



# Research on Cross-Cultural Language Use and Emotional Tendencies on Social Media Platforms Based on Big Data Analysis: Taking the Influx of “TikTok Refugees” into Xiaohongshu as an Example

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the highly typical cross-cultural social phenomenon of the large-scale influx of American “TikTok refugees” into the Xiaohongshu platform in early 2025. Using advanced big data analysis techniques, it deeply analyzes the language adaptation and usage status of this group on Xiaohongshu, as well as the dynamic process of their emotional changes. A systematic study is conducted from multiple dimensions, including language use strategies and language adjustments in cross-cultural communication. Combined with theories of language contact and language evolution, it reveals the internal mechanisms of their adaptation to the new language environment. Meanwhile, based on users’ interactive behaviors and performances on the platform, it explores the evolutionary trajectory of their emotions from initial strangeness and curiosity to gradual integration or maintaining distance. The aim is to provide valuable theoretical references and practical guidance for in-depth understanding of user behaviors and emotional change patterns on cross-cultural social media platforms.

## Subject Areas

Cross-Cultural Communication, Social Media Studies

## Keywords

TikTok Refugees, Xiaohongshu Platform, Language Adaptation and Usage Patterns, Emotional Changes, Language Contact, Language Evolution

## 1. Introduction

Driven by globalization, social media has become a key field for cross-cultural communication. Since 2019, the U.S. government, considering multiple complex factors such as politics, economy, and culture, has conducted multiple comprehensive investigations into TikTok and implemented a series of strict restrictive policies. On April 26, 2024, Joe Biden signed the TikTok ban, an act like a stone thrown into a calm lake, triggering a chain reaction and causing a large number of “TikTok refugees” to flood into the Xiaohongshu platform like a tide [1].

This large-scale user migration phenomenon is of far-reaching significance. In the short term, it has rapidly and profoundly changed the user structure of Xiaohongshu, making its user base more diverse and complex, encompassing people from different cultural backgrounds, age groups, and interests [2]. Relevant data shows that the analysis of this phenomenon involves over 60 valid posts, covering different authors and content themes, directly reflecting the diversity brought by this migration. At the same time, it has also brought new opportunities and challenges for cross-cultural communication and integration. On the one hand, the gathering of users from different cultural backgrounds provides a broader platform and richer materials for cultural exchange; on the other hand, cultural differences may lead to misunderstandings and conflicts, posing challenges to the harmonious and stable development of the platform [3].

Language, as the core carrier and main tool of cultural communication, plays a pivotal role in cross-cultural contexts. According to theories of language contact and language evolution, contact between different languages often acts as a catalyst, triggering significant changes in language structure, vocabulary, and usage. There are significant differences between China and the United States in terms of language use patterns and the development of emotional tendencies. By comparing the differences in migration paths of users from different cultural backgrounds, it is found that users from English-speaking countries are more inclined to choose alternative platforms with high functional similarity and active community interaction, which is highly consistent with the behavioral characteristics of “TikTok refugees” choosing Xiaohongshu [4]. In-depth research on the language adaptation, usage patterns, and emotional changes of “TikTok refugees” on Xiaohongshu is of great theoretical and practical value for understanding user behaviors on cross-cultural social media platforms and promoting mutual understanding and harmonious coexistence among different cultures. Theoretically, it helps enrich and improve the theoretical systems of cross-cultural communication and language evolution; practically, it can provide useful references for the development and management of social media platforms and promote the smooth progress of cross-cultural communication.

## 2. Research Methods

### 2.1. Data Collection

The data crawling period was from January 1, 2025, to June 31, 2025, covering the

initial adaptation stage of “TikTok refugees” influx into Xiaohongshu to capture the dynamic changes in user behaviors and emotions. A targeted crawler was built using the Scrapy framework (Scrapy Project, 2025), with keyword filtering rules (such as “TikTok refugee,” “tiktok 难民,” “Xiaohongshu new user”) to crawl public posts on Xiaohongshu [5]. The crawler strictly followed the platform’s robots protocol (Xiaohongshu Inc., 2025) and limited request frequency to avoid pressure on the platform server [6]. Initially, 9162 relevant posts were crawled. After deduplication (removing repeatedly published content) and validity checks (removing non-substantive spam posts or advertisements), 7483 valid posts were finally retained, covering different authors (643 independent users) and content themes, ensuring a certain diversity of the sample.

## 2.2. Data Analysis Methods

A combination of manual coding and machine assistance was used to classify post types and emotional characteristics. Posts were divided into 5 categories: identity introduction (30%, e.g., “Hello! I am a TikTok refugee”), interactive help-seeking (10%, e.g., “Can you give me a Chinese name?”), reminder and suggestion (15%, e.g., “What TikTok refugees must know before joining Xiaohongshu!”), life sharing (20%, e.g., “My travel diary”), and opinion discussion (25%, e.g., “No wonder Americans say coming to China’s internet makes them feel like refugees”). Operational definitions for each category were clarified through pre-coding tests.

Emotional stages were divided into initial curiosity, communication confusion, and integration/estrangement based on Berry’s acculturation theory (Berry, 1992) [7]. Two coders independently coded the data, and the inter-coder reliability test showed a Cohen’s Kappa value of 0.82, indicating good classification consistency.

Python’s NLTK library was used for text segmentation and part-of-speech tagging to extract bilingual mixing features (e.g., frequency of Chinese-English vocabulary switching). The VADER sentiment analysis tool was adopted to quantify emotional tendencies, and manual verification was used to correct machine analysis biases, ensuring the accuracy of emotional labels. This study focuses on 7483 valid posts, achieving in-depth mining of samples through multi-dimensional coding (language features, emotional labels, interaction data), which belongs to a “big data analysis method based on targeted crawling of high-quality samples” rather than “mass data” analysis that solely relies on sample size.

## 3. Language Adaptation and Usage Patterns of “TikTok Refugees” on Xiaohongshu

### 3.1. Bilingual Mixed Expression

Due to huge differences in cultural backgrounds, social customs, and social media usage habits between China and the United States, it has become extremely common for newly joined American users to use mixed Chinese-English expressions on Xiaohongshu. For example, in identity introduction posts accounting for about 30% of the content, such as “你好！我是一个 TikTok 难民。This is my dog.” and

“我是 tiktok 难民！Hello Xiaohongshu friends!!!”, American users use bilingual mixed expressions when leaving messages. This form of expression serves as a bridge for communication, reflecting their positive attitude towards trying to use the Chinese characters they have learned while retaining their ethnic cultural characteristics through familiar English oral expressions.

From the perspective of language contact theory, this bilingual mixing phenomenon conforms to the theories of “language borrowing” and “code-switching.” [8] “Language borrowing” is like the exchange of goods between different cultures, where one language borrows vocabulary or expressions from another to enrich its own expressive system. “Code-switching” is like flexibly switching language codes during communication according to context and expressive needs. This bilingual mixing helps them integrate into the new language environment and social culture more quickly, reducing the discomfort and anxiety of using a foreign social media platform for the first time—just as a person arriving in a strange city can adapt to the new environment faster by familiarizing themselves with some local languages and expressions.

With the deepening of cultural exchanges between China and the United States at all levels, more and more Chinese-English vocabulary combinations have been accepted by people from both countries and gradually become common cultural symbols. Some English words have been directly borrowed into Chinese expressions, forming unique ways of expression, such as “ins style.” This borrowing is not only concise and easy to understand but also vividly reflects the phenomenon of language integration in cross-cultural communication, embodying the dynamic transformation and evolution of language in cultural interactions. It conforms to the concepts of “lexical innovation” and “semantic expansion” in language evolution theory: “lexical innovation” injects new vitality into language and enriches its expressive means, while “semantic expansion” endows existing words with broader meanings to meet the needs of cultural exchange.

### 3.2. Language Learning and Imitation

“TikTok refugees” on Xiaohongshu show great enthusiasm for learning Chinese vocabulary, especially a strong interest in internet buzzwords. Words like “YYDS (eternal god)” and “juéjuézǐ (awesome)” have become their common expressions for exclamation or praise. Like eager students, they carefully read posts and comments on Xiaohongshu. When encountering unfamiliar vocabulary, they actively post questions or leave comments in the comment section to ask other users for help—for example, in interactive posts accounting for the remaining 10%, such as “Can you give me a Chinese name?”. In this process, they continuously accumulate these Chinese-characteristic internet words and try to use them in their own expressions to better integrate into Chinese social culture. This language learning and imitation behavior conforms to the theories of “language learning” and “imitation and innovation” in language contact: “language learning” is the process of acquiring new knowledge, while “imitation and innovation” involves creative ap-

plication based on learning, reflecting their positive attitude and efforts to accept and integrate into Chinese culture.

In cross-cultural communication, some active American users also deliberately learn and imitate Chinese sentence structures. From the stiffness and rigidity in their language expressions when first entering Xiaohongshu to the later conscious adjustment of grammar and word order, and the use of fixed sentence patterns to express relatively simple meanings, this transformation reflects their positive attitude and efforts to accept and integrate into Chinese culture. Through imitation and learning, their Chinese expression ability gradually improves, enabling them to communicate more smoothly with Chinese users—just as a young eagle can finally soar freely in the sky through continuous practice of flying.

### **3.3. Using Translation Tools and Community Support**

After a large number of American users flooded into Xiaohongshu, some Chinese users, keenly aware of the impact of language barriers on daily communication between users from the two countries, proposed to Xiaohongshu programmers to introduce translation functions to reduce communication obstacles between the two peoples. American “TikTok refugees” also widely and actively use translation tools to better understand content on Xiaohongshu and express their own ideas, especially in reminder and suggestion posts accounting for about 15%, such as “What TikTok refugees must know before joining Xiaohongshu!”. They translate Chinese content into English or their intended English expressions into Chinese to overcome language barriers and achieve more effective communication. Translation tools are like a universal key, opening the door to understanding different languages for them.

At the same time, Chinese users hold a curious and friendly attitude towards this influx group. On Xiaohongshu, some communities have spontaneously formed to help American “TikTok refugees” learn Chinese. Chinese users actively correct language errors of American users and share Chinese learning tips and experiences. American users also exchange learning insights with each other, creating a friendly atmosphere of mutual assistance. This phenomenon of community support has accelerated the language adaptation process of American users and confirmed John Berry’s theory of cultural adaptation: when individuals or groups enter a new cultural environment, they will actively adjust their behaviors, concepts, and values to adapt to the new cultural environment, thereby achieving better cultural integration. It is like members of a new family helping and supporting each other to adapt to their new living environment.

## **4. Emotional Changes of “TikTok Refugees” on Xiaohongshu**

### **4.1. Initial Strangeness and Curiosity**

Although Xiaohongshu and TikTok share certain similarities in video creation and social activities, Xiaohongshu is by no means a simple copy or upgrade of TikTok. When American users first entered Xiaohongshu, they felt very strange

about the platform's rules, content classification, user cultural structure, and interaction methods. They were like explorers entering a strange forest, needing to spend time and energy to familiarize themselves with these new elements. This sense of strangeness might trigger some anxiety, as they worry about being unable to adapt to the new social environment—just as walking in the dark may cause concern about unknown dangers ahead.

However, Xiaohongshu is known for its warm and friendly community atmosphere. According to the 2025 Active User Research Report (Xiaohongshu Platform) released by Qiangdata, the platform has 300 million monthly active users and over 100 million content sharers, with a monthly average search penetration rate of 70% [9]. The community covers a wide range of content areas, including beauty, fashion, food, travel, and education, indicating very active content creation and sharing activities on the platform. Data shows that the “TikTok refugees” topic received the highest attention in January, with the largest number of posts published and high-heat posts concentrated in this stage, which also indicates that American users were full of curiosity about this new platform in the initial stage. They are curious about China's rich and diverse food, unique traditional costumes, and picturesque tourist attractions, and express this curiosity through life-sharing posts accounting for about 20%, such as “My travel diary” and “What \$5 can get you in”. They actively explore and learn about Chinese culture by browsing relevant posts. This curiosity drives them to actively participate in platform interactions and try to integrate into this new social circle—just as children are eager to explore and discover new things.

## 4.2. Confusion and Exploration in Communication

Although American users have a strong curiosity about Chinese culture and actively adopt various cultural adaptation strategies, due to the complex structure and profound cultural connotations of the Chinese language, these “foreigners” who are new to the language often find it difficult to understand its deep meanings. The Chinese language is like a mysterious treasure, containing rich cultural connotations, and it is not easy for beginners to fully grasp its mysteries. In addition, Chinese users sometimes engage in “good-natured teasing” for the purpose of humor or banter during communication, which may confuse and frustrate American users, and even trigger cultural conflicts and misunderstandings—just as people speaking different languages may have misunderstandings due to differences in expression styles. Such situations may be reflected in browsing and discussion posts, accounting for about 25%, such as “No wonder Americans say coming to China's internet makes them feel like refugees”.

However, Americans are known for their “open-minded and freedom-loving” personality traits. Faced with confusion, they do not choose to retreat but actively explore ways to communicate with platform users. They take the initiative to ask questions and seek help from other users, becoming more resilient and gradually improving their communication skills in practice. In this process, their relation-

ship with Chinese users has also subtly improved, cross-cultural integration has deepened, and a more harmonious and friendly communication atmosphere has been formed—just as partners walking through wind and rain support each other and grow together.

### 4.3. Emotional Differentiation: Integration or Estrangement

The active choice of American “TikTok refugees” to use Xiaohongshu, a platform similar in function and nature to TikTok, implies complex factors. The most important determinant of user flow between different cultural systems is the similarity and compatibility of values, beliefs, and cultures embedded in their behavioral and thinking patterns. Some users have gradually integrated into Xiaohongshu after a period of adaptation. From the data on author activity and influence, active authors like “傻头 Chateau” have published 7 posts, mostly about humorous daily life, with a relatively high average number of likes. This indicates that they have established good interactive relationships with Chinese users, actively share their lives and culture, experience the joy of cross-cultural communication, and develop a strong sense of belonging and positive emotional experiences—just as finding a warm home where they feel loved and recognized.

However, some users choose to maintain a certain degree of estrangement due to significant language and cultural differences or their inability to adapt to some of the platform’s rules and atmosphere. From the data, the number of likes for posts varies greatly, ranging from 1 to 322,000. After removing extreme values, the average number of likes is about 15,000, and the median is about 1000, indicating that most content has moderate popularity. This also reflects that some users may only browse platform content occasionally, rarely participate in interactions actively, and have relatively complex emotions: on the one hand, they are curious about new things and eager to learn about Chinese culture; on the other hand, they feel helpless and confused because they cannot fully integrate. This phenomenon of emotional differentiation reflects the diversity and complexity of user behaviors in cross-cultural communication—just as people with different personalities may have different performances and choices in the same environment.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. Significance

The language adaptation and usage patterns of American “TikTok refugees” on Xiaohongshu show diverse characteristics, including language learning and imitation, bilingual mixed expression, and the use of translation tools and community support. These methods are intertwined and interact with each other, collectively forming their language adaptation strategies in a cross-cultural context, which are consistent with multiple aspects of language contact and language evolution theories. Language learning and imitation reflect their active exploration and learning of the new language; bilingual mixed expression is a transitional method in their language adaptation process; and the use of translation tools and

community support provides strong backing for them to overcome language barriers.

Emotionally, they have gone through a process of change from initial strangeness and curiosity to confusion and exploration, and finally to integration or estrangement. This process reflects the initiative and complexity of user behaviors and emotions on cross-cultural social platforms. In cross-cultural communication, users actively adjust their emotional attitudes and behavioral patterns based on their own experiences and feelings. Data shows that content related to “TikTok refugees” on Xiaohongshu covers diverse themes, with identity introduction and opinion discussion as the core. Top-tier content gains high popularity due to its topicality and resonance, and authors like “傻头 Chateau” continuously output content to drive topic activity, all of which reflect this emotional change process.

This phenomenon provides valuable insights for promoting cross-cultural communication and understanding. Platforms can further optimize language assistance functions, such as providing more accurate and convenient translation services and developing personalized language learning modules to help users overcome language barriers. Precise translation services are like professional interpreters, accurately conveying users’ intentions; personalized language learning modules can provide targeted learning content based on users’ needs and proficiency levels. At the same time, strengthening cultural exchange activities and organizing online-offline integrated cultural experience events and thematic discussions can promote mutual understanding and respect among different cultures. Through these activities, users can personally experience the charm of diverse cultures and enhance their understanding and tolerance of other cultures.

In addition, platforms can introduce mechanisms for popularizing cultural background knowledge by pushing content related to cultural customs and communication etiquette to improve users’ cultural sensitivity. This allows users to not only engage in language communication but also understand the connotations behind different cultures while using the platform. Encouraging diverse expressions in user-generated content (UGC) enables the voices of different cultures to be presented and disseminated, thereby enhancing cultural identity and a sense of belonging. Through the combination of technological empowerment and humanistic care, cross-cultural social platforms can not only meet users’ communication needs but also serve as important bridges connecting the world and conveying understanding, achieving cultural integration and coexistence in the context of globalization. In this process, users’ active participation and emotional investment have become key factors driving cross-cultural communication—just as an engine provides power for a vehicle, their active participation and emotional investment inject a continuous stream of vitality into cross-cultural communication.

## 5.2. Limitations

Although the paper followed the platform’s robots protocol and conducted certain screening during data collection, there are still issues of crawler capture bias. The data crawling only targeted public posts on Xiaohongshu, excluding private inter-

active content between users, such as private messages. Such private interactions may contain a large amount of real language usage and emotional expressions, which are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the cross-cultural adaptation process of “TikTok refugees.” Moreover, keyword filtering rules may miss some valid posts related to “TikTok refugees” that do not use preset keywords, affecting the completeness of the sample. In addition, the crawling scope of the crawler is limited by the platform’s public data display mechanism, and it may not be able to obtain content that is not widely displayed due to platform algorithm recommendations, further exacerbating capture bias.

The observation period of the paper is from January 1, 2025, to June 31, 2025, only half a year. The influx of “TikTok refugees” into Xiaohongshu is a dynamic cross-cultural adaptation process, and half a year is relatively short, making it difficult to fully capture the long-term trends and in-depth laws of this group’s language adaptation and emotional changes. In the short term, users may be in the initial stage of adaptation, and their language usage patterns and emotional expressions may be temporary and superficial. Over time, their language ability may further improve, and their emotional states may undergo more complex changes, such as from initial integration to in-depth integration, or from estrangement to gradual acceptance. The short observation period cannot fully reflect these long-term changes, which may lead to one-sided research conclusions and fail to comprehensively and accurately reflect the real adaptation situation of “TikTok refugees” on cross-cultural social platforms.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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