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Theorizing Intercultural Adaptation from the Perspective of Boundary Game*

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Abstract: The impact of globalization on human society strongly demands a constructive process of intercultural adaptation and a more systematic study of the concept. In order to tackle the problem of conceptual ambiguity in the existing literature, this analytical paper attempts to lay down the conceptual foundation by theorizing intercultural adaptation as a boundary game after a brief review of the previous literature. Intercultural adaptation as a boundary game is further supported by the argument that the boundary game of intercultural adaptation must be treated as totality. The author then advocates "boundary wisdom" as the key to the success of achieving the goal of intercultural adaptation. It is hoped that the analysis in this paper can provide a basic guideline for further research on the subject of intercultural adaptation and for further employing the idea of boundary game to theorize the study of intercultural communication. [China Media Research. 2013; 9(1): 1-10]

Intercultural adaptation is an infinite game played by souls haunted by their own cultural spirits. An infinite game, according to Carse (1986), is not "for the purpose of winning", but "for the purpose of continuing the play" (p. 3). Thus, intercultural adaptation is a continuing process of interaction between two cultural beings. It refers to the reach of a potential harmonious state of equilibrium and co-production originated from the mutual exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages between the two opposite poles (Teng, 1997). In other words, intercultural adaptation, as a dynamic process, aims to extend the degree of mutual understanding, to explode the force of mutual respect, and to expand the space of mutual acceptance. "Understanding -> respect -> acceptance" therefore points to the progressive direction of intercultural adaptation. Moreover, this interactional process of intercultural adaptation can be treated as a boundary game. The paper is divided into two parts to delineate this argument. The first part briefly reviews the literature of research on intercultural adaptation, and in the second part the author theorizes intercultural adaptation from the perspective of boundary game.

A Brief Literature Review of the Study of Intercultural Adaptation

As one of the earliest and most important concepts in the area of intercultural communication, intercultural adaptation has been studied in different disciplines for decades and abundant essays and research findings have provided rich information regarding the concept in the extant literature. Approaches to the study of intercultural adaptation can be sorted out from four perspectives: (1) levels of the study, (2) types of the study, (3) models of the study, and (4) dimensions of the concept.

Levels of the Study

As Kim (1995) pointed out, the study of intercultural adaptation can be classified into the individual level and group level. The individual-level study focuses on the psychological adjustment of a sojourner in a new or unfamiliar culture. Based on the observation of individual experiences in the process of intrapersonal reaction and interpersonal interaction in an unfamiliar environment, the re-socialization and coping process of those newcomers, including immigrants, temporary sojourners, refugees, and members of different ethnic groups, can be explained and understood. This individual-level approach to the study of intercultural adaptation is mainly adopted by scholars in Psychology and Communication disciplines (e.g., Berry, 1992; Chambers, Kambon, & Birdsong, 1998; Furnham, 1987; Kinefuchi, 2010; Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998).

The group-level study of intercultural adaptation traditionally was led by scholars in the disciplines of Anthropology and Sociology since the early 20th century. In Anthropology, especially for cultural psychologists, a main focus of scholarly inquiry is the acculturation process of groups of people from different cultures encounter, which tends to result in the transformation of cultural belief or value orientation in either or both groups (e.g., Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Scholars in Sociology are more concerned with the study of group relationships, e.g., minority/majority or between ethnic groups, from the perspective of power or resources distribution in the interactional process. This can be demonstrated by abundant studies on the process of how a minority/co-cultural group integrates into the economical, political, and social systems of the mainstream or host society (e.g., Gibson, 2001; Hegde, 2002; Kim, Lujan, & Dixon, 1998; Marrett & Leggon, 1982; Valencia, 1991; Van Oudenhoven & Eisses, 1998; Witteborn, 2008).

Types of the Study

The study of intercultural adaptation can be examined from the types or categories of interactants involved in the adaptation process. According to Brislin (1981), the cross-cultural interactants can be organized into 14 types: foreign students, business persons assigned in another country, diplomats and members of an embassy, language interpreters working in international organizations or conferences, technical assistance personnel assigned to overseas, participants in organized programs such as the Peace Corps, military personnel overseas, immigrants, internationally collaborated researchers, tourists, different ethnic groups, people participating in arranged interethnic contact such as an interracial summer camp or government-funded housing projects, ethnic groups required by authorities to move to another area, and students who live and work with culturally different members in a program such as "home stay." Among the categories, most of them happen in the context of a host culture, and the others are in the same country.

Although the categories look tedious and seem to overlap in some of them, the plentiful studies in each type of encounter have provided valuable information for learning about the nature of intercultural adaptation from different facets. In addition, research results regarding each type of cross-cultural contact are usually highly helpful for institutional or government policy-making in forming the necessary understanding of and assistance to the specific group.

Models of the Study

The study of intercultural adaptation can be encompassed by five general models that describe the process of adapting to a new culture: the recuperation model, the learning model, the recovery model, the dynamic tension reduction model, and the dialectical model (Anderson, 1994; Chen & Starosta, 2005).

The recuperation model is best described by the study of "culture shock" (Oberg, 1960). This model posits that the recovery from culture shock is the mechanism for a sojourner to successfully adapt to the new life in the host culture. As Lysgarrd's (1955) U-shaped curve illustrated, after sojourners go through the initial honeymoon stage of experiencing the new life in the host culture, they'll face the impact of culture shock, which locates at the bottom of the U-shaped curve. Only through overcoming culture shock can sojourners move up to top of the U curve by gradually adjusting to the host culture and finally reaching the state of full adjustment or becoming a "multicultural person" (Adler, 1975, 1998), which, as well, indicates the reestablishment of one's identity (Adler, 1987; Bennett, 1977; Moran, Harris, & Moran, 2010).

The learning model points out that intercultural adaptation is a process of getting to know the socio-cultural conventions, including perceptual and behavioral rules, of the host culture. It is a process of reaching intercultural communication competence, which is comprised of three main factors: intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural adroitness/effectiveness (Chen, 2010; Chen & Starosta, 1996; Chen & Young, 2012). While the social learning theory and scholars in the discipline of Psychology emphasize more the learning of perceptual and behavioral rules of the new environment (e.g., David, 1976; Triandis, 1980), communication scholars put the emphasis on the acquisition of verbal and nonverbal communication skills necessary for being effective and appropriate in interacting with the host nationals (e.g., Gudykunst & Hammer, 1984; Ruben, 1976; Wiseman, 2003).

Different from the recuperation model, which focuses on the symptom of culture shock, the recovery model of intercultural adaptation centers on the process of short-term sojourners or long-term immigrants in "a step-by-step psychological journey from the fringes to the center of a foreign culture, from a state of denial or ignorance to a state of understanding and empathy" (Anderson, 1994, p. 295) through the learning process (Katcher, 1971). The stage by stage process from honeymoon, crisis, adjustment, to biculturalism of the U-shaped curve is a typical example of this approach. Another example is Bennett's (1986) developmental model of intercultural adaptation, which dictates that the development of intercultural sensitivity moves from an ethnocentric stage to the final stage of ethnorelativity.

The next model treats intercultural adaptation as a dynamic process of uncertainty or tension reduction. It assumes that the equilibrium state of the sojourners' mental system begins to face the challenge or leads to disruption when they encounter the new cultural elements of the host culture. This experience will cause tension and uncertainty and the sojourners tend to develop a certain kind of drive or need to cope with the internal imbalance or dissonance provided by the tension and uncertainty situation (e.g., Gao & Gudykunst, 1990; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1987; Wong-Rieger, 1984). Torbiorn's (1982) subjective adjustment model well reflects this approach. Torbiorn argued that the degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction sojourners perceive of the experiences in the host culture will change the relationships between their frame of reference, their behavior, and the environment. In other words, satisfaction of the sojourner tends to lead to the internal balance which will in turn result in the attainment of the goal of intercultural adaptation, and vice versa.

Finally, the dialectical model considers intercultural adaptation as a cyclic and recursive process in which sojourners try to cope with the problems caused by the interaction with the host culture (Chen & Starosta,

2005). Anderson (1994) contended that every cycle of problem-solving in the process of intercultural adaptation represents a sense of "rebirth" to the sojourner. The model integrates different aspects of previous intercultural adaptation research by treating drive or motivation as the force that moves sojourners to learn to accommodate to the new culture. Thus, the intercultural adaptation and learning are interdependent in the process of tackling the "stumbling blocks" (Barna, 1998) through the development of problem solving strategies. Moreover, the cyclic, continuous, and interactive nature of intercultural adaptation emphasized by this approach implies the personal development and transformation of the sojourner embedded in the change of affection, cognition, and behaviors required to face the challenge of cultural differences in the new environment (Kim, 2003; Taylor, 1994).

These approaches are very helpful in understanding the study of intercultural adaptation from different perspectives, though the classification is arbitrary. In fact, the distinctions among these approaches are more on the degree of emphasis rather than of content or substance. Basically, the first four models tend to treat intercultural adaptation as a linear process, while the last integrated model shows a more dynamic and nonlinear nature of intercultural adaptation.

Dimensions of the Concept

The final approach to the study of intercultural adaption is to explore the dimensions or main elements of the concept, which either examines the concept as a developmental process or as containing discrete dimensions. For example, when studying the concept of "culture shock", which was sometimes used interchangeably with intercultural adaptation, Oberg (1960) identified six dimensions of the experience of culture shock, including the feeling of stress, the feeling of loss, the feeling of being rejected or rejecting, the feeling of confusion, the feeling of anxiety, and the feeling of impotence. Culture shock might also be examined from six dimensions, including language shock (Smalley, 1963), role shock (Higbee, 1969), transition shock (Bennett, 1977), culture fatigue (Guthrie, 1975), education shock (Hoff, 1979), adjustment stress (Barna, 1983), and culture distance (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980). In addition, Furnham and Bochner (1986) identified eight dimensions for the study of sojourner's adjustment. They are movement as loss, fatalism, selective migration, appropriate

expectations, negative life events, social support, a clash of values, and social skills deficit.

Studies treating intercultural adaptation as a developmental process with different stages or dimensions are commonly found in literature. For example, Mansell (1981) pointed out that the sojourner's emotional and affective experiences in the process of intercultural adaptation can be found in four developmental dimensions: alienation, marginality, acculturation, and duality. Taylor' (1994) transformative learning model separates the process of intercultural adaptation into three dimensions of the precondition to change, the process, and the outcome. The four stages of intercultural adaptation in the U-Curve pattern developed by Lysgaard (1955) previously discussed is also a good example.

Together, all these approaches demonstrate the fruitful research findings and theories of the study of intercultural adaptation from diverse academic disciplines. The achievements of research in this area provide a variety of information for the understanding of the concept and the process of intercultural adaptation. However, the rich literature is still waiting for the agreement of the definition of the concept among scholars. It's the attempt of this paper to tackle this problem of conceptual ambiguity by theorizing the concept based on the argument that intercultural adaptation is a boundary game.

Intercultural Adaptation as a Boundary Game

Intercultural adaptation demands a space, in which the interactants of differing cultures work as teammates to redefine the boundary through the process of negotiation. In this paper, boundary is treated as the invisible line that demarcates the two players on the basis of cultural differences embedded in the core values of each culture. Through the redefinition and restructuring of the boundary, the demarcating line between the two cultural beings is gradually expanding to a border, then a frontier. A border is usually considered as a narrow zone, while a frontier refers to a larger region (Anderson, 1982; Prescott, 1987). In other words, constant boundary-crossing is the function of intercultural adaptation that blurs the cultural line and grows into a border and further enlarges into a frontier of intercultural understanding. This frontier is what we call the contact area or the space of intercultural adaptation. Figure 1 shows the boundary model of intercultural adaptation.
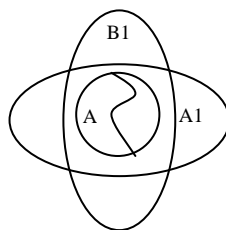
Figure 1. The boundary model of intercultural adaptation

The contact area reflects a high degree of ambiguity and uncertainty caused by the differences between the two cultural beings. It is the interaction, either struggling for control or driving for cooperation, of the two parties within this space that defines or ascribes one's cultural identity. Hence, the formation, maintenance and validation of cultural identity are based on the discrimination of cultural differences in the boundary-expanding space (Barth, 1969; Cohen, 2000a). Each party in the process of intercultural adaptation may not only perceive cultural differences as a matter of relativity, but also of kind. Thus, we argue that it is necessary to treat the concept of boundary as the foundation of intercultural adaptation and furthermore as the center in constructing intercultural communication theory. It is in the boundary-frontier area a culture reveals its dynamic nature in terms of the cyclic and transformative process between the two contrastive forces, such as center/periphery, power/powerless, and authentic/inauthentic.

In Figure 1 A and B represent the two interactants as two interdependent and interpenetrating cultural entities. Each entity is a self-dependent and self-changing system within its own culture (Chen, 2006). However, it is the interaction and connection of the two entities that forms a complete and holistic system of intercultural adaptation. Although contradictions and conflicts are inevitable in the interactional process, the success of intercultural adaptation depends on the ability of interactants to keep a dynamic balance. The interdependent existence of the two cultural entities and their interaction leading to a great whole reveal that the dynamic nature of intercultural adaptation is relativistic (Cheng, 1987). Independently, the two entities are a closed system respectively, in which the internal change is manifested by its self-absorbed and self-collected nature embedded in its own culture. However, through intercultural adaptation a synthetic unity of the two entities is unveiled in different stages of interaction.

The line between A and B in Figure 1 represents the boundary line that demarcates the two interactants of A and B. This boundary line is gradually extended and expanded to the area of the intersection, indicating the border or frontier of intercultural adaptation, of the ellipses A1 and B1 (A=A1; B=B1) through the process of interfusion, interpenetration, co-identification, and co-production. The expansion of the boundary line into a border or frontier explicates the magnification of intercultural space on the basis of mutual understanding, respect, and acceptance of cultural differences.

The dynamic balance of intercultural adaptation is sustained through the movement from opposition to unification or fellowship founded on the transformation of cultural differences into cultural understanding and acceptance (Wilhelm, 1979). This transformation is reflected on the two kinds of change produced by intercultural adaptation, i.e., substance change and velocity change. Both changes are dictated by the degree of cultural differences between the two interactants.

According to Chen (2008, 2009a), the substance change of intercultural adaptation refers to quantity and quality transformation. The former is demonstrated by the positional change after the interactants understand each other's cultural differences and are willing to put their feet into their counterpart's shoes to further elevate the communication to the level of acceptance, while the latter is manifested on the change of relationship from casual to personal level due to the increase of breadth and depth of verbal and nonverbal exchanges (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

The velocity change shows the speed of motion reflected in the expansion from the boundary line to the border and frontier in the process of intercultural adaptation. It is comprised of gradual change and sudden change. The gradual change is an evolutionary process of the accumulation of every action of intercultural adaptation in the web woven by temporal and spatial contingencies. This can be illustrated by the achievement of being included and establishing a more personal relationship based on the gradual movement of quantity and quality changes of intercultural adaptation. As Chen (2009a) pointed out, when the gradual change reaches its saturation level, the acceleration of the movement in the process of intercultural adaptation will emerge and in turn lead to a revolutionary or sudden change. The sudden change happens when the magnitude of the accumulative forces produces a thrust power that results in the emergence of a new attitude of accepting one's cultural counterparts at a faster pace.

Thus, the dynamic transformation from the demarcated boundary line to the frontier of respect and acceptance of cultural differences may infer the breakdown of traditional centrality versus periphery

distinction based on the concept of power (Bateson, 1994; Cohen, 2000b; Shils, 1975). In other words, intercultural adaptation is a process based on equal interaction to transform the isolated condition into a convergence state. As Thomas (1978) indicated that convergence, connection, co-existence, and co-production are the tendency of all living things, neither A nor B in Figure 1 is a periphery; instead, both are centers. In another sense, it is a harmonious process of pushing and pulling between centripetal and centrifugal forces that brings forth the continuity of movement from self-concentration to self-decentralization, and to the integration of the two centers into one (Bakhtin, 1981; Mifsud & Johnson, 2000).

Furthermore, the border/frontier created through intercultural adaptation can be treated as a co-center of the original cultures of the two interactants. This co-center created by intercultural adaptation is actually the new center of intercultural communication, and the goal of intercultural adaptation or intercultural communication is to maximize the area of the co-enter in this globalizing society. It is similar to the place of the fusion of horizons indicated by Gadamer (1977) or dual/multiple authenticities referred by Starosta (2010). In other words, the boundary line between center and periphery, power and powerless, and authenticity and inauthenticity is gradually diminishing in the process of intercultural adaptation.

The awareness of identification and interpenetration of the two interactants (i.e., A and B in Figure 1) is therefore the key that unlocks the meaning of intercultural adaptation. That is, intercultural adaptation dictates a totality, a oneness, a grand interfusion, or the *tao* of human interaction, and it negates the duality of subject and object and the demarcation of the self and the other in the process of interaction (Baxter, 1994; Chen, 2009b; Chen & Starosta, 2004). This negation of the duality does not imply the undifferentiating between the two cultural interactants; instead, it refers to no fixed stereotypes and prejudices of the interactants to allow the interpenetration and interfusion between the two polarities (Starosta & Chen, 2003). Only through the transcendence of one's egocentricity or cultural biases can the freedom from partiality and partisanship and the achievement of equalitarianism among the co-existing interactants be reached.

Totality refers to a holistic system in which all involved is but a transitional and on-going process. It assumes that intercultural interactants play a vital role in this process to communicate with dignity and influence in a mutual and interdependent network. In this holistic and transitional network, all elements of intercultural adaptation can be understood only in relation to other elements (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Chen, 2006). This holistic network of intercultural adaptation can be delineated by the concept of "interculturality." According to Dai (2010), interculturality refers to "the complex

connection between and among cultures whose members negotiate intercultural agreements and work together to establish reciprocal interactions" (p. 14), and it is "a space where different cultural perspectives meet" (p. 18). This is the space of boundary-frontier area created by interactants in the process of intercultural adaptation. Interculturality transforms the isolated cultural interactant into a culturally related one. Through the connection of the two parties, the sense of oneness and mutual identification begins to emerge; a totality of epistemic and relational bond of intercultural adaptation therefore comes to existence. Thus, interculturality opens up a space for sustainable adaptation, enhances the fusion of two cultural minds, eases cultural tensions, and turns cultural differences into creative dynamic entities (Dai, 2010). It is the very essence of the totality nature of intercultural adaptation as a boundary game.

In reality, the two parties of intercultural adaptation possess their own inherent strengths and weaknesses. They cannot soundly produce or grow alone. The full development or the state of completion can only be achieved through the constant corresponding of the two sides. In this situation, A in Figure 1 is able to be successfully interfused or incorporated into B, and vice versa, through the process of transculturation, which may involve factors such as function, framing, content, environment, time, receiver, and channel (Chan, 2001; Mundorf & Chen, 2006).

Intercultural adaptation dictates that transculturation posits culture as a relational phenomenon, in which the interactants mutually use each other's cultural symbols, rituals and values. However, the mutual appropriation of cultural values or products depends on the reciprocal and equal exchange, rather than dominance or exploitation (Rogers, 2006). As a transcultural process, intercultural adaptation therefore can be conceived as involving an ongoing, circular appropriation of cultural elements of the two interactants, which shows the interpenetrating and fusing of cultural forms through the interaction of mutual influence, co-production, and interchange (Lull, 2000). The blurring of the boundary line and expectations of the wholeness, continuity, and essence appear in this syncretizing and synergizing process of transculturation through intercultural adaptation (Adler, 1983; Herskovits, 1966; Kapchan & Strong, 1999; Ziff & Rao, 1997). A new form of cultural hybridization in the process of intercultural adaptation as well arises, in which cultural forms become "separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices" (Rowe & Schelling, 1991, p. 231).

All oppositions, contradictions, and tensions between the two parties are therefore resolved in the process of intercultural adaptation. The totality then not merely refers to the state of the unity of dualities or the

reconciliation of opposites, but also a unity in multiplicity, a wholeness of parts. This mutually dependent relationship reflected in the part-whole interdetermination also indicates that all individual components are equally valid outcomes of the interaction of the two parties in the process of intercultural adaptation (Shotter, 2000).

The totality or holistic view of intercultural adaptation rejects the dichotomy thinking of human communication. The problem of dichotomy thinking has plagued the field of intercultural communication in both practice and research. There are two possible explanations for the problem. First, according to Asante (2006), the problem is caused by the Eurocentric domination built on the attitude of Western triumphalism, which is reflected in the aggressive individualism, chauvinistic rationalism, and ruthless culturalism of Western society. Western culture tends to celebrate self reliance, autonomy, independence and individual liberty, and assumes that only Westerners have the right to define the reality because the Western idea is the most correct form of human societies. This inevitably leads to the marginalization, suppression, silence, ignorance, denigration, and exclusion of non-Western cultures. The dichotomy problem of "either-or" or "we versus they" becomes apparent.

The other problem is caused by the rigid treatment or misperception of cultural values as categorical and insurmountable differences, e.g., the misperception of Hall's (1976) high- and low-context distinction and Hofstede's (1983) dimensions of cultural values. As Chen and An (2009) indicated, the contrasting paradigmatic assumptions such as holistic vs. atomistic in ontology, harmonious vs. confrontational in axiology, interconnected vs. reductionistic in epistemology, and intuitive vs. logical in methodology between, for example, East and West demonstrate that cultural differences seem to create a discrepancy which makes intercultural adaptation impossible (Chen & An, 2009).

From the perspective of intercultural adaptation, dichotomy thinking is a great barrier for reaching intercultural understanding and acceptance. It induces conflicts in the process of intercultural communication. The truth is that the differences of cultural values of the East and the West represent a continuum, rather than discrete or either-or, in which each culture orients to a different point between the two ends of the cultural values. As Kluckhohn and Strodbeck (1961) pointed out, all human societies must face universal problems, the solutions for each universal problem are limited but they all exist in the same society, with one more dominant and the others are less dominant. Thus, it is more appropriate to say, for example, Easterners tend to be more holistic (or less atomistic) than Westerners in terms of the ontological assumption. In other words, to a certain degree all cultures are different and similar at the

same time. Intercultural adaptation cannot happen between two cultural interactants with an insurmountable gap of cultural differences.

In a nutshell, the holistic or totality view of intercultural adaptation as boundary game implies the transcendence of dichotomy problem in the process of intercultural communication. It disavows the ethnocentric monopoly, but embraces the idea of multicultural or multi-contextual co-existence and co-equality that embodies the interpenetration and identification of the two dichotomies as the totality nature of intercultural adaptation (Starosta, 2006).

Finally, Chen (2009b) argued that the realm of grand interfusion or totality achieved through intercultural adaptation mirrors a picture of the wholeness of parts that shows the unity of dualities, the reconciliation of opposites, and a unity in multiplicity. In order to free the interactants from the hindrances of cultural preconceptions to activate the process of concrescence in the boundary line, the interactants must foster the ability of "boundary wisdom" to achieve the great empathy that requires sensitivity and creativity as the two eyes of intercultural adaptation (Chen, 2009c). According to Chen and Starosta (2004),

> …sensitivity is the contraction of diversity into unity, and creativity is the expansion from unity to diversity. Sensitivity supplements creativity by supporting a ground of potentiality, while creativity provides a means of actualizing for great empathy to be revealed. The two move together hand in hand and their radiance is emitted through a ceaseless process of learning. (p. 13)

Creativity in this sense denotes the freedom from the temporal and spatial entanglements imposed by cultural differences, but at the same time it identifies with all the common essence embedded in cultural similarities. The interaction between the detachment from cultural differences and identification with cultural similarities therefore produces abundant potentialities and possibilities in the process of intercultural adaptation. More specifically, creativity is moving from one to many by expanding the subjective unity to intersubjective diversity, and produces the manifold diversities of existence in the frontier of intercultural adaptation.

On the other hand, sensitivity provides interactants the ability to discriminate and differentiate the diversity and contract it into unity, and thereby creativity gains a ground to expand the space of intercultural adaptation. Sensitivity help interactants create shared communication symbols and empathically penetrate into the other's mind by having the same thinking and feeling. The free movement between subject and object, between the self and the other, or between the two

interactants demonstrates the liberation of the stronghold of the isolated cultural self, the penetration of the cocoon woven by cultural beliefs, the dilution of heavy boundary color, and the diminishing of the wall between the two cultural identities. As Chang (1963) described, like the ebb and flow of the wave, the cyclic rotation and transformation between the forces of sensitivity's contraction and creativity's expansion manifests the infinite interfusion and interpenetration of diversities in unity and the potentiality of unity in diversity in the process of intercultural adaptation.

Conclusion

This analytical paper attempts to lay down the conceptual foundation of intercultural adaptation by stipulating intercultural adaptation as a boundary game. The first part of the paper demystifies the nature and substance of the concept of intercultural adaptation through a brief review of the literature. The second part theorizes intercultural adaptation from the perspective of boundary game, which treats intercultural adaptation as totality.

Intercultural adaptation is not only in highly practical demand in the globalizing society, but also a rising area of scholarly research. This paper advocates that only through the interpenetration and identification of the two dichotomies on the basis of comprehensive harmony and beyond contrast can the process of intercultural adaptation be transformed from opposition to fellowship and bring continuity into the dynamic stream of human interaction. To achieve this goal, it will require "boundary wisdom," which relies on the ability of creativity and sensitivity to manifest the courage to expand the boundary line to a border or frontier through the acknowledgment, recognition, acceptance, and integration of different cultural elements via an active involvement in the process of intercultural adaptation. Boundary wisdom helps interactants challenge their own core cultural values at the same time when facing the challenge from their culturally different counterpart. It entails an inclusive mindset for a cultural flexibility and multicultural co-existence. As Carse (1986) indicated, "Infinite players are not serious actors in any story, but the joyful poets of a story that continues to originate what they cannot finish" (p. 176), and "there is but one infinite game" (p. 177) in human society. Intercultural adaptation is part of this one infinite game.

Finally, although this paper uses the concept of boundary game to theorize intercultural adaptation, for future research scholars can try to move the theorizing level up to the process of intercultural communication. As a major manifestation of the process of intercultural interaction, intercultural adaptation mirrors the nature and attribute of intercultural communication, to employg the concept of boundary game to further theorize intercultural communication, based on the argument in this paper, will potentially make significant contributions to the study of the field in the process of knowledge production.

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