

Resources for Interculturality in Chinese Higher Education (RICH-Ed)

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D1.1 Inventory of intercultural learning in Chinese higher education

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Introduction

Intercultural communication has developed rapidly in China against the backdrop of globalization and internationalization since the 1980s. As part of the national efforts to integrate intercultural communication into foreign language education, China's Ministry of Education has issued several policy documents to urge the integration of intercultural communication into university curriculum. "In 2000, the Chinese English Syllabus for English Majors (CESEM) emphasized cultivating English majors' intercultural competence for the first time. CESEM now requires that English majors should learn about intercultural awareness, tolerance, and flexibility in real time contexts. In 2004 The Chinese College English Curriculum Requirements (CECR) gave intercultural competence the same important role as English knowledge and proficiencies for millions of college English learners. In the same year, the Chinese High School English Curriculum Standard elaborated that English education in high schools should include cultural knowledge, awareness, and skills in intercultural communication. In 2015, the new version of CECR required colleges and universities in China to include the course Intercultural Communication as one of the compulsory courses in English education to develop students' intercultural competence." (Wang, Dearsdorff & Kulich, 2017) The Chinese section of the Inventory provides an overview of how intercultural communication was integrated into the teaching of language. IC was introduced into the curriculum at both the theoretical and practical levels and the status quo of intercultural teaching and learning in Chinese higher education context.

Currently, there are altogether 50 relevant publications in the Chinese section of the Inventory, with 47 published in the last 10 years from 2008 to 2018 and three between 2004 and 2007. 41 of the 50 publications are journals papers, while textbooks and books are four each. There is one Ph.D. dissertation. As for the general release of the 41 journal papers, 38 were published in CSSCI journals such as Foreign Language World, Foreign Languages of China and Foreign Language Research as well as many others. Therefore, the inventory results can adequately offer an insight into the current trends of intercultural communication teaching and research in China.

Inventory Journals

After reviewing the 41 inventory journals, we identify 9 major categories, as can be seen from Table 1 below. From Table 1, it can be seen that except for Category 1 and Category 6, all the rest of the seven categories are studies at the theoretical and polemic levels, respectively. Drawing on Euro-American traditions, Chinese scholars have been grappling to conceptually adapt intercultural communication competence within the Chinese context (Huang, 2013; Huang, 2017; Liu, 2012; Yang & Zhuang, 2007; Zhang & Yang, 2012). Indigenous theoretical ICC models address the issue of what to teach about intercultural communication in the context of China. Various models/frameworks constructed for ICC development in college English teaching are trying to address the issue of how to teach intercultural communication within the Chinese context. Kong & Luan (2012) attempted to

build a practice model of cross-cultural college English teaching with three principles: systematization and comprehensiveness; dynamic and sustainability; and practical application. Song (2008, 2009), Song & Fu (2004) proposed a framework for an intercultural communicative approach to ELT (ICLT) with four fundamental principles: The Principle of Interculturality; the Principle of Interactivity; the Principle of Unity of Language and Culture; the Principle of Integration of the Global and the Local.

Table 1 Categories of Research Contents of the Inventory Journals

Categories	Contents	Number
1	Pedagogical practice of (inter)cultural teaching	9
2	Theoretical and critiquing studies of ICC cultivation in China	6
3	Theoretical ICC model construction in the context of China	6
4	Construction of model/framework for ICC development in college English teaching at the theoretical level	6
5	Construction of framework of Chinese college students' ICC evaluation system	3
6	Descriptive studies on the current situation of college students' and teachers' ICC in China	3
7	Theoretical development of intercultural communication in China	3
8	Disciplinary development of intercultural communication in China	3
9	Intercultural communication teaching materials evaluation	2

Xu & Sun (2013) constructed a progressive-interactive model for intercultural competence development. The model incorporates knowledge, motivation, skills, contexts, and outcomes, with a focus on cultivating learners' intercultural personality in a globalizing context. The core emphasis of this model is from a dyadic interactive perspective.

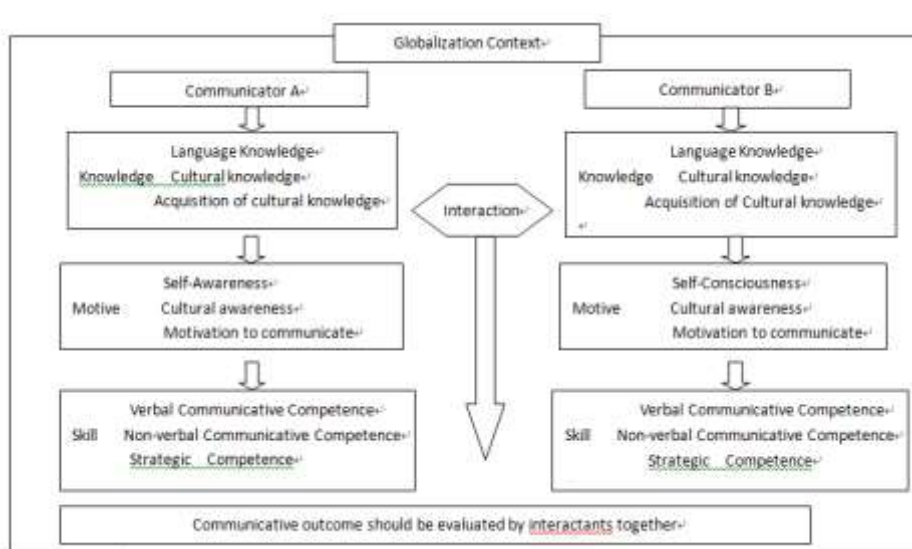


Figure 1 A Progressive-Interactive Model for Developing Intercultural Competence in a Globalizing Context (Xu & Sun, 2013)

Gu's (2017) circular model for ICC training consists of three circles which respectively represent objectives, procedures, and activities of intercultural language teaching from the inside out. These models for developing students' intercultural competence in college English

teaching are all characterized by 1) an interactive perspective; 2) a dynamic and progressive view of culture; 3) learner autonomy. However, instructors have used only a few of these models have in Chinese foreign language education environment.

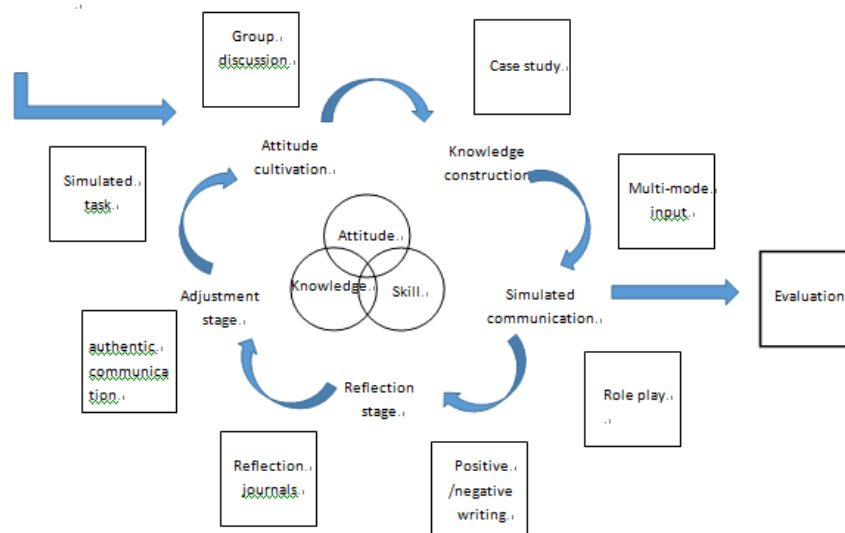


Figure 2 The Circular Model of Intercultural Communication Competence Teaching Practice (Gu, 2017)

Some scholars have applied different intercultural practices in foreign language classrooms. Zhang & Chen (2012) conducted experimental research on the cultivating of cross-cultural qualities in college English teaching. The cultivating of cross-cultural qualities is integrated regularly into before-, in-, and after-class activities, which produced positive results. Chang and Zhao (2012) carried out action research applying the teaching approach “Cultural Knowledge” to intercultural college English teaching of Integrated Course to raise students’ intercultural awareness. Both the quantitative and qualitative data obtained after the innovative teaching show a positive impact of the “Cultural Knowledge” on raising learners’ intercultural awareness. Huang (2015) designed a process-oriented cultural teaching model based on constructivism. The model consists of 4 steps: propose hypotheses about cultural differences; conduct research; write reflective journals regularly; reflect on the learning process and construct new understandings of culture and cultural differences. The qualitative and quantitative data obtained from the treatment group and the control group after the innovative teaching shows that the process-oriented cultural teaching significantly improved students’ ICC at both affective and behavioral levels. Yang & Li (2017) aimed at integrating intercultural communication with college English to promote the development of students’ English skills as well as intercultural competence. Two rounds of action research were carried out on the comprehensive English course with a cohort of second-year non-English majors. Through an iterative process of teaching planning (teaching events), implantation, and constant assessment and reflection, the authors proposed a “Production-oriented language-IC integration teaching model.” The model proves to help improve students’ intercultural competence of interpreting other culture, of understanding self-culture, and better intercultural awareness.

Fu & Zhang (2017) applied main methods of intercultural training including videos,

discussion, cultural assimilators, IC workshops, role play, simulations, etc., and designed a 6-step teaching process: needs analysis; setting teaching objectives; rationalizing; specifying teaching content; designing teaching activities; and assessment. Some scholars have researched intercultural teaching in intercultural communication courses in particular. Wang & Qin (2011) established a structural creativity model of 4 steps: propose questions or assumptions; research the proposed questions or assumptions; critically organize the collected information in teams and develop new understandings and interpretations; output—make a presentation about the reconstructed IC knowledge. Zhang (2013) established a multi-literacy framework and applied it to the intercultural communication course. The model is project-based: Week 9—establish project task resources; Weeks 10-11—decide on the project plan: to communicate with the overseas student in China, to communicate with overseas Chinese students, or to communicate with returned Chinese students from abroad; Weeks 12-14—analyze project tasks. Reflect on the previous knowledge, develop new understandings and deconstruct stereotypes; Week 15—construct new resources and finish project reports; Week 16—a Questionnaire survey. Zheng & Li (2016) designed a Reflective Intercultural Teaching Model and applied it to a course named “Language, Culture, and Communication.” Starting from understanding and describing cultural differences (Weeks 1-4), the learners then learn to explain the differences from different perspectives (Weeks 5-8) and discuss the interpretation of and attitude toward the differences (Weeks 9-11). Finally, they learn strategies for communication and adaptation, negotiation of differences, and resolution of conflicts (Weeks 12-14). The Reflective Intercultural Teaching Model focusing on personal experience, critical thinking, and communicative classroom discourse not only helped students acquire cultural knowledge and communication skills, but it also encouraged them to reexamine assumptions and go beyond stereotypes. Wang & Kulich (2015) adopted a descriptive and reflective intercultural interview approach as an intervention and means of developing and assessing intercultural competence. Procedural steps for participants include: (1) Reflect on and write up one’s “Own-Culture Story.” (2) Choose a target cultural group and informant(s) representing that group. (3) Do library or Internet research on the groups to prepare interview topics. (4) Establish and extend relationships by sharing “own cultural stories.” (5) Carry out “friendly conversations.” (6) Write out reflective journal entries. (7) Conduct formal interviews. (8) Review the process and write up a final development report. The nine studies mentioned above of pedagogical practice of (inter)cultural teaching in the Chinese higher education context display some shared characteristics. There is the homogeneity of the constructed teaching models with recurring elements: propose assumptions about a specific culture or cultural differences; verify the assumptions by doing research or engaging in activities; reflection and critical thinking; reconstruction of understandings of cultures and cultural differences. Frequently used class activities include watching videos, group discussion, case analysis, role play, simulation, intercultural encounter, etc. And an unanimously adopted way of assessment is portfolio composed of reflective journals and reports.

From the analysis of the Inventory journals there is a growing recognition among the scholars that the static and orderly characteristics of culture are problematic; culture is

dynamic and an ongoing process. Students' autonomy is respected while reflection and critical thinking are emphasized in this view of culture. Students are encouraged to re(construct) their knowledge and understanding of cultures and cultural differences through research, observation, and experience embedded in various activities.

Conversation/interactivity between students and students, students and teachers, students and texts, students and interlocutors underpins the intercultural teaching and learning process. Therefore, these researches are highly consistent with the five principles of intercultural education (CREED) proposed by Sun (2016): Critiquing; Reflecting; Exploring; Empathizing; and Doing (learning by doing).

On the other hand, however, there are still discrepancies between the current trends and mainstream default teaching practices. Han (2014) carried out a questionnaire survey among 1081 college English teachers from 39 universities throughout China. The results show that the teachers' knowledge of intercultural communication competence and intercultural English teaching requires improvement in terms of teaching objectives, teaching activities, teaching content and assessment. There is a lack of more in-depth understanding of diversity and dynamics of cultures among both teachers and students, which underscores the importance of systematic teacher training in intercultural communication. Given the affiliated role of intercultural teaching to foreign language education in China, and due to a lack of top-down conceptual and operational framework for the identification of concrete teaching contents, teaching methods, teaching materials and means of assessment to be pursued, the practice of (inter)cultural teaching in China is unsystematic and fragmented. In the absence of programmatic guidance, many foreign language teachers tend to approach (inter)cultural education with their understandings. Such unguided, unsystematic, fragmented and superficial teaching practice may be counterproductive, reinforcing stereotypes (Zhang, 2012). Therefore, it is essential to carry out top-down intercultural education in the Chinese context.

Inventory Textbooks

The four IC textbooks in the Inventory are *Intercultural Communication in English (Revised Edition)* (Xu, 2009), *Intercultural Communication: A Practical Coursebook in English* (Huang, 2013), *Newision College English* (Cortazzi & Jin, 2011), and *English. Think* (Sun, 2015), with the former two being textbooks designed explicitly for intercultural communication course and the following two books for college English integrating intercultural communication. The two categories represent a broader picture of IC textbooks published in China. As China's intercultural communication has leaned heavily towards foreign language education, a high number of "IC textbooks" are designed for college English targeted at non-English majors while incorporating elements of intercultural communication. For example, Sun (2015), in his series of textbooks, made a serious attempt at integrating culture, critical thinking, and intercultural communication competence into the four basic skills of English.

Faculty across China offer Intercultural communication courses, which calls for textbooks with a different focus. Huang (2013)' books frequently compare Chinese and Western approaches to intercultural pragmatics. Xu (2009) is mainly targeted at English

majors enrolling in the course of intercultural communication. Topics covered have extended to cross-cultural perception, intercultural adaptation rather than cultural comparison.

IC textbooks in China are generally topic-based with a structured format for each unit which usually consists of several readings. Textbooks for intercultural communication courses or college English incorporating intercultural communication, language is always a focus given the Chinese higher education context. Unlike IEREST education resources which are awareness- and attitude-oriented, IC textbooks in China are still predominantly cognition-oriented. Even though the past decade has witnessed a shift from the positivist paradigm to the constructivist model in intercultural communication research in China, the structural-functional view of culture endures not only in practice but also in IC textbooks. Suo et al. (2015) content analyzed 122 intercultural communication textbooks published in China from 1985 to 2014. The authors concluded that the choice of teaching materials and intercultural communication theories are arbitrary. They also noticed that IC textbooks in China are Euro- and America- centric without the realistic representation of indigenous intercultural communication in learners' locality.

Conclusions

Intercultural communication teaching means all teaching activities should pertain to students interacting with foreigners, from theories to methodology, to pedagogy, to teaching materials, and assessment. There has been a vigorous and sustainable development of intercultural communication studies in China, but the existing gap between theories and teaching practice, teaching materials, and curriculum development needs to be bridged to align with the complexity and dynamic of both culture and intercultural communication.

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Appendix

Journals

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