "matter to" here to indicate the importance of his comrade for Kyle and to show Kyle's affection to them.

(2) EHI: The affect: dissatisfaction: ennui weariness of Kyle's repetitive killing is also clear, and carried inside Cooper's heavy body and smiling face, until he movingly cracks judgement: social esteem: capacity pictured showing the strain, above. (Clint gives a patriot super-soldier's view of Iraq, in a leanly effective combat film. January 14, 2015, Rotten tomatoes)

Extract (2) comes from the same review of extract (1). Kyle, the legend of America navy, is also a man with conscience and kindness. He is tired of killing others over time, the "weariness" here properly transfers his boredom of the repetitive killing, and it belongs the 'ennui' of 'dissatisfaction' in affect resources.

#### 4.1.2 Linguistic realization of judgement of English movie reviews

Judgement refers to our appraisal towards people and the way they behave. As we have mentioned, it can be classified as social esteem and social sanction. Social esteem has to do with normality, capacity and tenacity while social sanction is with veracity and propriety.

(3) Farmig judgement: social esteem: capacity skillfully alternates judgement: social esteem: capacity fragility and judgement: social esteem: capacity strength as a mother in a dangerous line of work ('The Conjuring' is scariest when its demons go unseen, Jul. 18, 2013, Rotten tomatoes)

(4) We're away at the races with a spook-by-numbers saga of a judgement: social esteem: normality happy couple and their five judgement: social esteem: normality darling daughters moving into an obviously haunted house. (The Conjuring reconjures classic scares: review, Jul. 18, 2013, Rotten tomatoes)

(5) Twitchy judgement: social esteem: tenacity zombies judgement: social esteem: tenacity frantically search out the living, even using their foreheads to beat against car windows, all with the aim of biting their victims into the same unsavory state. (Review: 'World War Z' gets a rise from the undead, June 20, 2013, Rotten tomatoes)

In extract (3), the word "skillfully" is the judgement of one of actor's performance, it conveys the judgement of one's 'capacity', and the words "fragility" and "strength" are the judgement of "mother"-one of the roles in the movie, both "fragility" and "strength" refer to the mother's 'capacity'. In extract (4), the words "happy" and "darling" are the judgements of the characters in the movie-the couple and their daughters, the words "happy" and "darling" all transfer the characters' usuality, they belong to 'normality' of social esteem. Extract (5) is the sample of 'tenacity' in English horror movie review, the words "twitchy" and "frantically" are all the status of zombies, they belong to 'tenacity' of social esteem. The above are all samples of social esteem.

#### 4.1.3 Linguistic realization of Appreciation of English movie reviews

Appreciation is usually used to construe our attitude toward "things", generally it can be divided into 'reaction' which includes 'impact' and 'quality', 'composition' which includes 'balance' and 'complexity', and 'valuation'. The following are the samples.

(6) But it's a film more of appreciation: reaction : quality thrills than appreciation: reaction : quality thoughts, and nothing can top the unforgettable "wow" of the first viewing of appreciation: valuation groundbreaking digital dinosaurs in the original trip to the park. (Jurassic World bites into big dumb dino action: review, Jun. 11, 2015, Rotten tomatoes)

(7) Though they have their appreciation: reaction: impact impressive elements, these celebrations of CGI go on far too appreciation: composition: balance long and weigh the movie down with all the force of Thor's hammer. (Movie review: 'Avengers: Age of Ultron', Apr. 30, 2015, Rotten tomatoes)

The attitudinal resources in extract (6) are appreciations of the film itself and also its special effect. The word "thrill" properly describes a quality as a horror film should bear, "groundbreaking" tells us the commemorative significance of digital dinosaur's first step to the park. Extract (7) also contains the appreciation of special effects, the reviewer uses "impressive"

to acknowledge that the elements impress him, but he still think the celebrations of CGI go too “long” which is beyond the harmonious scope, the appreciation resources in the extract are ‘impact’ of reaction and ‘balance’ of composition.

## 4.2 Linguistic Realization of different types of attitudes in Chinese Movie Review

### 4.2.1 Linguistic realization of Affect of Chinese movie reviews

The linguistic realization of affect in Chinese movie review will be conducted in the perspective of un/happiness, in/security and dis/satisfaction. Here are the samples.

(8)对于家庭生活,凯尔也越来越affect: dissatisfaction: ennui心不在焉,面对妻子的再三挽留和急需父爱的孩子,他一次次坚持重返战场,杀敌以捍卫正义。(《美国狙击手》:美国英雄的赞歌 2015-01-23 时光网)

ET: Kyle was more and more affect: dissatisfaction: ennui absent-minded for family life, facing his wife’s repeated detention and the children who were badly in need of father’s love, he insisted returning to battlefield to fight the enemy and defend the justice again and again. (American Sniper: a Paeon of an American Hero, Jan.23, 2015, Mtime)

(9)三个月前看的《林肯》.之后一直affect: happiness: affection挂念着到现在,看法却还是没变.

(《林肯》:平庸地书写着伟大, Feb.17,2013, Mtime)

ET: I saw the move Lincoln three months ago. It has been affect: happiness: affection lying in my heart until now, and my attitudes towards it have never changed.(Lincoln: to express greatness with banal words, Feb.17,2013, Mtime)

In extract (8), although already back to home, Kyle is not used to normal family life anymore, “absent-minded” conveys us the information that Kyle’s dissatisfaction of family life, he doesn’t like it. In extract (9), the attitude resource is a long sentence, the target of “pity” is the sentence “that the invincible sniper in the battle field was killed by his sibling and he himself was a steadfast supporter of the individual right to have a gun.”. Here, the attitude is ‘misery’ of ‘unhappiness’.

### 4.2.2 Linguistic realization of judgement of Chinese movie reviews

The linguistic realization of judgement will be conducted from the perspective of social esteem: normality, capacity and tenacity and social sanction: veracity and propriety. Here are the samples.

(10)那时候 judgment: social sanction: propriety招蜂引蝶 judgment: social sanction: propriety 血腥玛丽的两个孩子(尤其是妹子), (《鬼影实录3》:伤不起的丈母娘, Feb 15, 2012, Mtime)

ET: At that time, the two kids especially the younger sister are and judgment: social sanction: propriety Bloody Mary style judgment: social sanction: propriety inclined to attract unwelcome attention. (Paranormal Activity 3: the vulnerable mother-in-law, Feb.15,2012, Mtime)

(11)小妹妹晚上不睡觉与看不见的鬼朋友玩游戏,女保姆在家鬼影闪现,男主人judgment: social esteem: tenacity 疑神疑鬼四处查找, (《灵动:鬼影实录3》:血腥玛丽说三次, July29,2012, Mtime)

ET: The little sister kept awake at night and played games with unseen ghost friends, the ghost appeared when the nurse was alone, the host looked for everywhere suspiciously(Paranormal Activity 3: say blood mary three times, July29,2012, Mtime)

In extract (10), the word “inclined to attract unwelcoming attention” shares the same target “two kids” with the word “Bloody Mary style”. the former means that the kids are flighty, “Bloody Mary” is Elizabeth I’ elder sister, she slaughtered countless protestants when she was a queen, she’s a symbol of brutality and tyranny; by the two phrases, the reviewer conveys his judgement of the two kids’ moral characters, the judgement resources here are ‘propriety’ of social sanction. Extract (11) is also an evaluation of plots, “suspiciously” vividly transfers us that the host is scared by the unseen ghost and rummages around fearfully, the judgement resource here is ‘tenacity’ of social esteem.

### 4.2.3 Linguistic realization of appreciation of Chinese movie reviews

The linguistic realization of appreciation in Chinese movie review will be conducted under the three subsystem of appreciation: reaction (impact and quality), composition (balance, complexity), and valuation. The following are the samples.

(12)这部电影中最大的appreciation: reaction: quality亮点,也是不同于其他几部电影的地方,便是这场想象中的战斗,可谓是 appreciation: valuation画龙点睛之笔! (暮光之城4(破晓下)虽然不清楚,但也算是完结了, Dec 29, 2012, Mtime)

ET: The biggest appreciation: reaction: quality highlights of the film which is also the film’s difference from others is the imaginary battle, and it’s the appreciation: valuation finishing touch of the film. (Twilight 4 (Breaking dawn 2): although not clear, it’s the ending, Dec.9,2012, Mtime)

(13)可惜观众等来的并不是高潮,而是集动作探险、低幼爱情、道德说教、女权思想为一身,节奏appreciation: composition: complexity 拖沓、剧情appreciation: reaction: quality狗血的大杂烩(《暮色3:月蚀》:捉襟见肘的青春校园喜剧, Jul 7, 7, Mtime)

ET: However, what the audience waited is not climax, but a hotchpotch which combines action adventure, naïve love, moralization and feminist thoughts together with its appreciation: composition: complexity tardy rhyme and appreciation:

reaction: quality crazy plots. (Twilight 3: Eclipse, a shoddy youth campus comedy, Jul.07, 2010, Mtime)

In extract (12), the reviewer uses “highlight” to express his love to the imaginary battle, the appreciation resource here is ‘quality’ of reaction; In China, only a dragon owns its eyes, it’ll fly and be powerful, “finishing touch ” is the touch of a dragon’s eyes which is quite valuable, it’s the ‘valuation’ resource; In extract (13), “tardy” which means sluggish is a ‘complexity’ resource, while “crazy” is used to modify the terrible situation of the film.

## 5. Results and discussion

### 5.1 Comparative analyses of different types of attitudinal resources between Chinese and English movie review

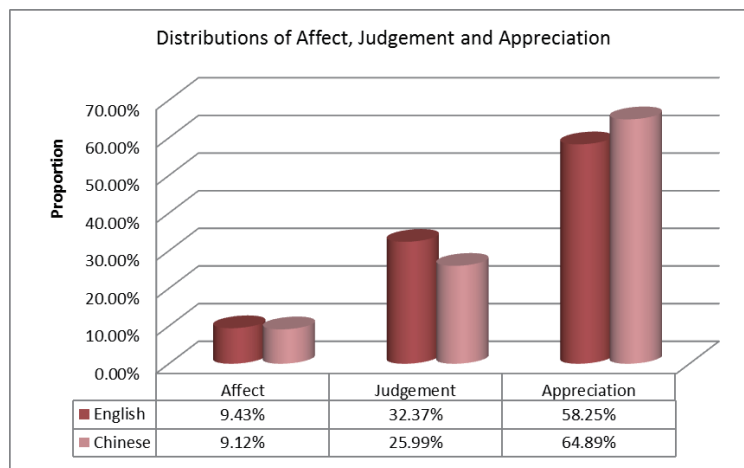


Figure 1. Distributions of Affect, Judgement and Appreciation in English and Chinese Movie Review

Figure 1 is about the overall distributions of attitudinal resources in Chinese and English movie reviews, just as the table shows, the percentage of appreciation resources in Chinese movie is 64.89% which is higher than that of English movie review which is 58.25%; and accordingly, the percentages of affect resources and judgement resources in English movie review are higher than those in Chinese movie review. This is because of the different context culture background of the two movie reviews. According to Edward Hall, Chinese culture bears higher context characteristics while American culture possesses lower context ones. The people living in high context culture are reserved and indirect when they express their ideas while the one living in low context culture tend to be frankly, thereby, the affect resources which express feelings and the judgement resources which judge people’s behaviors from the perspective of ethics as well as laws and regulations in English movie review are more than those in Chinese movie review.

### 5.2 The different distributions of subtypes of affect in Chinese and English movie reviews

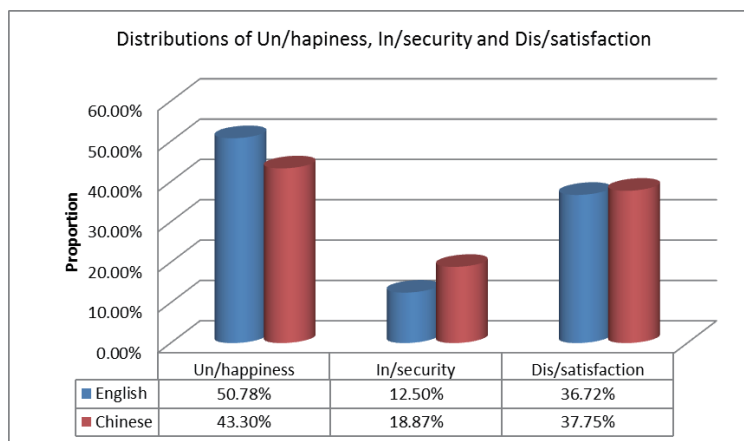


Figure 2. Distributions of the Subtypes of Affect in Chinese and English Movie Review



Figure 2 is about the distributions of the subtypes of affect in Chinese and English Movie Review. As the table shows, the percentage of ‘un/happiness’ resources in English movie review is 50.78% which is higher than that in Chinese movie review which is 43.3%, while the percentages of in/security and dis/satisfaction resources in Chinese movie review are slight higher than those in English movie review. The reason of the different distributions can also be explained by Hall’s high and low context culture theory, the emotions just like sadness, happiness, affection, and antipathy transferred by ‘un/happiness’ are more instinctive and straight than the feelings transferred by ‘in/security’ and ‘dis/satisfaction’, the Chinese movie reviewers who live in a higher context culture use less ‘un/happiness’ resource is reasonable and understandable.

### 5.3 The different distributions of subtypes of judgement in Chinese and English movie reviews

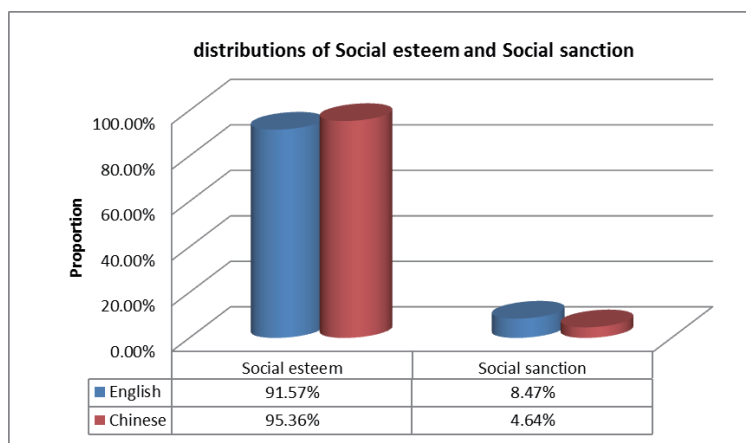


Figure 3. Distributions of the Subtypes of Judgement in Chinese and English Movie Review

As for the distributions of the subtypes of judgement in Chinese and English movie Review, we finds that the percentage of social esteem resources in English is 91.57% while that in Chinese movie review is 95.36%,The former is lower than the latter. That’s because as a high context culture country, China has long history and traditions, most of its information lies in its context, there’s no necessary to point out which behavior are against laws and regulations. America, as a low context culture country, its many information must be expressed clearly and frankly, and its many social rules are systemized as laws and regulations. That’s why the usage of social sanction in Chinese movie review is less than that in English movie review, accordingly, the percentage of social esteem in Chinese movie review is larger than that in English movie review.

### 5.4 The different distributions of subtypes of appreciation in Chinese and English movie reviews

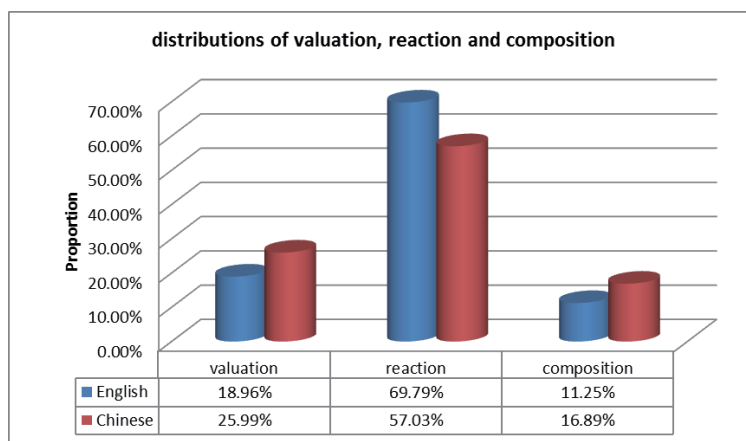


Figure 4. Distributions of the Subtypes of Appreciation in Chinese and English Movie Review

Figure 4 is about the distributions of reaction, valuation and composition in English and Chinese movie reviews. The proportion of reaction resources in Chinese movie review is 69.79% which is higher than that in English movie review; accordingly, the proportions of valuation and composition resources in Chinese movie review are lower than those in English movie review. Reaction resources are usually institutive feelings towards whole films, film plots, special effects etc. The

Chinese film reviewers who live in a high context culture are more inclined to be reasonable, so the proportion of their use of institutive ‘reaction’ are lower than that of America reviewers; and accordingly, the proportions of their use of ‘valuation’ and ‘composition’ are higher than those of America reviewers.

## 6. Findings

As far as types of attitude, the percentages of Chinese affect and appreciation resources are lower than those of English affect resources while the percentage of Chinese judgement resources is higher than that of English judgement resources; in the subtype affect, the percentage of English un/happiness resources is larger than that of Chinese un/happiness resources while the percentages of English in/security and dis/satisfaction resources are smaller than those of Chinese.

Reviewers’ culture background accounts a lot for the results. The Chinese reviewers who live in a high context control culture may choose different kinds of attitudinal resources from those America reviewers who live in a relatively low context control culture.

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