A Cross-Cultural Perspective of Open Educational Resources

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Introduction

Open educational resources (OER), or open courses, were initiated in the United States and Europe in the early 2000s with the purpose of facilitating personal learning. Ten years later, hundreds of higher educational institutions have joined the effort and produced thousands of courses on their institutional websites for free of charge. People all over the world have viewed the course contents for the purpose of self-learning, making it possible for researchers to examine OER development from a cross-cultural and trans-national perspective. This poster will briefly introduce OER achievements in the United States, and also introduce the popularity of OER among Chinese viewers in China.

The Case of OER Learning in China

Started in 2010, several China-based entertainment webhosts translated some of open courses and made them available to local learners. Within a short period of a few months, these courses had been able to attract millions of visits with tons of comments. For example, the course of "Fundamentals of Physics" offered by Yale University available on one China-based website alone received almost two million visits several months after its translation. The unexpected popularity of OER in a different cultural, educational and social environment provides useful information for the improvement of the open access movement in general and the development of OER in particular. It is helpful for reaching a true global enterprise of open access, which represents the future of scholarly communication.

Institution	# Course	# Comment	# View
Cambridge Univ.	1	28	n/a
Harvard Univ.	4	3,974	179,330
MIT	11	1,108	n/a
Oxford Univ.	3	139	n/a
Princeton Univ.	5	1,131	n/a
Stanford Univ.	10	3,715	84,160
UC Berkeley	7	891	n/a
UCLA	1	195	24,409
Yale Univ.	23	6,007	3,342,754
Total	65	17,188	3,630,653

Courses and related data on two Chinese sites

Definition of OER: Narrowly speaking, OER refers open courses available in the public domain not for commercial use or degree seeking.
First OER Initiative: OpenCourseWare (OCW) by MIT in 2001, see http://ocw.mit.edu/about
Major OER Alliances:
    (1) *The OER Consortium*,161 community colleges in the United States
    (2) *The OER Commons,* 120+ institutions offering 28,649 course materials
    (3) *The OCW Consortium* , 243 content-providing members spreading all over the world
Examples of OER Sites (all data were collected in spring 2011):
    (1) *Connexions* by Rice University offering 5,700+ open courses
    (2) *OCW* by Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2001 offering 2000+ open courses
    (3) *Webcast Berkeley Course Lectures* by Berkeley in 2001 offering 1,715 open courses

Website	Institutional Provider	Format
163.com	Cambridge, Harvard, MIT, Oxford, Princeton, Stanford, UC Berkeley, UCLA, Yale	Video
myoops.org	Johns Hopkins, MIT, Notre Dame, TED, Utah State, Yale	Various
sina.com	Cambridge, Columbia, Harvard, MIT, Oxford, Princeton, Stanford, UC Berkeley, UCLA, Yale	Video
sohu.com	Cambridge, Harvard, MIT, Oxford, Princeton, Stanford, UC Berkeley, Yale	Video
TLF	Oxford, UC Berkeley, Yale	Video
xinkaixue.com	Harvard, MIT, RWTH Aachen, Stanford, TED, UCLA, UPenn, Yale	Video
yyets.com	Harvard, MIT, Stanford, UCLA, UPenn, Yale	Video

OER providers covered by popular Chinese websites

Recently, students' daily greetings on many Chinese college campuses became: "have you taken an open course today?" instead of "have you eaten?" (the Chinese version of "how are you?")

Findings

- Courses with a subject in social science and the humanities, such as psychology and philosophy, receive the most comments because viewers can easily connect course content to their daily life and thinking.
- On the other hand, courses in physical and medical sciences and technologies have more viewers but fewer comments. These comments focus on suggestions for better course translation and organization rather than reflections on course materials.
- Viewers pay less attention to who provides which course than what the course is about.
- The success of OER local adaptation in China has provided some novel and valuable insights into our understanding of open access in a different cultural and social context.

Suggestions

- Open courses are in great demand in countries outside the West.
- Courses aligned by academic subject will help viewers engage in better self-paced learning.
- Higher education institutions may consider adopting innovative strategies to expand their education to areas beyond traditional coverage.
- Various open access stakeholders may take a trans-national perspective and re-direct their efforts toward more diverse geographical and cultural settings.

The self-learners in China have vocalized their preferences for the open course content, teaching style, and the open ideals of these courses.

The impact of OER on open access and education has a cultural and social dimension. International sharing of open course materials will make teaching and learning a real global enterprise and bring potentially substantial ideological and physical changes to regional systems.

Course Title	Institution	Comment
Positive Psychology	Harvard	2,186
Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?	Harvard	1,110
Philosophy: Death	Yale	923
Listening to Music	Yale	884
Game Theory	Yale	855
Financial Market	Yale	787
Programming Methodology	Stanford	764
Economics	Stanford	704
Business Leaders and Entrepreneurs	Stanford	637
The Future of Human Health	Stanford	612

Top ten commented courses by Chinese viewers

Course Title	Institution	View
Fundamentals of Physics	Yale	1,873,314
Financial Markets	Yale	311,287
Game Theory	Yale	255,117
Philosophy: Death	Yale	233,787
Listening to Music	Yale	192,830
Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?	Harvard	112,403
Introduction to Ancient Greek History	Yale	102,788
European Civilization	Yale	99,127
The Psychology, Biology and Politics of Food	Yale	85,213
Programming Methodology	Stanford	84,160

Top ten visited courses by Chinese learners