

# Developing College Students' Intercultural Competence in the Context of Chinese Culture Inheritance and Dissemination—A Case Study of the Intercultural Communication Course Design for ESL Students

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**Abstract:** *Inheriting Chinese cultural genes and disseminating excellent Chinese culture has nowadays become important moral education goals of the new liberal arts in China's colleges and universities, and intercultural competence is the prerequisite for inheriting and spreading the excellent Chinese culture. The development of intercultural competence among college students, therefore, becomes the contemporary mission of foreign language education in China's colleges and universities. Moral education, or the ideological and political education construction of foreign language courses mainly involves the following aspects: the analysis of the course's basic situation, the setting of teaching aims and objectives, the design of teaching philosophies and ideological and political contents, the application of teaching materials and technologies, the design of the teaching process and instructional strategies, and the assessment and reflection of teaching. This paper, by taking the design of an Intercultural Communication course from the above aspects for ESL students in a Chinese university as an example, discusses the development of college students' intercultural competence in the context of Chinese cultural inheritance and dissemination.*

**Keywords:** *Intercultural competence, Cultural inheritance and communication, Intercultural communication, Ideological and political education*

## 1. Introduction

With the deepening of economic globalization, the implementation of the “Belt and Road” initiative, and the continuous promotion of the building of a community with a shared future for humankind, China's economic and cultural exchanges and cooperation with other countries in the world are increasing, and the demand for international talents with intercultural competence has increased accordingly <sup>[1]</sup>. In January 2017, the General Office of the State Council of China issued the “Opinions on Implementing the Project of Inheritance and Development of Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture”, proposing the guiding ideology for the implementation, including adhering to the Chinese cultural stance, inheriting Chinese cultural genes, drawing on Chinese wisdom, promoting Chinese spirit, spreading Chinese values, continuously enhancing the vitality and influence of Chinese excellent traditional culture, and creating new brilliance in Chinese culture. The overall goal of the project is that “by 2025, the system of inheritance and development of excellent Chinese traditional culture will be basically formed, and important results will be achieved in research and development, education and popularization, protection and inheritance, innovation and development, and dissemination and exchange” <sup>[2]</sup>. It can be seen that “education and popularization” have been listed as important means to promote the implementation of the project for the inheritance and development of excellent Chinese traditional culture.

Among the talent training objectives of value shaping, knowledge imparting, and ability training in Chinese colleges and universities, value shaping, namely “moral education”, has been placed in the primary position of liberal arts talent training in the new era. On November 3, 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the “Declaration on the Construction of New Liberal Arts”, which pointed out that “new liberal arts are needed to strengthen cultural confidence” and that “there is great potential for the construction of new liberal arts by vigorously promoting the creative transformation and innovative

development of excellent Chinese traditional culture, cultivating and practicing socialist core values, and injecting powerful spiritual power for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” [3]. The goal of the new liberal arts construction is to create a Chinese culture that shines brightly in the times and in the world and to enhance China’s cultural soft power and international influence. Hence, inheriting Chinese cultural genes and spreading excellent Chinese culture become important moral education goals of the new liberal arts in Chinese colleges and universities. Intercultural competence is the prerequisite for inheriting and spreading the excellent Chinese culture, and the cultivation of intercultural competence among college students, therefore, becomes the contemporary mission of foreign language education in our colleges and universities.

## 2. Definition of “Intercultural Competence”

The development of intercultural competence in foreign language teaching has become a consensus in the Chinese academic world and has attracted increasing attention and discussion. Since the 1960s, scholars outside China have constructed many theoretical models of intercultural competence from different perspectives [4-6]. These theories, however, basically reflect the Western perspective and are not fully applicable to the Chinese context. The theoretical exploration of intercultural competence studies in China began in the 1990s. These studies, mainly from the perspective of foreign language teaching and learning, have drawn heavily on the Western view that intercultural competence is the development of universal humanistic values and also the ability of individuals to complete communicative activities effectively and appropriately in a specific intercultural context [7-8]. The English Major Teaching Guide in 2020 in China, for example, defines intercultural competence as follows: “Respect the world’s cultural diversity; have intercultural inclusiveness and critical awareness; master basic theoretical knowledge and analytical methods of intercultural studies; understand the basic characteristics and similarities and differences of Chinese and foreign cultures; be able to interpret and evaluate different cultural phenomena, texts, and products; be able to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures; be able to help people from different backgrounds to communicate effectively across cultures.” [9]

Wen Qiufang, however, believes that there is a lack of ideological and political elements in the description of “intercultural competence” in the Teaching Guide. She points out that “intercultural competence” should not be a “value-neutral” training goal but rather highlight its ideology and Chinese characteristics, emphasizing the cultivation of global citizens and international talents with a sense of patriotism. Therefore, she gives a new definition of “intercultural competence” and defines it as “the ability to understand, interpret, and evaluate the similarities and differences of different cultural phenomena, texts, and products through comparison and contrast, to deepen the understanding and identification of Chinese culture, to broaden the international perspective, to learn the essence of foreign cultures, and to serve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind”; and “being flexible, effective, and principled in cross-cultural communication, actively participating in public diplomacy, making a Chinese voice, telling a good story of China, and showing the image of China” [10]. Wen Qiufang’s definition focuses on the ideological and political connotations of “intercultural competence” and the transmission and dissemination of Chinese culture by students. This definition is also oriented towards “fostering virtue and serving the nation”, lays stress on strengthening cultural confidence, and highlights Chinese elements, thus meeting the new requirements of the new era in China.

In view of the richness and diversity of the ideological and political elements in foreign language courses, among which the teaching of specialized knowledge itself has obvious value orientation, teachers can explore the ideological and political contents of the specialized courses from an intercultural perspective, combining the development of students’ critical thinking and intercultural competence to realize the teaching effectiveness of moral education in a natural way [11]. In order to promote the construction of the ideological and political education of foreign language courses, it is necessary to combine the characteristics of foreign language disciplines and specialties, build a scientific and reasonable teaching system of ideological and political education, and integrate it into the whole process of teaching. Specifically, the ideological and political educational construction of foreign language courses mainly involves the following elements: the analysis of the course’s basic situation, the setting of teaching aims and objectives, the design of teaching philosophies and ideological and political contents, the application of teaching materials and technologies, the design of the teaching process and instructional strategies, and the assessment and reflection of teaching. This paper, by taking the design of an Intercultural Communication course (hereinafter IC course) from the above elements for ESL students in a Chinese university as an example, discusses the development of college students’ intercultural competence in the context of Chinese cultural inheritance and dissemination.

### **3. Presenting and Mapping the Intercultural Communication Course**

#### ***3.1. Course Description***

The IC course is a specialized core course for ESL students at the Foreign Language School of a Chinese university, which was set up in 2014 when the School of Foreign Languages was established. The textbook chosen for this course is *Intercultural Communication in English* by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. Besides, the students are provided with other high-quality teaching resources that reflect the latest and cutting-edge theories and intercultural cases, videos, and articles, including those from some teaching online platforms, such as “China University MOOC” and “Wisdom Tree” as mentioned above, and the latest news as teaching resources from some official accounts, such as *Frontier of Intercultural Communication*, *People’s Daily*, *Xinhua Net*, *CCTV*, *China Daily*, and *Guangming Online*.

The teaching content is adjusted from the perspective of English professional talent cultivation and the vocational requirements of students in their future jobs. The employment orientation of English majors mainly includes industries such as education, scientific research, foreign affairs, publishing houses, economics, and trade. In the future, they will mainly be engaged in translation, research, teaching, management, foreign trade, etc. Therefore, this course also aims to enhance the professional qualification in terms of professional ethics, professional skills, professional behavior, and professional consciousness, and to improve students’ career development abilities.

Additionally, the course emphasizes the cultivation of a sense of patriotism. According to its teaching aims, this course will explore, adjust, and integrate the ideological and political content in connection with the relevant topics of intercultural communication. It not only focuses on the enhancement of teaching effectiveness, but it also accentuates the cultural advantages behind the great achievements of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the dissemination and promotion of the excellent traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture, and the cultivation of students’ deep love for the party, the country, and socialism.

#### ***3.2. The Aim of Ideological and Political Education***

The IC course in the context of ideological and political education aims to scientifically and reasonably integrate the educational functions of traditional Chinese culture and explore the ideological and political elements contained therein, such as a sense of mission, responsibility, patriotism, striving spirit, and pioneering spirit. The students are supposed to develop intercultural awareness and communication skills, deepen their understanding of Chinese culture based on the comparison of Chinese culture with other cultures, enhance cultural confidence, consciously and confidently promote Chinese culture, tell Chinese stories, spread the Chinese voice in English, and show respect, tolerance, and openness to diverse cultures.

The teaching content of the IC course needs to be adjusted according to the fundamental aim of implementing ideological and political education, ensuring that education performs its fundamental mission of fostering virtue. If it is only limited to cross-cultural differences at the linguistic and pragmatic level and emphasizes certain fragmented cross-cultural communication strategies and skills, this course will neglect ideological and political education; consequently, English majors will not be able to become qualified talents to engage in Chinese and foreign exchange, nor can they spread Chinese ideas, Chinese voices, and Chinese wisdom in cross-cultural communication, much less be able to perform the important task of intercultural communication in the game of great powers<sup>[12]</sup>.

The aim of ideological and political education in the IC course is achieved in roughly three stages. The first stage is the basic cognitive stage of intercultural phenomena, in which students will know cultural phenomena around the world and cultural differences between China and other countries. The second stage is the cross-cultural comparison stage, in which students will understand and be able to identify the cultures and values of different countries. The third stage is the practice stage, where students can confidently use English to promote the excellent traditional Chinese culture and consciously shoulder the responsibility of cultural inheritance and innovation and intercultural communication.

#### ***3.3. Teaching Approaches and Models***

The IC course is guided by the OBE (Outcomes-Based Education) and CLI (Content-Language Integration) teaching philosophies. On the one hand, the course adopts a student-oriented and outcome-

based approach and takes the students' final learning outcomes into consideration in its teaching design, aiming at developing students' multicultural awareness, improving intercultural communication skills, and enhancing their ability to help people from different backgrounds communicate across cultures. On the other hand, the course focuses on the integration of professional skills and language learning, helping students master the ability to apply English in an intercultural manner, to express accurately in English the knowledge, customs, habits, and manners of Chinese culture and other cultures, and to understand and identify different cultural phenomena.

In addition, this course is based on the education model of blended learning, where students attend class in person but also engage in synchronous, online learning outside the class. Teaching platforms such as "China University MOOC", "Rain Classroom" (an intelligent teaching aid that also includes teaching resources), and "Wisdom Tree" (a global large-scale credit course operation service platform), as well as text, audio, and video materials related to intercultural communication, are employed to carry out diversified teaching activities both online and offline. The passive learning style is thus replaced by multiple learning styles so that students will be able to cope with different tasks independently and cooperatively, as is required. Fig 1 shows the teaching approaches and models of the IC course.

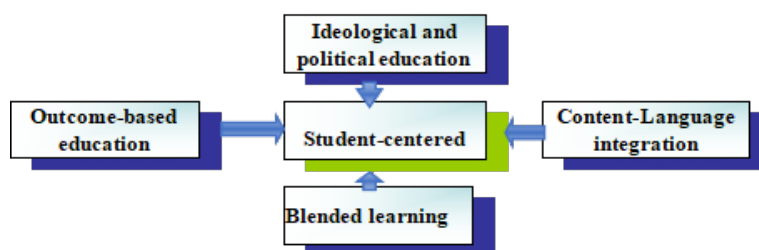


Figure 1: The teaching approaches and models of the IC course

### 3.4. Teaching Materials and Technologies

The textbook *Intercultural Communication in English*, which is advanced in theory, rich in cases, and relevant to reality, is used as the main teaching resource in classroom teaching. In addition, the teaching team constantly pays attention to the latest developments in intercultural communication research, summarizes and adjusts the teaching contents in a timely manner, and adds intercultural communication cases in conjunction with current international and domestic hot topics for teachers and students to refer to.

As for students' self-directed learning materials, the teaching team send them many intercultural communication cases both in the form of text and video to extend the teaching contents in order to broaden students' intercultural horizons and stimulate their interest outside the class. In addition, the teaching team recommend appropriate movies, TV shows, and other video materials related to intercultural communication topics as resources for students to study after class and for discussion in class.

Besides, the course employs relevant modern educational technology to aid instruction, such as various online courses on MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) platforms, "Sojump" (an online platform for questionnaire survey, evaluation, and voting), "Grading and Scoring System", "Rain Classroom", and other WeChat applets. These modern online teaching tools and technologies make the teaching process more practical, efficient, and flexible, including the teaching activities such as sign-in, roll-call, voting, questionnaires, learning analysis, classroom interaction, classroom quizzes, and students' mutual evaluation.

### 3.5. The Outline of Ideological and Political Education Content

In the process of intercultural communication teaching, we implement ideological and political education based on the dimensions of political identity, national sentiment, and moral cultivation. The course affectively aims to fulfill the fundamental task of moral education and bring into play the implicit educational dimension of intercultural communication. The main approach to realizing ideological and political education is by integrating excellent Chinese culture into the teaching of intercultural communication. This integration will help enhance students' cultural confidence, improve students' awareness, and enhance students' ability to inherit and disseminate excellent traditional Chinese culture in English, thus enriching the humanistic education functions of English courses and developing students'

intercultural competence<sup>[13]</sup>. Table 1 shows the design of the ideological and political educational content of each unit in the IC course.

*Table 1: The Outline of Ideological and Political Education Content*

Topics	Materials/Activities	Ideological and political education outcomes
Beauty standards (Unit 1 Communication Across Culture)	Video watching: "Informal Talks" program clip where representatives from different countries state beauty standards in their country	Know the beauty standards of different countries and respect the diversity of world cultures
Greetings, apologies, thanks, and goodbyes (Unit 2 Culture and Communication)	Group discussion: Comparison of ways of greeting, apologizing, thanking, and saying goodbye in China and other countries	Appreciate Chinese culture and take pride in our nation, a nation of ceremony and propriety
Cultural identity (Unit 2 Culture and Communication)	Case Study: Identity Dilemma of Second-Generation Chinese Americans	Be firm in cultural confidence and take pride in good traditional Chinese culture
Relationship of man to nature (Unit 3 Cultural Diversity)	Article reading and discussion: Xi Jinping's speech at the Leaders Climate Summit: For Man and Nature: Building a Community of Life Together	Understand the Chinese concept of "harmony of nature and mankind"; Master the idea of a community with a shared future for mankind
Cultural dimension: Long-term vs. short-term orientation (Unit 3 Cultural Diversity)	Video watching and discussion: "What is the 14th Five-Year Plan?" reported by the official media China Global Television Network (CGTN)	Understand Chinese wisdom and China's five-year plans
Kinship terms (Unit 4 Language and Culture)	Discussion: The difference between Chinese and Western kinship terms	Understand the family values and family tradition of China
High involvement vs. high considerateness (Unit 5 Culture and Verbal Communication)	Video-watching: CGTN's host Liu Xin talking trade with FOX Business' Trish Regan	Know the communication styles in different countries
Nonverbal communication (Unit 6 Culture and Nonverbal Communication)	Lecture: Chinese people who are not used to saying "no"; Chinese people who rush to pay the bill	Master Chinese interpersonal guidelines
Mono-chronic vs. Poly-chronic (Unit 7 Time and Space Across Cultures)	Lecture: The cultural psychology behind the phenomena of "queue-jumping" and "multitasking"	Understand the core socialist values of "harmony" and "civility"
Stereotypes and prejudices (Unit 8 Cross-cultural Perception)	Discussion: Dior's controversial photo of a spooky Asian woman displayed at a Shanghai fashion exhibition	Know how to confront stereotypes and prejudices
Adapting to the culture (Unit 9 Intercultural Adaptation)	Video: Typical scenes of contemporary life in China, such as bike-sharing, online shopping, and quick payment Discussion: China has changed me	Appreciate China's great transformation in the last decade, China's speed, and China's spirit
Differences between Chinese and Western education (Unit 10 Acquiring Intercultural Competence)	Group discussion: Confucius' ideas on education; my view of good teachers	Understand the Chinese educational philosophy of "teaching without discrimination", "teaching according to the ability", and "establishing moral education"

### 3.6. Teaching Process and Instructional Strategies

The IC course is modeled on educational psychologist Robert M. Gagné's "Nine Events of Instruction"<sup>[14]</sup>. The nine-step process includes gaining attention, describing the goal, activating prior knowledge, presenting the content, providing learning guidance, eliciting the performance, providing feedback,

assessing the performance, and enhancing retention and transfer.

First, through questions, anecdotes, news, events, videos, case studies, etc., the intercultural communication topic is introduced in a reasonable way to focus students' attention. After the attention-getter, the learning objective is shared with the students. By being told early in the lesson what they will be able to accomplish, students will be more motivated to achieve the specific expectations related to the learning objectives and to complete each task. Then, through questions and discussions, students are guided to recall prior intercultural knowledge and share any related intercultural experiences they have had. After drawing on prior knowledge, various forms of media, such as presentations, videos, and group projects, and a variety of methods of delivery, such as lectures, texts, and activities, are employed to share content with students and to reiterate information. Next, in order to help students understand intercultural knowledge and raise their intercultural awareness through case studies and cultural comparisons, learning guidance should be provided to make the stimuli, such as activities, videos, and texts, as meaningful as possible. After that, by asking thought-provoking questions, facilitating discussions on a topic, encouraging collaboration, or providing assessments such as projects, assignments, and group presentations, the teacher can initiate learning and help the students demonstrate their understanding of the intercultural situations and apply intercultural knowledge and English language skills to analyze and solve intercultural problems. Subsequently, detailed formative feedback such as personal feedback from the instructor, peer-evaluation, and self-evaluation will be used to keep students on track toward the learning goal. Additionally, multiple evaluations, such as quizzes and oral discussions, can be used to assess the performance and determine whether the objectives have been achieved. Last, in order to enhance retention and transfer knowledge to long-term memory, instructors can help students apply information to personal contexts, provide additional practice, or develop assignments.

#### **4. Teaching Assessments and Reflections**

The course assessment mainly includes the following three kinds: diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, and summative assessment. Diagnostic assessment is achieved with the aid of online teaching aids such as quizzes on teaching platforms such as Rain Classroom and questionnaires on Sojump. It is aimed at evaluating students' knowledge, skills, weaknesses, and learning gaps before starting a new learning experience. Formative assessment is used to dynamically measure students' performance throughout the learning process in order to help adjust the teaching strategies accordingly. It is achieved through the instant evaluation of students' performance with the intelligent teaching aid Rain Classroom, which records students' attendance, classroom participation, self-evaluation, group presentation performance, peer-evaluation, etc. Summative assessment, used to measure students' knowledge after the IC course has been taught, is realized through the quantitative assessment of a specified set of indicators and the qualitative or quantitative evaluation of students combined with the results of diagnostic and formative evaluations.

According to the above teaching assessments and students' feedback, the teaching content, teaching process, and instructional strategies are adjusted accordingly for the purpose of optimizing teaching effectiveness. In the future, more attention should be paid to the following three aspects of teaching: First, the learning environment should be made more lively and attractive. With many distractions present upon entry to the classroom, as well as disturbance during the class, it is important to capture the students' attention by carefully preparing the teaching details before the class and sharing interesting intercultural anecdotes and cases and high-quality Internet resources to liven up the environment of the class. Second, we can explore more active learning strategies and an effective course communication plan that meaningfully engages students in their learning. For instance, through group discussion, pair work, group presentation, case study, classroom feedback, and other student engagement strategies, we promote the interaction between teachers and students and the interaction between students so that students can deeply participate in the classroom and are highly motivated to learn. Third, an outcome-based and goal-oriented approach to the course will be more emphasized. The course planning is designed around clearer learning objectives and better realization of the teaching objectives. The outcome-based and goal-oriented approach to course design is conducive to the realization of the cognitive, affective, and ability objectives. Students can better master the theoretical system of intercultural communication and improve their communication skills to introduce Chinese culture and identify cultural differences between China and other countries in English. Meanwhile, they will have better intercultural communication competence, critical thinking ability, and international vision, as well as a better sense of patriotism, responsibility, and team consciousness.

## 5. Conclusion

The development of students' intercultural competence in the context of ideological and political education should be oriented toward "fostering virtue and serving the nation", emphasizing the deep understanding of Chinese culture and the inheritance and communication competence of Chinese culture. Therefore, the natural integration of ideological and political education in this course is targeted at the needs of national economic and social development, and it also underlines the talent training objectives of undertaking missions, exploring knowledge, enhancing abilities, and contributing to society. More importantly, it aims to raise students' intercultural awareness, develop correct values and a correct worldview, and guide students to firmly establish cultural confidence, and inherit and disseminate Chinese culture. These objectives are not only the main goals of promoting ideological and political education but also the mission of cultivating socialist builders and successors with both virtue and talent.

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