

**University of Białystok**  
**Department of Educational Sciences**

**LULU HAO**

**A STUDY ON THE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE OF  
ENGLISH MAJORS IN CHINESE UNIVERSITIES**

**Thesis Summary**

Prepared under the direction of  
Dr hab. Dorota Misiejuk, Prof. UwB

Białystok 2022

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
1. Context of my study .....	1
2. Research Objectives and its Significance .....	2
3. Research Questions .....	2
Chapter 2 Literature Review .....	3
1. Introduction .....	3
2. Intercultural Competence--Definitions and Components .....	3
2.1. Definition Summary .....	3
2.2. Components .....	4
3. Major Studies on Intercultural Competence (Western and Oriental) .....	4
4. Assessment of Intercultural Competence .....	8
4.1. From Deardorff .....	8
4.2. From Fantini .....	8
4.3. From Wu Weiping .....	9
5. Conclusion .....	9
Chapter 3 The Exploration of Key Concepts .....	9
1. Introduction .....	9
2. Main Content .....	10
3. Conclusion .....	11
Chapter 4 Research Design and Methodology .....	11
1. Introduction .....	11
2. Research Questions and Hypothesis .....	11
3. The Rational of the Research .....	15
4. Methods .....	15
5. Advantages, Challenges and Limitations .....	16
6. Conclusion .....	16
Chapter 5 Findings and Discussions .....	16
1. Introduction .....	16
2. Findings .....	16
2.1. Presentation of the Respondent Groups from Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 2 .....	16
2.2. Answering the First Five Detailed Research Questions .....	18
2.3. Answering the first Main Research Question .....	20
2.4. Answering the Remaining Three Detailed Research Questions .....	21
2.5. Answering the Second Main Research Question .....	22
3. Discussions .....	23
3.1. Identity Profiles .....	23
3.2. Profiles v.s. Dimensions .....	24
3.3. Correlation Analysis of the Variables .....	24
3.4. Intercultural Foreign Language Education as the Way out .....	24
4. Conclusion .....	25
Chapter 6 Conclusion .....	25

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1. Context of my study

My research on the topic of “*A STUDY ON THE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE OF ENGLISH MAJORS IN CHINESE UNIVERSITIES*” was officially initiated at the beginning of 2019, when I wrote the research proposal for my PhD application to the university of Bialystok. Back then, the topic of intercultural competence has gained its popularity for decades worldwide under the trend of globalization, multiculturalism, and internationalization. And this, of course, applied to the situation in China too, only that a question gradually emerged with the deepening of globalization and intercultural communication: Is intercultural communication always in equal terms? The answer might be negative, due to the overwhelming impact of 'western culture' on the rest of the world, including China, in the form of cultural colonization in aspects of values, ideology, lifestyles, etc. Thus, to a large extent, Western culture has deeply affected the whole world, with its dominant position in intercultural communication. Thus the theoretically expected 'equality' in intercultural communication may not always happen in reality. Actually, there was a time when western culture was "worshiped" by youngsters in China; and it seemed to them, or even to me when I was a college student, that everything about western world was more developed, advanced, and even more civilized. This phenomenon was also reflected in foreign language education, in which language policymakers and educators, once upon a time, only focused on the learning of western culture while neglecting the importance of figuring out their own cultural identity, hence resulting in the so-called Chinese Culture Aphasia.

In 2013, President Xi proposed Belt and Road Initiative, which is the continuation of the Silk Road back to thousands of years ago. And it can also be considered as a product of globalization, multiculturalism and internationalization, especially since China learned its lesson so hard from history and know better than ever before the importance of opening up, learning from each other, and striving to keep up with the times. Besides, insufficiency of China's voice on global stages as well as the demand from multinational companies doing business in or with China are also calling for the urgent needs for people with intercultural competence.

Foreign language education in higher institutions plays a major role in responding to the above demand, especially in English language teaching and learning. Since the opening-up policies in 1978, China at that time was desperate to learn from the West and got rid of its backward situation. Language policies were revised and national curriculum for foreign language education was designed under such a context with the purpose of getting to know everything about developed Western English-speaking countries. In addition to Western cultural invasion, the context back then has made most of foreign language learners in China assume Chinese cultural heritage as unimportant and out-of-date while everything from the West is modern and worth learning. Decades later till now, significant changes have happened especially in the past one decade since the Belt and Road Initiative, with nationwide propaganda on the renaissance of Chinese culture, the importance of enhancing one's cultural confidence, as well as delivering a positive image of China to the world, etc.

What is drastic and newly added to the context of study is the global pandemic of Covid-19. When it first broke out at the beginning of 2020, no one expected it to be so prolonged and overwhelming, to the extent that basically every aspect of people's life is affected, and

international tensions aggravated along with it. When it should be a time of unison, division gained the upper hand in reality; and the very significance of intercultural communication was ignored, or rather, lost. Therefore, the importance of it should be repeatedly stressed, and education of the notion as “being interculturally competent” should be delivered to the young generation in all countries, more effectively and urgently than ever before.

## **2. Research Objectives and its Significance**

The **purpose** of my study is to research on intercultural competence and get to know the current situation of the English majors in Chinese universities in terms of their intercultural competence.

In order to achieve the above purpose, and under the guidance of relevant theories and models of intercultural competence and foreign language teaching, and by conducting questionnaires and interviews to at least 400 English major students and more than 100 college English teachers in around 10 universities in China, a comprehensive analysis of the collected data will be carried out and suggestions will be offered for integrating the learning of intercultural competence into the daily teaching of foreign (English) languages in universities.

The **significance** of my study echoes with the reality both in China and the world. First of all, it is widely applied to areas such as intercultural negotiations, trade talks, multinationals' adaptation to different countries, cultural exchanges and learning, immigration to new countries or cooperation programs of any kind among different countries; not mention its critical role in a time of global pandemic when intercultural communication is greatly compromised while the whole world needs to be united. It responds to the urgent needs for more intercultural speakers, which in a long run, is essential for popularizing intercultural learning among all people that helps to foster the attitude of openness, tolerance, and mutual respect, along with the skills of empathy and appropriate communication. Also, Chinese scholars are relatively new in this arena, therefore empirical studies are very limited; for those already done, mostly are theoretical research. And students' actual intercultural competence is seldom investigated, analyzed and systematically studied. This study is a useful attempt and necessary supplement to the existing research on intercultural competence and will play a positive role in promoting intercultural teaching in Chinese universities. Theoretically, the study will further enrich the current IC theories and models; especially nowadays most of the model are still Western-centric, and some of them may not be applicable to the Chinese context. With data collected and analyzed, new problems may emerged as future research topics. Besides, this research also calls on the policy-makers of higher education in China to reconsider the language learning policy and national curriculum by attaching the importance of intercultural competence to language learning as well as provide clues about what kind of language professionals or specialists the modern China and the world need. Last but not the least, it may also be window for my Polish peers, advisors and readers to get to know more about China and may promote further intercultural exchanges academically.

## **3. Research Questions**

With the above purposes and by putting intercultural competence in the China's social, cultural and educational context, my research questions are hence constructed as follows,

### **1. How interculturally competent are the English majors in Chinese universities at present?**

- (1) In what aspects does their English language proficiency affect their communication with people from other cultures?(language proficiency)

- (2) How do they evaluate their performance in the interaction with people from other cultures? (interaction skill)
- (3) How interculturally sensitive are they towards their own and other cultures?(intercultural sensitivity)
- (4) Do they have necessary cultural knowledge of the major-English countries for effective and appropriate intercultural communication?(Knowledge)
- (5) What is their attitude towards cultural differences and intercultural communication?(attitude of openness, respect, curiosity)

## **2. What are the major factors that may constrain students from developing intercultural competence?**

- (1) Are students willing to jump out of their comfort zone and actively participated in intercultural communicative activities both in class and in their daily life? (intercultural experience)
- (2) Do English teachers integrate intercultural learning/training into their class? (Teachers' perspectives)
- (3) Does the educational foreign language policies in China put intercultural competence as one of the major objectives?(language policies)

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **1. Introduction**

In this chapter, the definition and components of intercultural competence will be explored as a start, followed by an overview of studies on intercultural competence both from Western and Oriental countries; and then discussions on the assessment process by some well-known IC experts will be introduced as guidance for the operation of my assessment empirically.

### **2. Intercultural Competence--Definitions and Components**

#### **2.1. Definition Summary**

A large number of scholars prefer to use **effectiveness and appropriateness** to define the criteria of being interculturally competent in a specific context, such as below:

- (1) Spitzberg((2000, p379), *“Intercultural competence refers to the appropriate and effective behavior of the communicator in a specific context”*.
- (2) Chen and Starosta(1996) think that *“Intercultural competence refers to the ability of the interactors to negotiate cultural significance and use effective communicative behavior in a special environment appropriately in order to confirm their multiple identities”*
- (3) Ting-Toomey(1993) pointed out that intercultural competence is the ability of the communicators to negotiate effectively with the members from other cultures so as to achieve a satisfactory result.
- (4) Chen Junsen and Fan Huayuan(2006) also agree that intercultural competence *“emphasizes the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of different cultural backgrounds”*.
- (5) Professor Gao Yihong(2000) believes that *“intercultural competence refers to the competence or quality required for successful intercultural communication”*; --when defining "successful",

effectiveness and appropriateness is mentioned.

There are also a variety of definitions on intercultural competence **from other perspectives**, such as below, and those scholars define intercultural competence either from the perspective of mental state, the result or the mutual relationship in the process, etc. all of which further enrich the core meaning of this term.

- (1) Kims (2001a) thinks that intercultural competence is an inner ability of the communicator to adapt to a new environment by adjusting his or her mindset.
- (2) Arasaratnam & Doerfel (2005) argued that intercultural competence is the ability of the interlocutors to reach a satisfactory result that both sides can feel in the communication.
- (3) Dai & Chen (2015) define intercultural competence as the ability to establish intercultural contact and develop a harmonious and win-win relationship.

## **2.2. Components**

A consensus has been reached so far on the four essential components of intercultural components, i.e. knowledge, skills, attitudes and awareness(Chen 1996; Jia 1997; Kim 2001; Yang & Zhuang 2007; Zhang & Yang 2012; Chen & Starosta 1996; Spitzberg 1997; Byram 1997; Fantini 2000, 2006; Deardorff 2004, 2006; Spitzberg & Changnon 2009).

Generally speaking, The most recognized definition and components are offered as above; however, in recent years, the mainstream understanding of intercultural competence and its components are mostly from Western scholars; the question of how to see and analyze this term with a non-western look is still await to be further explored by more researchers. For example, Some researchers from Oriental countries put intercultural competence in Asian cultural context and discussed about the importance of interpersonal relationship in the process. They believed that the skills of empathy, adaptation, tolerance, emotion and relationship are particularly important(Jia 1997; Kim 2001).

## **3. Major Studies on Intercultural Competence (Western and Oriental)**

So far, the definition of intercultural competence is yet to be settled, except that its 'appropriateness' during the communicative process and its 'effectiveness' as the outcome have been widely-recognized. As can be seen from the literature in this chapter, some scholars study intercultural competence from the perspective of immigrants, some from foreign language learners, while others from either the Western point of view or the Oriental's angels. Therefore, a consensus on any particular version of definition may never be reached and it is not necessary to do so.

By reviewing the above literature on IC studies, a table is summarized below to more clearly show a variety of interpretations on intercultural competence from different scholars. Culture already has too many dimensions, therefore it's quite understandable that researchers have different emphasis when it comes to intercultural studies. Hofstede's Six Dimensions offer us a series of categories to understand cultural differences more systematically; M.J. Bennett's model demonstrates the dynamic and developmental process of one's intercultural sensitivity; Stephen Bochner, Deardorff, Fantini, Micheal Byram, Ting-Toomey and A. Kurogi, and X.D.Dai & G.M.Chen have certain degree of consensus on the importance of emotion/attitude, behavior/skills, and cognition/knowledge in developing intercultural competence. Besides, IC researchers from Eastern countries stress elements such as moral ethics, self-restraint, harmony

and being euphemistic which are rarely mentioned by western scholars. Clashes of those ideas have further enriched intercultural studies and deepened our understanding towards this complex topic.

<b>Table 1: A Summary of Major IC Studies in Literature Review</b>						
<b>COMPONENTS</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>AUTHOR</b>						
<b>Hofstede's Five Dimensions</b>	Individualism-collectivism	Masculine-feminine culture	Power distance	Uncertainty avoidance	Long-term/short-term orientation	Restraint-Indulgence
<b>M.J. Bennett's ISM</b>	Denial (Ethnocentric)	Defense (Ethnocentric)	Minimization (Ethnocentric)	Acceptance (Ethno-relative)	Adaptation (Ethno-relative)	Integration (Ethno-relative)
<b>Deardorff's IC Model</b>	Attitudes (respect, openness, curiosity and discovery)	Knowledge and Comprehension(cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness)	Skills( to listen, observe and evaluate, to analyze, interpret and relate)			
<b>Fantini's IC Model</b>	Positive attitudes	knowledge	skills	Awareness		
<b>\Stephen Bochner's ABC Model</b>	Affect (both Negative- stress, anxiety. Confusions, physical and mental illness, low self-esteem and homesickness and Positive-emotional well-being, and a sense of satisfaction)	Behaviors of instrumental, interaction and relational adjustment.	Cognition (interest in other cultures, tolerance, positive attitudes towards new/unusual environment)			
<b>Byram's Five Dimensions</b>	Attitudes of curiosity and openness	knowledge	Skills of interpreting and relating	Skills of discovery and interactions	Critical cultural awareness	
<b>Kim's Intercultural Adaptation Theory</b>	Personal communication	Social communication	Ethnic communication	environment	predisposition	Intercultural transformation



<b>Ting-Toomey and A. Kurogi's Facework Competence Model</b>	Mindfulness Dimension (mindful reflexivity, openness for novelty, multiple vision, analytical empathy, and mindful creativity)	Knowledge Dimension (individualism-collectivism, small/large power distance, "self"/"face" model, and facework communication style)	Interaction skills (mindful listening, mindful observation, facework management, trust-building, collaborative dialogue)		Facework Competence Criteria (perceived appropriateness, perceived effectiveness, mutual adaptability, mutual satisfaction)	
<b>X.S.Xiao &amp;G.M.Chen's IC Theory from Confucianism's perspective</b>	Internal ability of virtue and sincerity (sensing ability)	External ability of practicing moral codes and propriety				
<b>X.D.Dai &amp;G.M.Chen's IC Model from the perspective of Interculturality</b>	Emotion ( open mind, a self-concept of interconnection, positive empathy, mutual appreciation)	Cognition (cultural knowledge, critical cultural awareness, cultural integration and intercultural perspective)	Behavior (interaction, identity negotiation, construction of harmony, and creative tension)	Moral ethics (mutual respect, sincerity, tolerance, responsibility)		
<b>J.Takai and H.Ota's IC Model</b>	the perceptual competence	self-restraint	social appropriateness	interpersonal sensitivity	tolerance to ambiguity	
<b>J.O.Yum's IC Theory from Korean Cultural perspective</b>	empathy	sensitivity	euphemistic	silence	transcendentalism	
<b>Fantini</b>	Positive attitudes/affect, knowledge, skills and awareness	Attributes of flexibility, humor, patience, openness, interest, curiosity, empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, and suspending judgements	Three areas(building relationship, communicating and collaborating)	Language proficiency		

## 4. Assessment of Intercultural Competence

### 4.1. From Deardorff

When talking about implementing intercultural competence assessment, Deardorff listed a number of items that have been agreed among top intercultural experts, such as case studies, interviews, mix of quantitative and qualitative measures, analysis of narrative diaries, self-report instruments, observation by others/host culture, etc.(Deardorff, 2009). However, it is still a very general guide, too general to offering systematic steps/procedures; for example, it didn't explain how to use the indicators or items to assess one's intercultural competence. Besides, the field practice is totally based on US experiences, which may be not totally applicable to my research under a Chinese context.

**Comment:** Deardorff's research is of great value in guiding me to have a comprehensive and holistic understanding about the research methods I need to apply. She listed examples of Assessment Plan, Checklist for Evaluating Assessment Efforts, Intercultural Competence Assessment Guide, etc.(Chapter 28, Deardorff's *The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, 2009, see table below). All of the above provide a good reference in constructing the whole project of assessment, especially in the preparation stage when designing the assessment plan.

### 4.2. From Fantini

Fantini also emphasized on the importance of foreign language education to the development of one's intercultural competence. Fantini's version of the definition, in my view, is more comprehensive. He not only agreed on the four dimensions of knowledge, attitudes, skills and awareness with many of the well-known IC experts, but also stressed the importance of cooperating for common good as well as maintaining the relationship. What's more, he is clearly aware of the essential role language proficiency plays in cultivating intercultural competence.

When talking about the assessment, Fantini argued that many researchers have ignored the essential role of language proficiency, which is actually the foundation for anyone who wants to develop intercultural competence. In the *Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence*(2009), Fantini provided readers with guidance in selecting proper assessment formats, techniques and strategies. For example, direct, indirect, discrete or global assessment could be adopted separately or together based on researcher's assessment objectives. Direct formats include traditional tests, quizzes, portfolios, capstone projects etc.; while indirect formats are usually time-consuming such as class observation, self-report surveys, interviews, and focus group, ect. Discrete assessment is used for measuring a specific aspect while global assessment is more general and comprehensive. Mostly, multiple formats need to be utilized in order to get more valid results. Besides, a series of techniques and strategies are also proposed by Fantini (Deardorff, 2009).

**Comment:** It motivated me to think about what's the purpose of my research—What's my assessment for? It is for students to be more culturally-aware; for teachers to know the reality, realize the urgency, adjust their teaching objectives, so as to grow up together with their students in the way of becoming competence global citizens. Of course, this is a life-long process. Fantini's theory is helpful to me in explaining the necessity of assessment and the challenges being faced. If teachers don't have a clear idea about the level/situation of their students, the learning outcome would be compromised. Therefore, quality assessment, as Fantini said, should be integrated into the whole teaching process.

### 4.3. From Wu Weiping

Wu Weiping designed the *Intercultural Communicative Competence Assessment Scale for Chinese College Students*. In her study, Wu reconfirmed the validity of Byram and Dearsorff's versions of IC definition, and he then provided a definition of intercultural competence applicable to his own research. According to Wu(2015), very few studies were found on the assessment of ICC in the Chinese context, which made such type of empirical research more valuable and meaningful.

Wu(2015) designed the questionnaire based on six indicators as follows, knowledge of self, knowledge of others, attitudes, intercultural communication skills, intercultural cognitive skills, and awareness. Wu then used FCE(Fuzzy Comprehensive Evaluation) index system as the evaluation method to get the results.

**Comment:** Wu's assessment method has the advantage of being simple and easy to operate, as well as being holistic by covering the six aspects. However, the description of each item is too general, such as “*Knowledge about the religions of your own country*”, or “*Having adequate skills to carry out effective and appropriate intercultural communication*”. When participants evaluate themselves, it's quite possible that they may over/underestimate their own competence, hence producing inaccurate results. Also, Wu said his questionnaire was designed specifically for Chinese context yet little sign has shown his intention. What's more, the relationship between intercultural competence and the mastering of foreign language wasn't discussed which according to my research, is quite necessary. Despite of the limitations, Wu's empirical study on intercultural competence in 2005 is still very valuable for China's IC research and it inspired me to explore further and deeper into this area.

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter is essential in laying a solid foundation for my own study on the topic of intercultural competence, including its definitions, components, models and frameworks, as well as for the construction of the whole assessment plan. By learning from those influential theories, arguments and assessment practice, new interpretations and inspirations will occur when combining specific object and context in my research.

## Chapter 3 The Exploration of Key Concepts

### 1. Introduction

This chapter explores some key concepts and topics that are relevant to my study. For example, the relationship among language, culture and communication is explained, plus a review of culture teaching in China and the West. What's more, higher education system and English language education in China, are also illustrated, which includes the modernization of Chinese education in general, and specifically English language education since 1949, and its relation to intercultural competence. besides, the learning style with Chinese characteristics is researched under the deep-rooted influence by Confucianism. All of the above concepts contributed to the current reality of English language education in colleges and universities of China as well as are vital for me to understand the definition of intercultural competence for Chinese English major students. More adaptive pedagogic strategies might be applied to fit Chinese students in terms of cultivating their intercultural awareness and competence.

## 2. Main Content

What is worth mentioning in this chapter as important background information is the **the modernization of China's education as well as English Language education in China since 1949**. The education system and the philosophies in China have experienced different periods such as **introducing western education theories and then abandoning them afterwards, the resurgence of Confucianism and then the denial of it, and the integration of both western and Chinese traditions**, etc. In a word, the development of any country's education is always closely related to the ups and downs of its society and the world as the whole. The pandemic at the present has too deeply affected the education in China in numerous aspects such as the sharp decline in overseas study and international exchanges, the way of learning from face-to-face transforming to online/distant learning, etc. The question of where education would be headed amid uncertainties under the current context is waited to be discussed by more people and authorities of concern. When it specifically comes to the English education in China, it is of course impacted by those dynamic social changes as well. According to Hu(2014), it was divided into three phases: from 1949 to 1980, from 1980 to 2010, from 2010 till now, that experienced imitation, opening-up, and transformation in modern times etc.

Besides, **Confucianism** is an unavoidable topic when talking about both Chinese culture and education of China. What then, is Confucianism? It is a school of thought initiated by Confucius (Kong zi in Chinese) more than 2000 years ago and has been developing over time, starting with the thoughts of Confucius and his disciples, then later integrating Taoism and Buddhism as well as evolving and transforming under social and cultural contexts throughout different dynasties. In order to understand the main thoughts of Confucianism, key concepts such as Ren and Li needs to be elaborated.

Ren(仁) is the core concept of Confucianism, with its connotation including multiple meanings such as love, humanity, kindness, and benevolence, etc. The practice of Ren aims to build harmonious relationship among family members as well as within society, including between the ruler and subjects. If the ruler govern the country with morality and virtue, social and political order would be restored. Actually, Confucius proposed the concept of Ren for the purpose of fulfilling his political ambition(p12, Wang and Lu, 2018).

Li(礼) is the second most important concept after Ren, which could be translated into *'rituals, proprieties, traditions, norms of social life, standard of conduct, order of society, ect.'*(p16, Wang and Lu, 2018). If Ren is the essence of Confucianism, then Li is the form; Ren is practiced by Li. It is a way to pay respect to others, especially for people to pay respect to their parents, to ancestors, to the departed, and to the sages such as Confucius. This sense of respect, and the rituals held along with it, will further enhance filial piety within family, courtesy to others, and political hierarchy, hence harmony stabilized in the society. .

Ren and Li, in addition to Yi(righteousness), Zhi(wisdom) and Xin(trustworthiness and reliability), are known as the Five Constant Virtues of Confucianism that have had huge and lasting influence on Chinese life and culture till the present day. Besides, exam-oriented educational system since 1500 years ago was also profoundly influenced by Confucianism and it has been deeply rooted in Chinese tradition and mindset. In brief, the thoughts of Confucianism could help readers understand better the Oriental intercultural theories in the previous chapter of Literature Review, especially the stress of moral ethics and harmony in communication, and also the historical reason why China's exam-oriented education system is so difficult to be reformed despite of its obvious

defects in the modern society.

As for the **Chinese culture of learning**, there were researchers from other countries studying the characteristics of Chinese students decades ago and traces could be found in a number of academic papers from Western scholars. It is likely that stereotype has somehow formed since then. According to Shi(2006), Ballard and Clanchy(1991), Carson(1992) and Connor(1996), Atkinson(1997) and Fox(1994), etc., they have all shared their views on Chinese students either based on their personal teaching experience or from relevant literature. They generally described Chinese students as being passive, quiet, submissive and disciplined, as well as lacking in critical thinking and open-mindedness. From their illustration, it could be sensed that Chinese students seems somehow 'inferior' to their western counterparts. And they also claimed that the reason behind might be the deep-rooted values from Confucianism.

However, Shi (2006) debated against this stereotype by conducting an empirical survey on 400 middle school students in Shanghai in 2003, and Shi (2006) argued that, the investigation demonstrated that contemporary Chinese students were actually quite active in class and were willing to ask and answer questions. Besides, they respect their teachers meanwhile they are critical of what they learned. But Shi(2006) also stressed that there is **something particular to Chinese students** according to her finding. For example, most students agreed that the criteria of a good teaching as being knowledgeable and skillful in helping students pass the exams and a good student as being extremely hard-working. Also, quite a number of them thought the purpose of learning English was to pass the exams. This is understandable since the pressure comes from the reality in China's exam-oriented education system. Though Shi's research was conducted 17 years ago, there is still reference value in understanding Chinese students, except that, with globalization and leapfrogging development of China in recent decade, Chinese students are even more opened-minded yet still very much exam-oriented.

### **3. Conclusion**

This chapter intends to provide a general picture of the Chinese education, including its recent history, development and the influence from Confucianism etc. By exploring the relevant concepts as above, it will be easier for readers to understand the current situation of foreign language education in China as well as to interpret the research results in a multi-angle and historical perspective.

## **Chapter 4 Research Design and Methodology**

### **1. Introduction**

In this chapter, The research questions and hypothesis will be elaborated in detail, as well as the research design which includes the rational of my research, the clarification of IC components and indicators relevant to the design of the questionnaires. Also, selection of participants (Junior and Senior English Major students and College English teachers), pilot interviews of students and teachers, the final construction of the two questionnaires are elaborated as research methods for my study. The following sections briefed the key content of this chapter.

### **2. Research Questions and Hypothesis**

The following research questions are designed based on author's observation and reflection over the past ten years of teaching English in Luoyang Normal University of China, along with a series

of pilot interviews with a group of English major students and college teachers as preparation for carrying out the PhD project.

**(1)How interculturally competent are the English majors in Chinese universities at present?**

**Hypothesis:** This research question is designed under the context of global pandemic, border closure, trade wars and the practice of unilateralism in certain major countries. The author is more than ever eager to know what's the situation of intercultural communication like within China at a time when the communication among different nations and cultures are being threatened. Of course, despite of the above uncertainties and turbulence, the support for equal and constructive intercultural cooperation and exchanges is still the voice of many countries across the globe and it still bears great significance for young generation to develop intercultural competence. Therefore, getting to know the level of intercultural competence of English majors in Chinese universities is the primary task in my research; the assessment of intercultural competence is complicated because different IC theorists have different definitions of IC and have proposed different frameworks for assessment. However, there are some key elements in intercultural competence which are well-recognized by scholars and educator, i.e. the attitude of openness, curiosity and respect, adequate cultural knowledge and necessary interaction skills etc. which the author has been elaborated in the part of Literature Review. Also, **the influence of specific Chinese cultural context and the educational system in China will also put into consideration when conducting the research.** Thus, according to the answers from the pilot interviews, detailed research questions and hypothesis can be made as follows,

① **How does their English language proficiency affect their communication with people from other cultures?**

**Hypothesis:** First, affected by the fierce competition under exam-oriented education system in the most populous country in the world, students are busy cramming knowledge into their head and have little time to practice spoken English before entering college. And this habit continues to influence their way of learning on college campus. Therefore, their language proficiency necessary for intercultural conversation **is not satisfactory**, especially in the second and third tiered cities of China where the economic and educational level is not as developed and internationalized as cities such as Beijing and Shanghai(**language proficiency**).

② **How do they evaluate their performance in the interaction with people from other cultures?**

**Hypothesis:** Second, the components of intercultural competence are interrelated. If the language proficiency as mentioned above is an obstacle for them to become interculturally competent, so are their interaction skills. Almost all the students interviewed said **they are not very confident when communicating in English either because they have problem in grammar and fluency or because they don't know what to say to their culturally-distinct counterpart; not mention that such intercultural opportunities are so rare during their daily life.** Besides, the author is curious to know whether students in China still value **harmony and face(mianzi in Chinese) in terms of interpersonal relationships** by avoiding direct confrontation during the communication, considering the sweeping influence of American culture to the young generation of China through internet and other forms over the past decades which promotes directness, effectiveness and sometimes problem-solving style of communication(**interaction and facework skills**).

③ **How do they feel when interacting with people from different cultures?**

**Hypothesis:** Third, when asking about their attitudes towards cultural differences or interaction

with people of other cultures, **most of them showed the attitudes of openness and curiosity**. This might be explained by the fact that they chose English as their major in the first hand, indicating that they're interested in English language and culture in the first hand(**Attitude**).

**④ How interculturally sensitive are they towards their own and other cultures?**

**Hypothesis:** Fourth, Ethnocentric and ethnorelative are being frequently discussed at present, giving the fact that the protests against racial discrimination have reached its peak worldwide in 2020 and 2021 after events such as Floyd's death, and the killing of 8 Asians in Atlanta Spas in the United States. It reminds people that discrimination and unequal treatment among different races have always been there. The reasons behind it might be too many and too complex; but being ethnocentric must be one of them. Ethnocentrism produce bias and prejudice, and then discrimination gradually and unconsciously occur. Such news were also broadcast by the mainstream media in China and have caught lots of attention nationwide. **As China is gaining more strength and influence in the world, the author wants to know what's the attitude of English major in China, as part of young generation, towards their own culture and other cultures; as this is the start of successful intercultural communication(intercultural sensitivity).**

**⑤ Do they have necessary cultural knowledge as basis for effective and appropriate intercultural communication?**

**Hypothesis:** Last of all, cultural knowledge is also indispensable in developing intercultural competence. There are courses in China's universities on the introduction of cultures and general situation in major English-speaking countries for English majors, plus such information is easily accessible online. Students interviewed also said **they think they know enough cultural knowledge in English-speaking countries**. However, it is the importance of **their own culture that they often neglected, as illustrated in the part “Chinese culture Aphasia”** in the first chapter. Since testing students' cultural knowledge of their own and English culture is a huge project, the evaluation of their master in English culture will be assessed in this paper, while more systematic and detailed culture quiz on their own and others' will be carried out in my future research on this topic(**Cultural knowledge**).

**(2)What are the major factors that may constrain students from developing intercultural competence?**

**Hypothesis:** This main question is designed for the purpose of investigating possible factors that may constrain students from developing intercultural competence. Based on author's previous research, observation from teaching English majors in Luoyang Normal University, along with the answers from the pilot interviews, **three possible factors will be investigated, namely, intercultural experiences, teachers' cognition on IC and their IC-related teaching method, and the language policies of China**. Therefore, detailed research questions and more hypothesis are shown below:

**① Are students willing to jump out of their comfort zone and actively participated in intercultural communicative activities both in class and in their daily life?**

**Hypothesis:** Unlike multicultural and diverse cultural environment such as European Union, the United stated and a number of other immigrant countries, students of China in most universities **don't get enough opportunities** to meet people from other countries and cultures in real life, **hence lacking in intercultural experiences**, which makes the term “intercultural communication” far away or even strange to students' daily life. What's more, Asian countries such as China, Korea

and Japan's way of education is deeply influenced by Confucian heritage culture, in which students respect the authority of their teachers and they **feel more comfortable by sitting in the class and listening to teachers' lecturing, instead of asking questions** in front of the class or having active interaction with teachers. Thus, when choosing English as their major in the university, **they know it's important to practice their spoken English, yet many of them may not be willing to jump out of the comfort zone** and challenge themselves to speak in English in and after class. This cultural heritage somehow affects the learning outcome of English major students since the nature of learning a language requires students to be more active in the class as well as in the intercultural communicative activities. However, if they want, there are still channels for them to make friends with people of other cultures and develop intercultural competence such as through Skype or other social media. The author will investigate through questionnaire on **whether they actively look for opportunities** to develop their intercultural competence in their daily life(Intercultural experience).

### ② Do English teachers integrated cultural teaching/IC-related content into their class?

**Hypothesis:** Previous literature shows that, compare with Western academic circle, the study of intercultural competence is relatively new in China which only has a history of two to three decades. Therefore, **it is possible that even many English teachers are not familiar with this term**, not mention delivering this concept to their students. Many of them may unconsciously or randomly talk about this topic in class, but not in a systematic way. Actually many foreign language teachers **are aware of the importance** of cultural teaching and intercultural communicative competence training for students, yet they themselves **are not competent enough** to teach such content and skills because they have not received systematic teachers' training in how to improve intercultural competence in an effective way. What's more, mostly, intercultural knowledge is regarded only as an appendage of language teaching, which means teachers only spend little time talking about it when time and conditions permit; the intercultural teaching is not systematic, and learners often learn fragmentary cultural knowledge and information. This method of introducing and learning culture as fragmentary knowledge may easily lead to one-sided or even wrong recognition of the target language. In sum, intercultural teaching in foreign language teaching has long been **ambiguous and incomplete**. Many foreign language learners and teachers only pay attention to the cultural factors and contents that affect foreign language skills such as reading and writing but **fail to fully recognize the role of foreign language teaching in helping students to develop more comprehensively with a global vision**. Therefore, it's worth conducting primary investigation on the teaching methods and then looking for ways of improvement(Teacher's questionnaire).

### ③ Does the language policies in China put IC as one of the major objectives?

**Hypothesis:** As introduced in Chapter 3, China has carried out reforms on foreign language education in the 21st century and formulated the Requirements for College English Teaching (2007). However, intercultural competence is only mentioned once as one item among the teaching content in this programmatic document. Since the documents do not put forward specific suggestions and requirements for intercultural education, it has long been neglected in the higher education of China. It's been 14 years since the formulation of the document and many scholars and educators have been making efforts in calling on the revision of the Requirements as well as the redesign of the National curriculum for English majors. Therefore, it is significant to **find out how the language policies have changed** over the years as the policies will affect significantly



where the IC education is headed.

### 3. The Rational of the Research

To begin with, the definition and components specific to this study is clarified as the foundation of the assessment. **Intercultural competence( for English major students in China) here is defined as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in an intercultural context, as well as to maintain a harmonious relationship during and after the communication.** This definition is largely borrowed from Fantini's elaboration on intercultural competence. His theory is more holistic in the way that not only “effectiveness and appropriateness” is included, the essential role of language proficiency and the ability to maintain relationship are also stressed. In my point of view, Fantini's theory is more culturally flexible as well as more relevant to language learners.

**Then, seven components are identified as follows,**

- (1) Language proficiency--grammar, lexical richness, fluency and cohesion, clarity of expression.
- (2) Intercultural sensitivity—ethnocentric and ethnorelative
- (3) Attitudes of openness, curiosity and confidence
- (4) Knowledge of one's own and others
- (5) Skills of interaction, and facework
- (6) Critical cultural awareness
- (7) Moral ethics (sincerity, honesty, no discrimination, mutual respect and responsibility)

**Comment:** As I have realized that only questionnaires with students and teachers cannot fully reveal their intercultural competence. It is a time-consuming project that need more data such as observation and journal writing over a semester, or even one year. Therefore, I will regard my PhD thesis as the first stage of my research which could to some extent reveal the situation of IC education in China as well as take a glimpse on the intercultural competence of the students, by assessing the first five components. In the near future, I could continue with the assessment in and after class with my students, by collecting more data involving students critical awareness and moral ethics.

### 4. Methods

With Junior and senior English major students & College English teachers as the participants, pilot interviews were conducted beforehand and questionnaires respectively for students and teachers were designed in order to answer the above research questions.

**The questionnaire for students** is named as “*Intercultural Competence Assessment Scale for English Major Students in China*” which is divided into two sections. The Section one is about personal information such as the gender, the place of origin, the university they're from, and the description of their own identity, etc. Section Two includes 28 items for the assessment of five dimensions as discussed above, i.e. language proficiency, intercultural sensitivity, attitude of openness, curiosity and confidence, interaction skills, cultural knowledge, along with intercultural experience.

**The questionnaire for teachers** is named as “*A Survey on Intercultural Teaching of College English Teachers*”. The content of this questionnaire is divided into two parts. Part 1 is Personal Information concerning participants' university, gender, age, degree, working experience and

overseas experience, etc. Part 2 is about IC-related teaching that covers the questions on definition of IC, understanding of IC education, teaching methods, the relationship between IC and language skills, and the role of Chinese culture for English language education, etc. Those questions were designed **for the purpose of answering the research question of “Do English teachers integrated cultural teaching/IC-related content into their class?”**

## **5. Advantages, Challenges and Limitations**

### **Advantage**

To begin with, the study makes up for the rarity of such research given the obvious scarcity of the empirical IC assessment papers that really investigate in practice the level of young generation, such as college students' actual intercultural competence, especially in China. And in this case, language proficiency was studied as part of intercultural competence in the foreign language education arena. Also, harmony is added into the definition of intercultural competence, which is not only more Chinese/Asian-culture oriented, but also responding to the turbulence of the world under the pandemic. Last but not the least, though the thesis focus on the study of students' intercultural competence, questionnaire for college English teachers was also added for a more comprehensive and persuasive interpretation of the data.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

The ever-changing international situation may always make the empirical research a step behind the reality, hence not keeping up with the times. And the culturally-different interpretations of the “effectiveness and appropriateness” also raised the level of difficulty in doing intercultural studies. Plus that it is extremely difficult to reach a larger sample size of participants as an individual PhD student. As to the limitations, more dimensions of intercultural competence and more assessment items should have been covered if time and energy permit in order to produce more ideal result; and it is possible that the sample is opportunistic given the tens of millions of students in more than 3000 colleges and universities in China.

## **6. Conclusion**

Research Design and Methodology helps to formulate a general guideline in answering the research questions of my study. And it also shows to readers the step-to-step procedure in conducting the whole empirical research. Challenges and limitations mentioned above are what the author wants to keep working on in the future on order to produce more valuable results.

## **Chapter 5 Findings and Discussions**

### **1. Introduction**

Findings will be summarized in the form of answering the research questions, meanwhile comparing the actual data results with previous hypothesis. Then in the part of Discussions, the data was interpreted from other angles, including the analysis of identity profiles, its correlation with the five dimensions, the correlations among the variables, as well as an exploration on intercultural foreign language education as the possible way out.

### **2. Findings**

#### **2.1. Presentation of the Respondent Groups from Questionnaire 1 and Questionnaire 2**

**Table 2 Questionnaire 1 for English Major Students (n=470)**

Variable		Frequency	Percentage	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	411	87.40	263.626	< 0.001
	Male	59	12.60		
<b>Grade</b>	Freshmen	18	3.80	855.723	< 0.001
	Sophomore	11	2.30		
	Junior	339	72.10		
	Senior	96	20.40		
<b>University</b>	HUST	94	20.00	308.249	< 0.001
	NCWU	40	8.50		
	LYNU	223	47.40		
	SISU	37	7.90		
	WQU	32	6.80		
	Other Universities	44	9.40		
<b>Language(s)</b>	1 Language	84	17.90	58.326	< 0.001
	2 Languages	168	35.70		
	More than 2 Languages	218	46.40		

**Table 3 Questionnaire 1 for College English Teachers (n=113)**

Information Category		
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
	92	21
<b>Age</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Number of Teachers in Each Category</b>
	30-39 years old	44
	40-49 years old	54
	50-59 years old	15
<b>Educational Background</b>	PhD Degree	14
	Masters Degree	90
	Bachelors Degree	9
<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Number of Teachers in Each Category</b>
	1-6 years of teaching	7
	7-12 years of teaching	16
	13-18 years of teaching	46
	19-24 years of teaching	27
	25-35 years of teaching	17
<b>Universities</b>	<b>University they are working in</b>	<b>Number of Teachers in Each Category</b>
	Luoyang Normal University	12
	Henan Agricultural University	16
	Henan University of Engineering	10
	North China University of Water Resources and Electric Power	10

	Xinxiang Medical University	29
	Xuchang University	8
	Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics	7
	Other universities	21

## 2.2. Answering the First Five Detailed Research Questions

### ① How does their English language proficiency affect their communication with people from other cultures?

Generally speaking, students' English language proficiency **negatively affects** their intercultural competence, with the means of 'Grammar' and 'Clarity of Expression' being the lowest, i.e. 2.449 and 2.409 respectively. While the mean for 'Expression of ideas' is the highest as being 3.830 among the five indicators which demonstrates the possibilities that some students in this group are able to communicate well in English despite of their language deficiency as well as that students have realized communicating ideas is more important than being linguistically correct. However, for respondents who favor this statement, whether all of their language proficiency in English level up their willingness to communicate ideas with people from other cultures is unknown from the data. When taking into account the results of the other four items, the answer might be negative. And if they self-evaluate their level of language proficiency as being not satisfactory, this may consequently affect their motivation and confidence to actively communicate with people from other cultures. **This result is consistent with the hypothesis** regarding their language proficiency stated in Chapter 4, which was assumed as “not satisfactory”.

### ② How interculturally sensitive are they towards their own and other cultures?

As the statistics show, majority of those English major students support the ideas that people of different cultures should learn from each other and treat each other equally and with respect; and **they are generally open, curious and respectful** towards the diverse cultures in the world. However, when asking about the role of their own culture and other cultures, about 28% of them agree or strongly agree with the statement that "Chinese way of doing things are the best way in the world" and another 27.7% of them are uncertain whether it's true or not. On the one hand, this result shows that the young generation in this day and age **are confident on their own culture, which is surprisingly different from what the hypothesis assumed, in terms of the role of Chinese culture.** On the other hand, it might indicate **a tendency to become ethnocentric**, which should be cautiously dealt with and consciously guided by their teachers and the society at large.

### ③ How do they feel when interacting with people from different cultures?

Those participated students, as English language learners, generally display an attitude of openness and curiosity towards intercultural interaction **which is consistent with the hypothesis**, except that the remaining 1/4 of the respondents evaluated themselves as being not so willing to interact with people of other cultures, which is worth our attention since this might negatively affect their intercultural competence. besides, 42% of them are uncertain if they can confidently interact with people of other culture; and 12.6% more evaluated themselves being not confident at all. This might be explained by the data results on language proficiency and intercultural

sensitivity. Cognitively, they may be confident in their own culture as well as curious and open to the outside world; but they are not confident in their language proficiency which consequently affect their ability to interact with people from other cultures when using English as the communicative language.

④ **How do they evaluate their performance in the interaction with people from other cultures?** (interaction skills and the role of face(mianzi))

The scores in this dimension are relatively low on average which indicates that students are ambivalent or rather disagree with the statements given by the research. Respondents are generally not confident in their communicative competence interculturally, or they are not sure about their performance in the actual scenario, given the opportunities are so rare in their daily life; and this is **consistent with the hypothesis** in terms of students' interaction confidence. They assumed that they would either avoid such situation or don't know what to say so as to carry on with the conversation. Consequently, students don't actively look for opportunities of intercultural interactions because they'd rather stay in their comfort zone. To sum up, the low score in interaction skills may due to the following: the lack of intercultural opportunities might be one of the reasons, and their lack of confidence in their language proficiency might be another; plus that regular evaluation of their interaction skills is likely to be a missing link in their English language learning process.

While the Mean for the last item that assessed facework is the highest in this dimension, **confirming the assumption in the hypothesis** that in Chinese culture, the avoidance of conflict is common in the first meeting and the face(mianzi) is very much valued in communication and it is quite likely that this tradition has not changed much even in young generations concept. The 33% uncertainty might be those who assume facing the conflict frankly instead of beating around the bush might be the best solution. This is also understandable since this is the type of communication style more and more business people favor. However, it is still worth people of other cultures attention when travelling to China or doing business with Chinese people.

⑤ **Do they have necessary cultural knowledge as basis for effective and appropriate intercultural communication?**

The Means of this dimension indicates that participants are relatively confident in their storage of cultural knowledge, especially compared with their language proficiency and interaction skills. And **this is also basically consistent with the hypothesis** in assuming students to be generally good in the cultural knowledge of major-English speaking countries since lecturing knowledge in the textbooks is still one of the mainstream teaching methods in China. To be more specific, by looking at the means in the table, it shows that the students generally know more cultural knowledge about rules and taboo of intercultural communication and main traditions, cultural values, and religious beliefs than the other three aspects, i.e. rules for non-verbal behaviors, political, legal and economic systems, main arts and crafts, ect.

**One problem detected** in this dimension is that still a large number of participants chose "uncertain" for each of the statement, which seems a safe and easy choice them; yet it actually shows that those junior and senior English major students don't really have a clear evaluation on themselves regarding how much cultural knowledge they know. Whats more, despite of being the highest score averagely among all the dimensions, still there are only at most half of the students

gave positive answers to each of the item, meaning that even majority of college English teachers in China stress on memorizing cultural knowledge and related words, the learning outcome is not as good as we expected.

### **2.3. Answering the first Main Research Question**

The above five detailed research questions will then lead to the answer to the first main research question, namely, **How interculturally competent are the English majors in Chinese universities at present based on the above data results and analysis?**

The data result is categorized into three levels, namely, low level of IC(1-2.4), intermediate level of IC (2.5-3.8) and high level of IC (3.9-5). Based on the overall result as shown above, the intercultural competence of the sample students is in an intermediate level with an average score of 3.3(the mean of 'intercultural experience' was excluded when calculating the average). Specifically speaking, the dimension of intercultural sensitivity has the highest score of 3.711, followed by attitude of openness, curiosity and confidence (3.709), cultural knowledge (3.384), interaction skills and facework (2.984) and language proficiency (2.739); the average score of the five dimensions all fall into the category of intermediate level of IC. However, when it comes to the specific items within the five dimensions, the indicators of grammar(2.449) and clarity of expression(2.409) are in the lowest level while students attitude of willingness to communicate(4.060) and the intercultural sensitivity in term of their positive affirmation in their interest in others' culture(3.917), mutual learning(4.321), equality and respect(4.036) towards different cultures are within the range of "high level (3.9-5)".

**From the data results listed above, summary can be made as follow,**

**First of all**, the investigated students generally hold open and curious attitude towards cultural differences, but lacking in interaction confidence, the reason of which may partly come from their problem in the use of grammar, clarity of expression, cohesion and fluency. Consequently, When evaluating their own interaction skills, the choice for "uncertain" was very common. Apart from the reason that they are not confident linguistically, their uncertainty may also indicate that students seldom evaluate their own interaction skills hence have no idea about it. Another reason for their lack of interaction competence and confidence is their very limited real life intercultural practice, the evidence of which can be seen from the data on 'intercultural experience', especially majority of them claimed that all of their friends are from their own culture.

**Second**, despite of being the highest average among the five dimensions, the level of participants' intercultural sensitivity is still in the category of intermediate level. On the one hand, respondents generally acknowledged the necessity of mutual learning among diverse cultures and the importance of equality and respect in intercultural communication. On the other hand, quite a number of them meanwhile supported the idea that "Most cultures are backward compared with my culture." and "The Chinese ways of doing things are the best in the world." The result shows a tendency from the participants to be ethnocentric, which is not so consistent with the hypothesis that if 'Western culture invasion' and 'Chinese Culture Aphasia' are the case, students may not confident enough on their own culture. Their confidence may come from the vigorous propaganda nationally from media channel; yet this confidence, for English major students, neither does it mean they know how to express Chinese culture in English, nor realize the importance of their own culture to the development of their intercultural competence.

**Lastly**, the result of the Cultural Knowledge Dimension is also worth noticing, the Mean of which

is comparatively good but not good enough. Given that learning cultural knowledge by memorizing and reciting for exams is the common routine for English major students, the large amount of 'uncertain' in their choice when assessing the five aspects of cultural knowledge is unexpected. And it clearly shows a lack of regular assessment from teachers or self-evaluation in their daily learning. Besides, more interpreting, relating, analyzing and reflecting should be integrated so as to help students internalize and consolidate the cultural knowledge they've learned.

#### 2.4. Answering the Remaining Three Detailed Research Questions

##### ① Are students willing to jump out of their comfort zone and actively participated in intercultural communicative activities both in class and in their daily life?

Though 'Intercultural experience' will not be included in assessing the overall intercultural competence of the participants, its role in helping students effectively developing intercultural competence is undeniable. However, the rarity of intercultural opportunities, as mentioned multiple times in previous paragraph, was proved by the Means in the table, as respondents themselves have recognized the fact that they hardly have any friends from other cultures, plus that students are not active and motivated enough to look for such opportunities. Hence to a large extent, their effectiveness of developing intercultural competence is compromised. **This result is consistent with the hypothesis** in terms of the lack of intercultural occasions as well as their passive attitude in looking for such opportunities.

##### ② Do English teachers integrate intercultural learning/training into their class?

**The first problem** detected from teachers' questionnaire is respondents' incomplete understanding in the definition of intercultural competence, as half of them assumed the attitude of openness and respect as being irrelevant to this concept; and 1/5 of them thought it is a western concept irrelevant to their teaching and half of the participants agreed that intercultural competence should be acquired through experience instead of in English class. **Second**, when asked about the role of IC education for English major students in China, majority of them agreed with their relevance, yet it is likely that they thought IC education is the same with linguistic competence; and 1/5 though it is useful only for those who work in multinational companies or go abroad. **Third**, majority of the college English teachers only spend 5 to 10 minutes in intercultural competence teaching, usually in the way of introducing cultural knowledge or comparing cultural differences. Nevertheless, despite of the variety of teaching methods they applied into their class, the time for intercultural learning is still too limited. **In addition**, inferred from the previous data results on their understanding on IC definition and IC education, it's possible many of them have misinterpreted the nature of intercultural competence and confused IC learning as language training or imparting cultural knowledge. To sum up, those investigated college English teachers generally have limited understanding and practice in intercultural competence teaching in the field of foreign language education, hence the answer might be negative to this question. **And this result is basically consistent with the hypothesis in the chapter 4.**

##### ③ Does the language policies in China put IC as one of the major objectives?

By reviewing relevant major language policies especially for foreign language majors of higher institution, such as English Syllabus for English Majors in Higher Education(2000), College English Teaching Requirements(2007), and English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education(2011), National Standard for Teaching Foreign Language Majors in Higher Institutions

of China(2016), Declaration on the Construction of New Liberal Arts(2020), and Ideological and Political Education(IPE) (2020), **signs can be easily traced from those documents that the role of intercultural competence in China's foreign language education has been gradually moving from sideways to the center and this is largely due to the dynamic changes happened within and outside China in recent decades.** It is evident that the overall context of China and the whole world are calling for more attention to intercultural competence of the young generation.

## **2.5. Answering the Second Main Research Question**

The remaining three detailed research questions as discussed above will then lead to the answer to the second main research question, namely, **What are the major factors that may constrain students from developing intercultural competence?**

Factors that may affect the development of students' intercultural competence are discussed as below from the aspects of the students themselves, College English teachers and China's language policies.

**From the aspect of students themselves**, their problems in language proficiency, the lack of regular assessment in interaction skills and cultural knowledge, along with the very limited intercultural experience and self-motivation in actively looking for such opportunities, plus a potential to become ethnocentric might be some of the obstacles.

**From the aspect of college English teachers**, the rather limited knowledge about intercultural competence is the most obvious constraint, especially that some of them think intercultural competence is an irrelevant topic to English class, or that IC education is equivalent with language training. The way of teaching IC-related knowledge might be another constraint since Methods that could motivate students' active thinking and develop an intercultural mind such as critical analysis and reflection are not well-integrated, along with a lack of regular assessment of students learning outcome; not mentioned that half of them spend 10 minutes and 37% more of them only spend 5 minutes on IC learning in their class. As for the role of Chinese culture in English language class, the data shows it is well-acknowledged among teachers about the equal importance of the understanding of ones own culture and that of the target language culture, while there are around one fifth of them who think Chinese culture is not important at all, the figure of which should not be neglected and worth our attention. Since if teachers cannot help students identify themselves culturally in the first place, it would be even harder for them to comprehend other cultures.

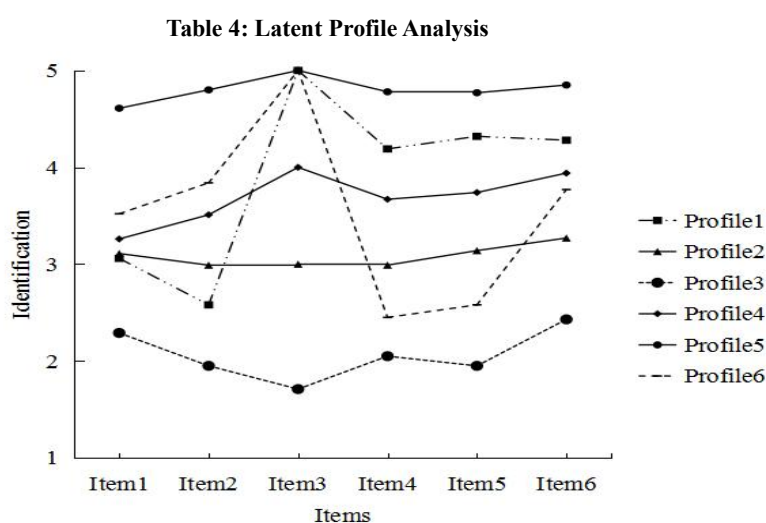
**From the aspect of national language policies** relevant to the role of intercultural competence to foreign language education, obviously there is no constraint in this regard based on the literature review, since those policies have clearly show that the trend of transforming foreign language education into intercultural foreign language education is inevitable, with the definition of intercultural competence more holistic, the requirement more specified, and the importance of IC more stressed. **The only question left** would be how is the execution of those policies in higher institutions across China. From the data collected by the author, in this case particularly for English language education, it seems more time and feasible measures are needed before university and college teachers and students update their way of learning as well as become more IC-aware.



### 3. Discussions

#### 3.1. Identity Profiles

Question 6 in the Section 1 of Questionnaire 1 intends to investigate students' identification profile which may affect one's potential in developing intercultural competence. How respondents perceive themselves geographically reveals how much they are willing to connect with the world. There are four cultural circles of identification, namely, the choices of 'the member of the world and Asian' is the sphere of 'Global', the choice of 'Chinese' is the sphere of 'National', the choice of 'inhabitant of province/city' is the sphere of 'Regional', and choice of 'the member of the family' is the sphere of 'Local'. Then Latent Profile Analysis was adopted to analyze the data result collected, hence a chart demonstrating different types of identity profiles were constructed as below, along with the a summary of the profile categories and the corresponding identification.



**Table 5: Summary of data result in Profile Identification.**

Profile Category	Number of Students and Its Percentage	Profile Identification
Profile 1	53 students, 11.3%	National and Local
Profile 2	71 students, 15.1%	Aligned Profile of being
Profile 3	21 students, 4.5%	Limited sense of Belonging
Profile 4	81 students, 17.2%	Slightly National
Profile 5	213 students, 45.3%	Global Citizen
Profile 6	31 students, 6.6%	National'

On the whole, when looking at the proportions of the population in each of the profile, it could be summarized that almost half of the participants recognize themselves as global citizens, around one fifth of them as national citizens, another one tenth as members of regional or local community, and the remaining 15% holds a neutral attitudes while 4.5% more display a very limited sense of belonging towards all of the six identities. By categorizing students into different profiles, it would be convenient to study if their identity awareness affect the development of intercultural competence.

### 3.2. Profiles v.s. Dimensions

The scores of the respondents in Profile 5(Global Citizen) exceed those of other profiles in dimensions of Intercultural Sensitivity, Attitude of curiosity and openness as well as Cultural knowledge (though not calculated as 'significant' in this dimension in statistics), which to some extent indicates that having the mindset of global citizens does help in fostering intercultural sensitivity and attitude, and their good performance in cultural knowledge is definitely complementary to the above two dimensions. However, it's worth mentioning that the scores of Profile 5 in Language Proficiency and Interaction Skills are the second lowest and third lowest, which may indicate that having a global mindset doesn't guarantee their competence in language proficiency and interaction skills which needs actual practice regularly instead of mere global mentality. Compared with Profile 5 in terms of the high score in Intercultural Sensitivity and Attitude of Curiosity and Openness, a contrast is detected in Profile 2, the respondents of which hold a Non-Preferential attitude towards the six identities whose scores are very low in these two dimensions. The contrast again proves the positive correlation between a global identity awareness and the intercultural sensitivity and attitude.

### 3.3. Correlation Analysis of the Variables

Positive correlations could be found between language proficiency and intercultural experience, as well as with interaction skills and cultural knowledge; those correlations could be easily explained since those components are mutually enhanced, and it is also a proof of what Fantini(2009) argued on the importance of language proficiency to intercultural competence, "*Proficiency in a second language at any level enhances all other aspects of intercultural competence in quantitative and qualitative way...*"; however, this is also why the negative correlation of the language proficiency with intercultural sensitivity is worth our pondering in that it seems contradictory to our common sense. Nevertheless, when reflecting on the data results of students and English teachers questionnaires, what caused this might be explained. Students' assessment in language proficiency being the lowest of all dimensions, along with teachers lack of knowledge in the definition and integration of intercultural competence into language learning might lead to the result that intercultural sensitivity be completely separated from English language learning, hence the fostering of an ethnorelative attitude seems nothing to do with English language class. Therefore, it is likely that this negative correlation is just a sign of no correlation at all.

In addition, intercultural sensitivity has a significant positive correlation with attitude of curiosity&openness and interaction skill. Namely, if students are open, curious, and tolerant towards cultural differences, their intercultural sensitivity would be more likely to be in the ethnorelative stages of acceptance, adaptation or even integration.

What's more, the attitude of curiosity and openness has a significant correlation with interaction skills as well as with cultural knowledge. And as for intercultural experience, a positive correlation can be found with cultural knowledge.

### 3.4. Intercultural Foreign Language Education as the Way out

Intercultural foreign language education is based on the concept that foreign language acquisition will be more naturally and effectively achieved, and more often than not, in an implicit way, when discussions, analysis, simulations, and reflective activities are organized through utilizing culture materials. In this whole process, students are using English to articulate, argue or debate over

diverse cultural issues of different countries, nations and ethnic groups, thus their language proficiency will be improved implicitly along the way of understanding cultures more deeply. Intercultural teaching encourages students to think, reflect, empathize so as to internalize the knowledge and develop intercultural awareness. This concept challenged the traditional way of teaching English in China, in which language learning mainly involves vocabulary, grammar, sentence patterns and repetitions, etc., and cultural information/knowledge is provided randomly and superficially. In this part, specific strategies within the framework of intercultural foreign language education are discussed in the hope of finding solutions for the questions and problems detected in this study.

Generally speaking, Byram(2018)'s point of view helps teachers and students realize the necessity of integrating intercultural competence into foreign language learning responding to the current context; Liddicoat, A., & Scarino, A. (2013)'s five core teaching principles guided them to introduce the concept of intercultural learning into language class step by step; while Peng(2020)'s model provides specific pedagogical instructions on how to cultivate students' intercultural competence through the platform of foreign language courses. And the above strategies and theories may provide possible solutions for the existing problems discussed in this paper.

#### **4. Conclusion**

So far, all the research questions in this paper have been answered, along with a series of discussions about relevant topics derived from the data. Generally speaking, a picture showing a glimpse of the intercultural competence of English Major students in China has been laid out in forms of analysis and discussions. However, there are of course regrets and limitations regarding the data collection and interpretations, such as the limited sample size, the accuracy of the results, and the over-general assessment items for the cultural knowledge evaluation, etc. Therefore, a second-phase research is necessary in the future for deeper investigation in this area. Nevertheless, the findings and discussions in this study at least reveal some of the weak links in English language education, or foreign language education at large in China, hence may provide some clues on what aspects we should pay special attention to, especially when cultivating students' intercultural competence is becoming one of the major goals.

#### **Chapter 6 Conclusion**

In this final chapter, the author recalled the whole process of conceptualizing this PhD program, reviewed the structure of the thesis, meanwhile reflecting on the program as well as inviting for further research by those who are interested.