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Sense of Humor: Americans versus Taiwanese
Chao-chih Liao* and Tsung-chin Chang**

Abstract

Taiwanese envy Americans for their great sense of humor and like to learn from them. This paper contrasts Taiwanese and American undergraduates' sense of humor via 13 questions in Appendix 1. As of fall 2005, 57, 89, 36 and 67 sets of data were collected from Taiwanese female, Taiwanese male, US female and US male students. We shuffled the four piles, chose the first 30 sets from each, and analyzed groups by ANOVA (Analysis of Variances). Ethnic groups share the same feelings toward five items and differ in eight. Similar perceptions of people with a sense of humor: Q4 (know when to be humorous and when not to), Q6 (are willing to downgrade themselves), Q8 (may use 'other' as the butt of jokes, later are willing to apologize in public' and Q9 'in private, and Q13 'are willing to tell a specific self-deprecating joke.' More Americans agree that such people can tolerate practical jokes played on them (Q1), they see themselves (Q10) as well as their parents are humorous (Q11 & Q12): i.e., 95% of Americans think their sense of humor average or above, 68.3% and 85% see mother's and father's humor, respectively, that way; only 70%, 46.7% and 58.3% of Taiwanese, respectively, regard their own, mother's and father's sense of humor thus. Taiwanese agree more that such people react quickly to people's words and understand a joke without a jokester explaining it (Q2), making people smile/laugh thoughtfully and understandingly (Q3), not downgrading others (Q5), and not using 'other' as the butt of joking (Q7). Gender plays key roles in three items. More females agree that such people should know when to be humorous and when not to (Q4), their fathers are humorous (Q12) and like to tell the self-deprecating joke in Q13. For Taiwanese to emulate their American counterparts, it is advisable that they tolerate practical jokes played on them, often expecting themselves to be humorous.

Key words: sense of humor, intercultural communication, Taiwanese, American

Introduction

Taiwanese envy Americans' great sense of humor and like to learn it, having seen US

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movies and TV programs to find that even when they argue or fight orally, they use humorous words. Stateside comedies are generally humorous, informational and educational. Prank films about making laughing stuff are American, not Taiwanese or Chinese. Taiwanese are more serious, unable to make movies of laughing stuff. TV news and English textbooks in Taiwan often cover US politicians' humor, to win more watchers and readers. In summer 2006 we asked a class of 52 undergraduates and graduates in Taiwan if they agreed that Americans are generally more humorous than Taiwanese; only eight (15.4%) disagreed, 20 (38.5%) held a neutral viewpoint, while 24 (46.2%) agreed. In January 2007, these questions posed to 175 undergraduates (86 female, 89 male); 23 (13.1%) disagreed, 51 (29.1%) held a neutral viewpoint, while 101 (57.8%) agreed, the genders not differing hugely. Most people commented that Americans are more broad-minded and hence more humorous; Taiwanese are more conservative, care about not losing face and therefore are not so humorous. Americans look at pranks from a more humorous perspective; Americans' education makes them more humorous. Those holding neutral viewpoints opined that American and Taiwanese humor are so different because of cultural diversity, it is not comparable. Humor or lack of it depends on individual differences, not race.

Taiwanese want to learn from their American counterparts concerning sense of humor, yet there have been few if any studies comparing Americans and Taiwanese in this regard. Taiwanese perceive themselves as more humorous than Japanese do (Liao, 2003a); contrast of Japanese and Chinese languages shows if a society is more hierarchical, it produces less humor (Lin 1976; Abe 1995). American society is less hierarchical than Taiwanese; therefore, Americans need to use humor to lubricate interpersonal relationships (Abe 1995). It seems cross-cultural humor study has become a trend in this humorology field. The 2005 annual conference of the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS) hosted by Youngstown State University in Ohio, had several cross-cultural papers: Brzozowska (2005), Chen (2005), Davies (2005), Donnelly (2005), Furo (2005), Paolillo (2005) and Plecinski (2005). The 2006 ISHS conference at Danish University of Education in Copenhagen yielded such papers: Branham (2006), Bucaria (2006), Kazarian and Cui (2006), Kuiper (2006), and Meyer (2006).

We collect books on humor. A seminal one was published in Taiwan by Yu Kwang-chung (born 1928), famous poet and writer in Chinese society, who garnered fifteen short works and nine long ones, written 1967-2003, to compile *Humorous Anthology of Yu Kwang-chung* (2005) with a preface by himself. 'Characteristics of Humor' (Yu 2005: 22-28) claimed to quote a western proverb, 'The fatal thing about humor is in its explanation.' We wonder about its authenticity, since he did not point out the origin of the citation. Besides, many works by western scholars explain jokes and humor (e.g. Raskin 1985; Attardo 2001). Carrell (1997) mentioned that recycled jokes may lose the quality of being humorous. No articles in *Humor* (an International interdisciplinary Journal since 1989) have mentioned the

fatal explanation of jokes. Yu sees humor as absurdity: inconformity with rationality or anti-nature to an extreme, an indirect and euphemistic way to point out absurdity. He categorized three kinds of people rated by the standard of a sense of humor: (1) able to see humor in absurdity, (2) more or less perceiving others' humor, and (3) unable to perceive others' humor. The last type creates no humor but contributes by producing absurdity; e.g., Emperor Hui of the Jin Dynasty said, "Why not eat meat,"¹ to trigger our sense of humor.

Like Lin Yutang, Yu Kwang-chung stated that humor kills not absurd people but absurdity itself. Yu praised Lin for creating *you* (幽 'darkness') and *mo* (默 'silence') as the equivalent of English 'humor;' based on 'darkness' and 'silence,' humor cannot be very loud and noisy. The more existing between lines, the higher the humor is as an art. However, it needs high wisdom to understand the rich implication between the lines. Humor is a kind of 'sudden' understanding. If the jokester has to explain or re-tell the same joke, it is fatal; the joke is no longer interesting. Yu seemed to admit only verbal humor; Mr. Bean's action humor should not be in his humor repertoire.

For this study, American undergraduate students (*Ss*) are from Franklin College in Indiana, Taiwanese *Ss* National Chung Hsing and Chiayi Universities. A sample of 120 *Ss* from these nations represents convenience and cannot be generalized to American and Taiwanese populations. Some readers might claim the sample size is too small. We regard it better than a single person's (un)wise subjective speculations. If 120 is too small, so is 1200; Taiwan has 23 million people and America 300 million. In statistics, too many subjects connote wasting data, time and money. Sometimes a group of 25-30 subjects is quite adequate (Hogg and Tanis 1983). Impracticality of using a whole population or too big samples in research has spawned establishment of departments of statistics for university (under)graduates. All questions in Appendix 1 were derived from Liao (1998). The goal of this study is to pinpoint how ethnicity and gender bulk large in differentiating attitudes toward people with a sense of humor, if interaction exists, a relationship between a person's feeling about his/her own sense of humor and perceptions of other items, as well as relative importance of items tested. We use Chinese and Taiwanese interchangeably throughout, since we study Chinese people in Taiwan. Few subjects are aboriginal. A political fact of many locals in Taiwan proclaiming themselves Taiwanese, not Chinese, is neglected. This paper uses *hanyu pinyin* for transliterating Mandarin except when Romanizing proper nouns. For names like Yu Kwang-chung's and our own, we follow a name bearer's transliteration. It is called *ming-cung-zhu-ren* (名從主人): people who read place or personal names, follow local people or the name bearer in pronunciation, spelling, etc.

¹ The story was well known to Chinese, which says, "Once Emperor Hui of the Jin Dynasty went incognito in the countryside and saw people starving or having starved to death. He asked his body guards, "Why don't they eat meat if they do not have enough cereal crops?"")

Literature Review

Liao (2003b) used a quantitative method to prove that the ancient Chinese term *Huaji* (滑稽) was the equivalent of the modern English 'humor' 2000 years ago. The term is not obsolete, but the meaning has deteriorated a bit. It becomes funny, shallow and ridiculous actions. After Lin Yutang's death (1895-1976), Yu (2005) proposed some literal explanation for Lin's transliteration of *you-mo* ('humor'). When a greatly respected writer interpreted *you-mo* as 'darkness' and 'silence', it should have some influence on mainstream Taiwanese in forming a concept of 'persons with a sense of humor.' This calls to mind Danish philosopher Harald Hoffding, who divided humor into great and small: great humor means a true humorous attitude as a philosophy of life, i.e., a personal attitude towards one's own life and fellow human beings; small humor is laughing, joking, etc. (Vejleskov 2001: 323).

In the preface, Yu tried to express what he thought humor is. The following are some important concepts of his: (1) humor is innate (Yu 2005: ii); (2) humor is gradient: some people have more, some less. Liao (2001) found that a constantly self-deprecating Taiwanese, trying to be humorous, may be regarded as lacking confidence; Martin et al. (2003) termed self-deprecating jokes as self-defeating. Yu (2005) has always been a person's speculation about a phenomenon.

Lai (2007) proposed that verbal humor should be viewed from either the speaker's intention or the hearer's interpretation. She recognized three possibilities:

- (P1) The speaker has the intention to be humorous in making his utterance, which is interpreted by the hearer as humorous.
- (P2) The speaker has the intention to be humorous in making his utterance, which is not interpreted by the hearer as humorous.
- (P3) The speaker does not have the intention to be humorous in making his utterance, which, is however, interpreted by the hearer as humorous.

Lai believes only P1 can be called humor, P2 and P3 being miscommunication or communication failure. We would like to point out the fourth possibility:

- (P4) Neither does the speaker have the intention to make his utterance humorous, nor does the addressee interpret it as humorous. The third-party onlooker or reader feels it humorous.

In other words, humor can be viewed from the speaker, the addressee, and the onlooker's point of view. Morreall (1997) noticed this and thus indicated that a tragedy at a faraway place can be very humorous for the onlooker/reader.

Though Yu (2005: iv) claimed that sense of humor is innate, not cultivated, he indicated himself to begin to write banter works in his middle age when he was 39 years old. When a person began to write humor at this age, we hesitate to call him/her innately humorous. Liao and Yano (2005: 103) found that Taiwanese struggle with correlations between innate and

learnable humor competence, Japanese are confident: those believing it innate do not think of its learnability; those believing its learnability do not think of its innateness. Thirty-seven percent of Japanese and 54% of Taiwanese young people in university, who responded to the questionnaire in 2005, believed it learnable, while 47% of the former and 29% of the latter believed it innate.

Yu (2005: iv) distinguished three terms: humor, *huaji* (滑稽) and *fengci* (諷刺). When he had to tell them apart, it must have meant his students or contemporaries had confused one for the other. All can cause some laughter/smile in some, not all, audiences. According to him, humor is subtler and more elegant than *huaji*, which in turn is more direct and shallow; *huaji* can entertain children, humor cannot. Humor is more tolerant and pleasant, and ‘marginally to the point’ (點到為止)—a term borrowed from Liao and Bresnahan (1996) to mean ‘more indirect.’ It marginally touches absurdity like a needle piercing a bubble. *Fengci* ‘sarcasm’ is severe, poignant, and usually hostile. Yu pointed out that *Fengci* is suitable to describe a foe, humor appropriate for describing a friend or lover. An utterance by a foe, friend, or lover means different. What matters is who utters it and how, not what is uttered.

Raskin (1985) developed the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) toward verbal humor, in which script opposition (SO) is thought to be a resource of verbal humor. For example, (1) includes two opposite scripts: the doctor and the lover.

(1) “Is the doctor at home?” the patient asked in his bronchial whisper.

“No,” the doctor’s young and pretty wife whispered in reply.

“Come right in.” (Raskin 1985: 100)

Raskin’s student, Attardo (2001) put the SO in SSTH at the highest level of the six hierarchical knowledge resources (KR) of General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH). The six KR’s from the lowest level to the highest are Language (LA), Narrative Strategy (NS), Target (TA), Situation (SI), Logical Mechanism (LM), and Script Opposition (SO). LA contains all the information necessary for the verbalization of a text. It is responsible for the exact wording of the text and for the placement of the functional elements that constitute it. NS for any joke can be as a simple narrative, a dialogue, a (pseudo-)riddle, an aside in conversation, etc. TA is the ‘butt’ of the joke. Jokes that are not aggressive (i.e., ridicule nobody or nothing) have an empty value for TA. SI of a joke can be the objects, participants, instruments, activities, etc. All humorous and non-humorous texts have SI. LM is something like the incongruity-resolution model, (rational or fake) reasoning.

Confucius was humorous (Chen 1985; Kao 1974; Wang 1998), especially in failure (Lin 1971: 61); he was good at amusing himself as an underdog. Lin (ibid: 109) pointed out that Confucius’ humor was of the warm, mature and sincere type. The humor of Confucius can be divided into five categories: (1) Confucius himself, (2) his disciples, (3) interpretation by the

orthodox scholars in different ages, (4) modern common Taiwanese interpretation for their own benefit and (5) humor of Confucius' innocence as a revelation of modern psychology, sociology and other experimental studies (Liao 2001). Confucius said, "If one person pays respects at the tomb of other people's ancestors, he is flattering. Seeing what should be done without doing is lack of courage" (Chiang 1996: 26). This saying can be very humorous. It should have happened that Confucius heard or witnessed someone paying tribute to the tomb of someone else's ancestors and commented on it. If so, it might be humor of mistake. This person probably mistook someone else's tomb for his own ancestor's; without enquiring on it, Confucius might have commented about his flattery. It is funny. Confucius made the mistake of not enquiring about the fact. Lacking context for Confucius' conversations and sayings makes them funny.

Lin (1971: 109-11; 1994) praised Confucius as a humorous sage, citing examples (2)–(7).

(2) Zigong (子貢) asked, "Here there is a good jade. Shall we hide it or shall we ask for a good price to sell it?" Confucius said, "Sell it. Sell it. I'm waiting for a good price to sell it" (Liao's translation).

(3) Confucius said, "A man who does not say to himself, 'What to do? What to do?'—Indeed I do not know what to do with such a person!" (Lin 1994: 365)

(4) Confucius went to Cheng (鄭) and the Master and disciples lost track of each other. While Confucius stood alone at the East Gate of the outer city, the natives reported to Zigong (子貢), "There is a man at the East Gate, whose forehead is like that of Emperor Yao (唐堯), whose neck resembles that of an ancient minister Gaotao (皋陶), whose shoulders resemble those of Zichan (子產) and who from the waist down is shorter than Emperor Yu (禹) by three inches. He looks crestfallen like a homeless, wandering dog." Zigong told Confucius this story (when they met), and Confucius smiled and said, "I don't know about the descriptions of my figure, but as for resembling a homeless, wandering dog, he is quite right, he is quite right!" (Lin 1994: 79)

(5) Confucius was humiliated in Wei (衛), ordered to follow the king and queen's carriage, admitting that he has never seen anyone who loves virtue more than beauty. Disappointed with the behaviors of many kings, he traveled from Wei (衛) to Zhao (趙), Chen (陳), Cai (蔡), Ye (葉) and Fu (蒲). Only a few faithful disciples were with him; they were angry and feeling regret, while Confucius was still entertaining himself with teaching and singing (Liao's translation).

(6) Confucius knew his disciples were angry or disappointed at heart, and so he asked Zilu (子路) to come in and questioned him. “It is said in *the Book of Songs*, ‘Neither buffalos nor tigers, they wander in the desert (comparison to themselves).’ Do you think that my teachings are wrong? How is it that I find myself now in this situation?” Zilu replied, “Perhaps we are not great enough and have not been able to win people’s confidence in us. Perhaps we are not wise enough and people are not willing to follow our teachings.” “Is that so?” said Confucius. “You (由; another name of Zilu), if the great could always gain the confidence of people, why did Boyi (伯夷) and Shuqi (叔齊) have to go and die of starvation in the mountains? If the wise men could always have their teachings followed by others, why did Prince Bigan (比干) have to commit suicide?”

Zilu (子路) came out and Zigong (子貢) went in, and Confucius said, “Ci (賜; another name of Zigong), it is said in *the Book of Songs*, ‘Neither buffalos nor tigers, they wander in the desert.’ Are my teachings wrong? How is it that I find myself now in this situation?” Zigong replied, “The Master’s teachings are too great for the people, and that is why the world cannot accept them. Why don’t you come down a little from your heights?” Confucius replied, “Ci, a good farmer plants the field but cannot guarantee the harvest, and a good artisan can do a skillful job, but he cannot guarantee to please his customers. Now you are not interested in cultivating yourselves, but are only interested in being accepted by the people. I am afraid you are not setting the highest standard for yourself.”

Zigong (子貢) came out and Yan Hui (顏回) went in, and Confucius said, “Hui, it is said in *the Book of Songs*, ‘Neither buffalos nor tigers, they wander in the desert.’ Are my teachings wrong? How is it that I find myself now in this situation?” And Yan Hui replied, “The Master’s teachings are so great. That is why the world cannot accept them. However, you should just do your best to spread the ideas. What do you care if they are not accepted? The very fact that your teachings are not accepted shows that you are a true gentleman. If the truth is not cultivated, the shame is ours; but if we have already strenuously cultivated the teachings of a moral order and they are not accepted by the people, it is the shame of those in power. What do you care if you are not accepted? The very fact that you are not accepted shows that you are a true gentleman.” And Confucius was pleased and said smilingly, “Is that so? Oh, son of Yan, if you were a rich man, I would be your butler.” (Lin 1994: 108-115)

(7) Confucius left Wei and went to the country of Chen and had to pass through the city of Kuang. Yan Ke (顏科) was acting as the driver. He pointed with his whip to a crack in the city wall and remarked, “You know, I went into the city through that crack last time.” This remark was overheard by the natives who then thought it was Yang Hu (陽虎) of Lu coming to the city. Now Yang Hu had once been very cruel to the natives of Kuang and the natives therefore surrounded Confucius. Confucius looked like Yang and was arrested for

five days. Yan Hui turned up later and Confucius said to him, “I thought you were killed.” “How dare I be killed, so long as you live!” replied Yan (translated by Lin Yutang 1994: 71-73).

Liao (1998: 176, 181-195) asked 88 undergraduates to answer the essay question of ‘define a person with a sense of humor’ to get the nine statements in Appendix 1. The statements of Q1 and Q2 are about the receptive sense of humor, while those of Q3-Q9 are about the productive sense of humor. Q1 and Q2 might have been offered by those who had played practical jokes on others and in consequence lost some friends. Thus they strongly held the view that a person with a sense of humor is able to tolerate the practical jokes played on him/her. These jokesters might have felt frustration that the hearers asked them to explain their jokes more explicitly and thus claimed that ‘a person with a sense of humor is able to react quickly to people’s words and understand the joke with the joke-teller explain it more explicitly.’ Yu (2005) shared views with these jokesters.

Using Attardo’s six KR’s to examine Q3-Q9 in Appendix 1, we find that Q3 (a person with a sense of humor can make people smile/laugh thoughtfully and understandingly) might be from a third-party’s point of view. Q4 (know when to be humorous and when not to) might be from an addressee’s or third-party’s point of view. The last five items, Q5-Q9, are the TA (target) of GTVH. In other words, of six KR’s, Taiwanese priority is about TA. The addressee (and perhaps people respected by the addressee) should not be the ‘butt’ of jokes.

The Study

Based on Liao (1998), studying Taiwanese beliefs about a person with a sense of humor, this paper compares Taiwanese and US university undergraduates’ sense of humor by using 13 questions in Appendix 1, on a five-point Likert scale, 1 for ‘strong disagreement’ and 5 ‘strong agreement.’ In fall 2005, we collected 57, 89, 36 and 67 sets of data from Taiwanese female, Taiwanese male, US female and US male Ss. The four piles were shuffled and the first 30 sets from each chosen to analyze with the independent variable of ethnicity and gender by ANOVA (Analysis of Variances) and Scheffe’s Post-hoc Test.

The Taiwanese students are undergraduates in the departments of foreign languages, computer engineering, civil engineering, biomechanical engineering, applied chemistry, applied physics, and applied mathematics. The American participants are from departments of computing and mathematics. The study orientation of students tells us why more valid responses came from males. Average age of Taiwanese participants is 20.97, range of 19-28; that of Americans 20.57, range of 18-52. With p-value equal to or less than 0.05, at least one comparison group is significantly different from one or more other groups. With p-value bigger than 0.05, parties do not significantly differ. For inter-item analysis, we used Pearson

Product-Moment Correlation and dependent t-test. The same standard of p-value is used: p less than 0.05 for significant results, between 0.1 and 0.05 for marginal importance, bigger than 0.1 for insignificant.

We first analyze the items in which Taiwanese and Americans got similar means, followed by those where Americans got better means, then items where Taiwanese got better means. Finally, we divide people into male and female to discuss the findings, doing inter-item analysis.

Taiwanese and Americans Similar

These ethnic groups share the same feelings toward five items and differ in eight. The same perceptions of them toward people with a sense of humor: Q4 ‘timing in being humorous,’ Q6 ‘willingness to downgrade him/herself,’ Q8 ‘allowing ‘other’ as the butt of jokes, but later being willing to apologize in public,’ Q9 ‘permitting ‘other’ as the butt of jokes, but later being willing to apologize in private,’ and Q13 ‘retelling a self-deprecating joke.’ Here we only show ANOVA results of Q6; as for Q4, Q8, Q9 and Q13, they can be imagined as having p-value for nation greater than 0.05. To interpret Q6 in a more comprehensible way, one has to use a post-hoc test (this study uses Scheffe’s), then calculate means of each ethnicity. Table 10 finds that both races got a mean of 3.63; when they are exactly the same, p-value equals 1 (Table 1).

Table 1 ANOVA results of Q6 ‘willing to downgrade him/herself’

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	P-value
Nation	1	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.0000
Gender	1	0.53	0.53	0.44	0.5075
N*G	1	3.33	3.33	2.76	0.0992
Error	116	140.00	1.21		
Total	119	143.87			

Liao (2003a) finds more Taiwanese than Japanese believing that a person with a sense of humor is more willing to downgrade him/herself (Q6), that a person with a sense of humor may use ‘other’ as the butt of jokes, but later is willing to apologize in public (Q8). Taiwanese and Japanese do not significantly differ in believing ‘A person with a sense of humor may use ‘other’ as the butt of joking, but later s/he is willing to apologize privately (Q9). The two studies together conclude in this way:

Downgrade self: American = Taiwanese > Japanese
 Apologize in public: Taiwanese = American > Japanese
 Apologize in private: American = Taiwanese = Japanese

Table 6 reveals Taiwanese with a slightly higher mean in ‘public apology’ (Q8). Perhaps Taiwanese emphasize public face most, closely followed by Americans, and finally Japanese. This reminds us of an event: Taiwanese TV Entertainer A told a joke with Celebrity B as the butt, angering B. Later on A apologized in private; B could not pardon him, saying, “He slapped me in public, then soothed me in private. It is unfair and inadequate.” Taiwanese highly value ‘public’ apology. The above commonalities between Americans and Taiwanese are restrictions on when to be humorous (Q4), the later apology (Q8 and Q9), and willingness to self-deprecate (Q6 and Q13).

Americans better

More Americans than Taiwanese agree to the concept that such people are able to tolerate practical jokes played on them (Q1), they themselves are humorous (Q10), and their parents are humorous (Q11 and Q12). ANOVA results of Q1 appear in Table 2; those for Q10-12 do not. Readers can not find that Americans are better from Table 2; they have to refer to Table 10 to the means in cells.

Table 2 ANOVA results of Q1 ‘tolerate practical jokes’

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	P-value
Nation	1	13.33	13.33	19.29	0.0001
Gender	1	0.30	0.30	0.43	0.5114
N*G	1	0.53	0.53	0.77	0.3816
Error	116	80.20	0.69		
Total	119	94.37			

Two reasons can explain why Americans feel themselves and their parents more humorous. First, Anglo-Saxons have long felt that lacking a sense of humor is a defect in personality (Allport 1937), while Chinese are influenced by the saying of humorous Confucius, who taught, “If a person is not serious, he is not respected.” Confucius himself was humorous (Liao 2001), but he thought his humor something bad and proposed that only serious people gain respect. Indeed, humorous people may at times be avoided (Liao 1998). Few Taiwanese thought of Confucius from the viewpoint of his humor. Second, when

evaluating their own humor, Americans may use a different and broader definition, Taiwanese a narrower one. Broad definition handles humor as an umbrella term to include absurdity, farce, clowning, cartoon, parody, slapstick, etc. The narrow definition includes only the high-class stuff causing smile or laughter, such as Dai (1996, 1997). When Taiwanese feel that Americans are more humorous and want to learn from them, double standard might exist. They envy them to be able to act as clown, do something absurd, while they hate themselves unable to do such.

Taiwanese Better

More Taiwanese than Americans agree to the concept that people with a sense of humor should react quickly to people's words and understand the joke without the joke-teller explaining it more explicitly (Q2), making people smile/laugh thoughtfully and understandingly (Q3), not downgrading others (Q5), and not use 'other' as the butt of joking (Q7). We decide not to list the ANOVA results of the four items because the p-value for the nation factor will be, like that in Table 2, smaller than 0.05.

Yu (2005) opined that explanation of a joke or re-telling the same joke kills its funniness. Yu's qualitative and speculative study seems to be correct in guessing about general Taiwanese mind (Q2 'react quickly': Taiwanese mean 4.13, American mean 3.47). In both Japanese and Taiwanese society, persons laughing much in public may be accused of inability to control themselves (Liao 2003a), so that Taiwanese, if they laugh, they have to do it thoughtfully and understandingly (Q3 'thoughtful and understanding laugh/smile': Taiwanese mean 4.55 and American mean 4.12). For Taiwanese the main definition of a person with a sense of humor is one who is able to let people laugh/smile thoughtfully and understandingly.

When Taiwanese got significantly higher means in Q5 'not downgrade others' and Q7 'not use other as the butt', it means that Taiwanese are doomed to be unable to be as humorous as Americans. When they involve in intercultural communication with Americans, they may be hurt by their interlocutors. Taiwanese want to learn from Americans because they find witty conversations in TV programs and/or movies. The conversation happens between Americans; Taiwanese do not play the role of 'butt' of joking and thus do not feel hurt. Instead, others' witty conversations are thought humorous. Morreall (1997) pointed out that disasters in a distance may be funny. When they happen to people around us, few Taiwanese can tolerate their humor. When Taiwanese saw American movies and TV programs to find they use humorous words even when arguing or involved in verbal fight, they were watching a disaster in a distance. When Taiwanese communicate with Americans face-to-face, the curiosity about their humorous counterpart may make them feel Americans humorous. Prank movies about making laughing stuff are American or their cousin, British

(like Mr. Bean), not Chinese or Taiwanese.

Females and males significantly different

More females agree that people with a sense of humor should know when to be humorous and when not to (Q4), their fathers are humorous (Q12) and they would like to tell the self-deprecating joke in Q13. Table 3 is the ANOVA results for Q4, the p-value for gender being 0.0154, that for nation and interaction of nation and gender (N*G) bigger than 0.05. Again, no tables are listed for Q12 and Q13. Tannen (1994) indicated that males are more humorous, yet females are also humorous in different ways, which females better appreciate. This study proves more females in both groups like to tell self-deprecating jokes, like the reporter in Q13 (Appendix 1). This can be explained by Holmes' social construction theory about women (Holmes and Meyerhoff 2003). No interaction between nation and gender surfaces in any item.

Table 3 ANOVA results for Q4 'know when to be humorous'

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	P-value
Nation	1	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.9276
Gender	1	6.08	6.08	6.04	0.0154
N*G	1	0.41	0.41	0.41	0.5252
Error	116	116.63	1.01		
Total	119	123.13			

Correlation

We count the correlation between Q10 'I am humorous' with the other items for each ethnicity (Table 4). For Taiwanese, it correlates significantly and positively with Q11 (mother's humor), Q12 (father's humor), and Q13 (retelling a self-deprecating joke). Marginal correlation exists with Q5 (not downgrading others) in a positive way and Q6 (willing to self-downgrade) in a negative way. In other words, the more a Taiwanese judges him/herself to have a sense of humor, the less they are willing to downgrade themselves, but the more they are willing to tell the self-deprecating joke of the reporter in Q13. To constantly downgrade oneself is self-defeating (Martin et al. 2003); to retell the story in Q13 is fun because it is only an episode.

When an American claims him-/herself to have a sense of humor, he/she is sure to tolerate more practical jokes (Q1), to judge their mother/father more humorous too (Q11 and Q12). Based on the fact that humorous Taiwanese and Americans feel their parents more

humorous, one might say that literary writer Yu (2005) is right to say that sense of humor is innate. Children acquire sense of humor constantly from the interaction of and with parents, yet Liao and Yano (2005) found 54% of Taiwanese believing sense of humor learnable, 17% held a neutral viewpoint, 29% believed it inborn. We do hope that Yu proposed that sense of humor is innate to soothe Taiwanese not to exert great effort in learning it, not to discourage others from becoming more humorous. We propose that humor is like singing. A person innately good at singing must practice to become a great singer. It is also true with humor.

Table 4 Correlation between Q10 and other items

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Taiwan	-0.00718	0.01935	-0.01415	0.05064	0.22666*	-0.23994*
USA	0.29654**	-0.03385	0.12872	0.17601	-0.00313	0.04028
	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q11	Q12	Q13
Taiwan	-0.17282	-0.03992	0.14350	0.51373**	0.44491**	0.25864**
USA	0.03701	0.06611	-0.14240	0.51216**	0.36048**	-0.12349

*0.1 > p > 0.05; ** p < 0.05

Inter-Item Comparison

Table 5: Grand Mean: Ranking and Grouping

Ranking	Item	Grand Mean (SD)	Grouping
1	Q3	4.33 (0.82)	A
2	Q4	4.13 (1.02)	B B
3	Q2	3.80 (0.97)	C C
4	Q1	3.72 (0.89)	C C
5	Q6	3.63 (1.10)	C C D
6	Q13	3.57 (1.29)	C C D E
7	Q10	3.47 (0.99)	D D D E E
8	Q7	3.42 (1.06)	D E E F
9	Q8	3.40 (1.12)	D E E F
10	Q5	3.29 (1.16)	E E E F
11	Q9	3.28 (1.13)	E E F
12	Q12	3.20 (1.22)	F F F
13	Q11	2.91 (1.20)	G

Here dependent t-test rates data in Table 10 for three groups: (a) both ethnicities overall, (b) Taiwanese and (c) Americans. Table 5 shows the two highest means for Q3 'making

people laugh/smile understandingly and thoughtfully’ and Q4 ‘aware of when to and when not to be humorous,’ in Groups A and Group B, respectively. There are four items in Group C, the third highest in means: Q2 ‘react quickly,’ Q1 ‘tolerate practical jokes,’ Q6 ‘downgrade self,’ and Q13 ‘tell a specific self-deprecating joke.’ Lowest mean goes to mother’s humor (Q11, Group G). Father’s humor is much better (in Groups F and G, respectively). In each column Grouping has two letters, signaling marked difference in means (p-value of dependent t-test below 0.05). Third column means the first item with C (Q2) differs from that with D (Q10). We know Q6, Q13, Q10, Q7 and Q8 are in the same group; Q6 got a significantly higher mean than Q5.

Table 6 reveals Q3 ‘smile/laugh thoughtfully and understanding’ as especially valued by Taiwanese. The next two items are ‘quick response’ (Q2) and ‘timing’ (Q4). Between Q4 and Q5, a significant gap exists, while Q5 and Q7, Q6, Q13, and Q8 do not differ significantly, belonging to Group C.

Table 6 Taiwanese: Ranking and Grouping

Rank	Item	Mean (SD)	Grouping
1	Q3	4.55 (0.72)	A
2	Q2	4.13 (0.83)	B B
3	Q4	4.12 (1.06)	B B
4	Q5	3.82 (1.00)	C C C
5	Q7	3.65 (1.04)	C D
6	Q6	3.63 (1.13)	C D D
7	Q13	3.60 (1.25)	C D D E
8	Q8	3.48 (1.16)	C D D E E
9	Q1	3.38 (0.99)	D D D E E F
10	Q9	3.15 (1.15)	E E E F F G
11	Q10	3.02 (0.91)	F G G G
12	Q12	2.68 (1.02)	H H
13	Q11	2.63 (0.99)	H

For Americans, the first four items (Q4 ‘timing,’ Q3 ‘smile/laughing thoughtfully and understandingly,’ Q1 ‘tolerating practical jokes,’ and Q10 ‘I am humorous’) are equally valued (in Group A). Americans’ sense of humor can be graded into five hierarchies only (Groups A-E), Taiwanese eight (A-H). Both groups rate them more humorous than their parents (Q10 > Q12 and Q11).

Table 7 Americans: Ranking and Grouping

Ranking	Item	Mean (SD)	Grouping							
1	Q4	4.13 (0.98)	A							
2	Q3	4.12 (0.87)	A	A						
3	Q1	4.05 (0.62)	A	A	A					
4	Q10	3.92 (0.85)	A	A	A	B				
5	Q12	3.72 (1.19)	B	B	B	B	C			
6	Q6	3.63 (1.07)				B	C	C		
7	Q13	3.53 (1.35)				B	C	C	D	
8	Q2	3.47 (0.98)				C	C	C	D	
9	Q9	3.42 (1.11)					C	C	D	
10	Q8	3.32 (1.08)					C	C	D	
11	Q7	3.18 (1.03)					D	D	D	
12	Q11	3.18 (1.32)							D	
13	Q5	2.77 (1.06)								E

Discussion

Taiwanese concept about a person with a sense of humor is generally derived from social and interpersonal viewpoint, not from cognitive ‘incongruity’, biological or mental ‘relief’ viewpoint. Concerning GTVH, Taiwanese pay more attention to TA than other aspects: the key point is that they (as addressee, [over]hearer) cannot be the butt of the joke.

Taiwanese envy Americans for their great sense of humor and like to learn from them. This paper finds that Taiwanese have to give up many concepts before they can do so. First, they need to practice tolerating practical jokes, to feel them humorous funny, not to worry about losing face, not to be angered or embarrassed if they are played pranks. Second, Taiwanese need to feel it is a shame not to be humorous. Third, they need not think that not to react quickly to people’s words and understand the joke without the joke-teller explaining it further is deficit. Fourth, they should stop being so philosophical to think that a person with a good sense of humor has to make people smile/laugh thoughtfully and understandingly. A shallow laugh is also fine. Fifth, they should be allowed to downgrade others, and use ‘other’ as the butt of joking. In other words, Taiwanese have to change their personalities and national spirits. Taiwanese have to be thoroughly educated that Confucius was ironical when he said, “A person has to be serious to be respected.” Confucius himself was humorous (Liao 2001). One’s behavior changes with one’s attitude.

Americans agree more than Taiwanese that their parents are humorous. Both American and Taiwanese parents use ‘baby talk’ to their children, indicating that the mother-child

relationship is less hierarchical than that of Samoan mothers, who do not simplify their speech for children (Tannen 1994). Among both groups, more females believe that a person with a sense of humor should know when to be humorous and when not to. Women are more likely to tell self-deprecating jokes, like the reporter in Q13. From Martin et al.'s (2003) viewpoint, women are more self-defeating than men. Women in both groups appreciate a father's humor more (Q12). Tannen (1986, 1990) proposed that jokes enhance intimacy in relationship. Liao (2001) claims Taiwanese females find it easier to joke with their fathers. Along with results of this study, we find father-daughter better than father-son relationships in both ethnic groups.

Allport (1937) found that 95% of British people judged their own sense of humor to be average or above. In 2005, the same ratio of Americans regarded themselves so. Americans today are not very different from their cousins 80 years ago.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Yu (2005) praised Lin Yutang for creating *you* (幽 'dark') and *mo* (默 'silent') as the equivalent of English 'humor.' Humor can not be loud and noisy; it is a kind of 'sudden' understanding. If a jokester has to explain or re-tell the same joke, it is fatal. Explanation is a killer of humor. Yu indicates humorous words and compliments will be killed upon repetition. Yu's argument seem to shout Q2 ('quick reaction') should be rated high by Taiwanese. Indeed Table 10 in Appendix 2 shows it at Place Two for Taiwanese, Place Eight for Americans. Both nationalities rated 'laughing/smiling thoughtfully and understandingly' as one of the first two highest choices because 'something able to trigger smile and laughter' is the basic universal concept of humor.

Liao (2003a) found Taiwanese and Japanese similar in five out of the first twelve items in Appendix 1. This study finds four items of similarities; Liao (2003a) did not include Q13, the fifth similar item between Taiwanese and Americans. This hints that Taiwanese and Japanese cultures may not be closer than Taiwanese and American cultures concerning concepts on humor, though both are in Asia and their cultures have influenced each other since over 1000-plus years.

	Taiwan-USA	Taiwan-Japan
Similarities	4	5
Differences	8	7

Americans, Taiwanese, and Japanese are humorous in descending order, with the American society least and Japanese most hierarchical, Taiwanese society somewhere in between. It might be right to say that in a less hierarchical society one relies more on humor

to lubricate interpersonal relationships. Japanese hierarchy can lubricate these already and need less humor (Abe 1995). If Taiwanese want to emulate their American counterparts, it is advisable that they tolerate practical jokes played on them, often expecting humor of themselves. Expectation will improve performance. Given close and constant contact with both Japanese and Americans, tri-cultural comparative study can benefit them especially. Americans are indeed more broad-minded to tolerate practical jokes, not to mind if a hearer/addressee reacts quickly to their jokes; most notably, they include foreign languages from around the world in secondary school and university curricula, even though they are the most developed country on Earth. Taiwanese universities should teach Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese, etc. as foreign languages to be friendly toward their new local neighbors.

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Appendix 1

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

Q1: A person with a sense of humor is able to tolerate the practical jokes played on him/her.

Q2: A person with a sense of humor is able to react quickly to people's words and understand the joke without the joke-teller explaining it more explicitly.

Q3: A person with a sense of humor can make people smile/laugh thoughtfully and understandingly.

Q4: A person with a sense of humor should know when to be humorous and when not to.

Q5: A person with a sense of humor does not downgrade others.

Q6: A person with a sense of humor is willing to downgrade him/herself.

Q7: A person with a sense of humor should not use 'other' as the butt of joking.

Q8: A person with a sense of humor may use 'other' as the butt of joking, but later s/he is willing to apologize in public.

Q9: A person with a sense of humor may use 'other' as the butt of joking, but later s/he is willing to apologize privately.

Q10: I am humorous.

Q11: My (step)mother is humorous.

Q12: My (step)father is humorous.

Q13: (Read the passage below and then answer the question) If I were the newspaper reporter, I would re-tell the story to people.

A car was involved in an accident in a street. As expected a large crowd gathered. As a newspaper reporter, anxious to get my story, I could not get near the car. Being a clever sort, I started shouting loudly, "Let me through! Let me through! I am the son of the victim." The crowd made way for me. Lying in front of the car was a donkey.

Appendix 2

Table 8 Frequency and percentage of options by nation
(1-2: disagree, 3: neutral, 4-5 agree)

Items	Taiwanese			American		
	1-2	3	4-5	1-2	3	4-5
Q1 Tolerate practical jokes	12	14	34	1	7	52
Q2 Quick reaction to jokes	4	2	54	9	20	31
Q3 Laugh/smile thoughtfully	2	2	56	2	10	48
Q4 Timing	5	9	46	4	10	46
Q5 Not downgrade others	6	18	36	25	20	15
Q6 Downgrade self	11	11	38	9	16	35
Q7 Not use 'other' as butt	10	16	34	13	25	22
Q8 Apologize in public	12	15	33	11	24	25
Q9 Apologize in private	15	23	22	12	16	32
Q10 I am humorous	18	23	19	3	15	42
Q11 Mother humorous	32	12	16	19	15	26
Q12 Father humorous	25	23	12	9	14	37
Q13 A self-deprecating joke	11	12	37	14	11	35

Table 9: Means (SD) of the four groups

	Taiwan Female	Taiwan Male	USA Female	USA Male	Significant?
Q1	3.27 (1.14)	3.50 (0.82)	4.07 (0.69)	4.03 (0.56)	N
Q2	4.23 (0.57)	4.03 (1.03)	3.47 (0.90)	3.47 (1.07)	N
Q3	4.67 (0.55)	4.43 (0.86)	4.00 (1.02)	4.23 (0.68)	N
Q4	4.40 (0.86)	3.83 (1.18)	4.30 (1.02)	3.97 (0.93)	G
Q5	4.07 (1.01)	3.57 (0.94)	2.87 (1.04)	2.67 (1.09)	N
Q6	3.73 (1.08)	3.53 (1.20)	3.40 (1.07)	3.87 (1.04)	
Q7	3.73 (0.98)	3.57 (1.10)	3.47 (1.07)	2.90 (0.92)	N
Q8	3.60 (1.07)	3.37 (1.25)	3.23 (1.07)	3.40 (1.10)	
Q9	2.97 (1.16)	3.33 (1.12)	3.27 (1.17)	3.57 (1.04)	
Q10	3.00 (0.91)	3.03 (0.93)	3.87 (0.90)	3.97 (0.81)	N
Q11	2.87 (1.01)	2.40 (0.93)	3.20 (1.19)	3.17 (1.46)	N
Q12	3.00 (0.91)	2.37 (1.03)	3.80 (0.96)	3.63 (1.40)	N & G
Q13	4.10 (0.80)	3.10 (1.42)	3.77 (1.36)	3.30 (1.32)	G

Table 10 Ranking of importance of the items for the two ethnic groups

Ranking	Items		Taiwan	USA
	Grand Mean (SD)	Item Mean (SD)	Item Mean (SD)	Item Mean (SD)
1	Q3 4.33 (0.82)	Q3 4.55 (0.72)	Q4 4.13 (0.98)	
2	Q4 4.13 (1.02)	Q2 4.13 (0.83)	Q3 4.12 (0.87)	
3	Q2 3.80 (0.97)	Q4 4.12 (1.06)	Q1 4.05 (0.62)	
4	Q1 3.72 (0.89)	Q5 3.82 (1.00)	Q10 3.92 (0.85)	
5	Q6 3.63 (1.10)	Q7 3.65 (1.04)	Q12 3.72 (1.19)	
6	Q13 3.57 (1.29)	Q6 3.63 (1.13)	Q6 3.63 (1.07)	
7	Q10 3.47 (0.99)	Q13 3.60 (1.25)	Q13 3.53 (1.35)	
8	Q7 3.42 (1.06)	Q8 3.48 (1.16)	Q2 3.47 (0.98)	
9	Q8 3.40 (1.12)	Q1 3.38 (0.99)	Q9 3.42 (1.11)	
10	Q5 3.29 (1.16)	Q9 3.15 (1.15)	Q8 3.32 (1.08)	
11	Q9 3.28 (1.13)	Q10 3.02 (0.91)	Q7 3.18 (1.03)	
12	Q12 3.20 (1.22)	Q12 2.68 (1.02)	Q11 3.18 (1.32)	
13	Q11 2.91 (1.20)	Q11 2.63 (0.99)	Q5 2.77 (1.06)	

廖招治*、張聰欽**

摘要

台灣人羨慕美國人很有幽默感，想學他們的幽默感。本研究設計了十三個題目，於2005年秋天，請兩國大學生作答，共收到57份台灣女生，89份台灣男生，36份美國女生，67份美國男生的問卷，經過洗牌後，抽取120份問卷(一地區一性別30份)，加以變異數(ANOVA)及雪費事後(post-hoc Scheffe)比較分析。我們發現兩國人在以下四題反應一樣：一個有幽默感的人知道何時可幽默，何時不可；此種人願意貶低自我、認為可以拿別人當笑話的靶子，但事後願意公開或私下道歉、願意跟別人說自己的一件特定糗事。美國人在以下四點得分較高：有幽默感的人應該容忍別人的惡作劇，認為自己及爸爸、媽媽是幽默的。95%、68.3%及85%的美國人分別覺得自己、媽媽、或爸爸的幽默感平均或平均以上。相對地，只有70%、46.7%及58.3%的台灣人認為這三個角色如此。台灣人得分較高者：有幽默感的人應能迅速對笑話做反應(發出會心的微笑)，不需要說笑者再說一次或解釋、讓人發出會心的微笑、不貶低他人、不拿別人當笑話的靶子。性別因素在這三情境占重要角色：較多女性認為有幽默感的人應該知道何時可幽默，何時不可、他們的父親是幽默的、願意說一個特定的自我貶低的笑話。假如台灣人要學美國人的幽默，我們建議他們先容忍別人的惡作劇，期盼自己要幽默。有期盼就有達到目的的一天。

關鍵詞：幽默感、跨文化溝通、台灣人、美國人

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