

An Action Research of the Chinese Context-Based Intercultural Teaching – A Case Study of an Intercultural Exchange Project between American and Chinese College Students

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Abstract: Based on a two-semester intercultural exchange project between students from a Chinese and an American university and Byram's ICC model, this action research investigates how Chinese EFL learners developed their intercultural competence within communicative, learner-centered Chinese context. The findings aim at providing reference and feedback to intercultural teaching from a perspective of the second classroom process research.

Keywords: Byram's ICC model, intercultural competence, intercultural exchange project

1. Introduction

Chinese EFL learners' Intercultural competence or intercultural communication competence have been argued for decades and approached by Chinese scholars from different perspectives. Most of these models are borrowed from or based on foreign scholar's theories. The relatively influential models are "motivation, knowledge, skill" (Samovar & Porter, 2004); "display of respect, orientation to knowledge, empathy, interaction management, task role behavior, relational role behavior, tolerance for ambiguity, interaction posture" (Gudykunst, 2004); the perspectives of "motivation (affective), knowledge (cognitive) and skills (behavioral)" proposed by Chen in *Foundations of Intercultural Communication Competence and A Study of Intercultural Communication Competence*; three interdependent ingredients, namely knowledge, motivation or affective component and behavior. (Neuliep, 2008).

Byram's ICC model (1997) foregrounds intercultural criticality among a cluster of factors for developing intercultural competence within communicative, learner-centered foreign language education. His ICC model attempts to build on earlier models of intercultural competence and effectiveness in learner-centered, communicative language teaching (e.g. van EK, 1986; van Ek&Trim, 1991, 1996), but to move beyond their dependence on "native speaker" norms and rules.

Byram (1997) developed a definition of "intercultural competence" containing five dimensions, namely savors — knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction (Byram, 1997); *savoir comprendre* — the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's

own (Byram, 1997); *savoir apprendre/faire* — the skill of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction (Byram, 1997); *savoir etre* — defined as “curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own”(Byram, 1997) and *savoir s’engager* — described as “critical cultural awareness/ political education: an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries.” (Byram, 1997)

Most Chinese intercultural experts also agreed that the goals of intercultural teaching — intercultural competence should be approached from cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects. But how to help EFL learners attain these goals from a practice perspective still leaves much to be improved. The current research situation of Chinese intercultural teaching is that the empirical and culture-specific studies are outnumbered by theoretical ones; the studies of Chinese culture and cultural comparison are outnumbered by studies of English and American culture; the studies about the ways to increase EFL learners’ intercultural competence are outnumbered by studies about the components of intercultural competence; the vernacular and creative studies are outnumbered by mechanical and introductory ones. (Kong, 2012)

Despite the fact that many Chinese intercultural communication teachers try to acquaint students with the “target and home language, culture and society”, help them “overcome intercultural communication apprehension and arouse their intercultural sensitivity”, make them willing to “interact with people from different cultures”, and finally enable them to “engage in flexible and effective intercultural behaviors”, (Kong, 2012) the present problem with intercultural communication teaching in China is that most EFL students are indifferent to the above three goals due to the text-oriented teaching mode or the situation that their intercultural knowledge is only limited to such superficial level as “literature, history, custom of the target culture, rather than the thinking and communication patterns and value orientations”, (Chang, 2012) let alone the flexible intercultural communicative behaviors. My experience is that intercultural communication teaching in the classroom can assist EFL learners in accomplishing the first goal and increase their target language and cultural awareness in terms of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, esp. culture-loaded words, contextual features, communicative style, non-verbal communication, social customs, history, geography, and social values. As to the second and third goals, classroom intercultural communication teaching is far from enough and effective due to the lack of authentic and real-life communicative environment. Therefore, based on action research, a two-semester intercultural exchange project between a Chinese university in Beijing and an American university in Chicago, and Byram’s model, I wanted to examine how my EFL learners increased their intercultural competence in terms of knowledge, motivation, behavior and situational performance. The findings aim at providing reference and feedback to intercultural communication teaching from the perspective of the second classroom process research.

2. The Research

2.1. Research Questions

Overall, my aim here was to investigate how Chinese EFL learners increased their intercultural communication competence in terms of *savoirs*, *savoir comprendre*, *savoir etre*, *savoir apprendre/faire* and *savoir s'engager* from a perspective of the second classroom process research. To achieve this, I looked for answers to the following questions:

- 1) What are the problems that my EFL learners have in intercultural teaching?
- 2) What methods can I adopt to address these problems?
- 3) How effective are these methods in increasing my learners' intercultural communication competence in terms of *savoirs*, *savoir comprendre*, *savoir etre*, *savoir apprendre/faire* and *savoir s'engager*?

2.2. Participants

About 30 Chinese and 28 American college students participated in this two-semester project. They were from different majors other than English or Chinese. Most of them had never engaged in intercultural communication.

2.3. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected in an intercultural exchange program between freshmen from a Chinese university of science and technology and an American university of arts from Feb, 2011 to Oct, 2012. This study followed an action research approach (Burns, 1999). I examined a problematic aspect of my own teaching, introduced changes, and evaluated the results of these changes. I worked through this process using one review stage and three main stages, in which I collected data through observation, interview, surveys and students' journal at the end of the program. I described each stage of the study below.

2.3.1. Reviewing Current Practice

In this phase I wanted to identify a focus for my study. So I observed how my intercultural communication teaching increase students' intercultural communication competence in terms of knowledge, motivation and behavior. Teaching activities mainly focus on classroom procedure: observation, exploration, expansion and evaluation. (Zhang, 2007)

The first stage was aimed to present a cultural topic to students who would compare Chinese and American phenomena concerning this topic and find the differences. The second stage was aimed to guide the students to analyze these cultural differences, gather further information and form their own judgment about the cultural phenomenon through intensive reading study or role-play. The third stage was aimed to input more cultural material to students and help them repair their previous observation in the form of group discussion. The fourth stage was aimed to guide students to synthesize the relevant cultural information, prove or give up their previous

judgment and finally reflect on their cultural study in the form of writing assignment.

At the end of semester, I surveyed my students about their intercultural communication competence. Most of them agreed this kind of teaching helped them increase their target language and cultural awareness in terms of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, esp. culture-loaded words, contextual features, communicative style, non-verbal communication, social customs, history, geography, and social values. But as to motivation and behavior, the other two aspects of intercultural communication competence, they felt to make very little progress. Due to the large amount of cultural information input related to each topic, some students even felt their intercultural motivation and interests suffered or even were deprived. Therefore, I think it was necessary to introduce authentic and real-life intercultural communication activities by linking technology, theory, pedagogical design, and hands-on experience, all of which “assist in fostering intercultural communication and critical thinking and in building intercultural learning networks” (Lomicka, 2006) between classes in China and English-speaking countries.

2.3.2. The Process of Two-semester Intercultural Communication

2.3.2.1. Step 1: Establishing the Personal Tie

The personal connection is the basis of this project because it helps both American and Chinese students break the ice during their preliminary intercultural communication. Guided by the instructors in the Chinese and American universities, the Chinese and American students (about 50 persons in different majors such as English, Chinese, international business, biology, civil engineering, management and mining technology) established their respective blogs on QQ and Facebook on which students' pictures appear along with their self-portraits. They were required to visit their favorite blogs and make pen pals with each other. Exchanges between pen pals during this stage were typically personal in nature, which mainly dealt with their hobbies, interests and study, and were written half in English and half in Chinese.

Partner teachers aligned their calendars before the start of the academic year. Scheduled scholarly breaks and vacations, as well as national holidays were taken into consideration as teachers set up their academic timeline for projects.

2.3.2.2. Step 2: In-depth Understanding about Target Cultures

Built on mutual trust, a common course schedule (same themes and similar linguistic notions) was shared, allowing students to develop their linguistic, cultural, and analytical learning with their partners. In this stage exchanges between pen pals were mainly academic in nature. Instructors from both universities helped students to determine topics which reflected the interests and concerns of the learners, such as typical campus conversations, activities, travel, sports, movies, pop music, education, advertisement, employment (Chastain, 1976). Once a topic was selected, a variety of activities were designed to develop the linguistic skill and cultural awareness. (see table 1)

Table 1. On-line Intercultural Communication Activities

Level	Tool	Function	Suggested Activities
Beginners	Blogs, podcasting, and on-line written or oral chatting	Improves students' reading, listening speaking and writing proficiency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students read blogs (authored by teachers or advanced learners) about the target culture in English and Chinese or tracked photo logs (flogs), which is not typically available in the textbook, and then are required to post their comments. 2. Students created and published their own oral podcasts in Chinese or English on a subject of their choice, dealing with some aspect of Chinese or American culture, which were shared on the blog with their keypals, who might give some valuable peer suggestions for improvement. 3. Students were assigned some simple on-line chatting tasks in Chinese or English, such as inquiring about one typical day on campus of their partner with the use of appropriate tense or make a telephone in the target language.
Inter-mediate Students	Blogs, flogs (a specialized type of Web journal in picture form) or voice thread (a special software to combine one's voice and slides)	Improves students' writing proficiency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students consulted flogs to practice writing descriptions, noting their observations in their own blogs. 2. To have two foreign language classes exchange blog address and read and comment on one another's blogs. Every week a different student could be responsible for writing the blog post for the class. Class could have access to posts from all the students in the class as well as the opportunity to respond to anyone in the class. <p>(Exchanges between pen pals were written half in English and half in Chinese)</p>

Advanced Students	Wiki, voice thread and on-line written chatting	Promotes students' critical thinking and communicating skills	<p>The wiki provides a web-based environment for collaborative work (Evans, 2009). Building on its nature or the thread share, the cultural projects were varied:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students in both universities collaborated to plan a target cultural travel. 2. Students in both universities created a book club suitable for each other for reading and discussion. (Lomicka, 2010) 3. Students in both universities surveyed on college students' view on employment or friends-making patterns by interviewing their pen pals via on-line chatting. And then they studied these statistics or cases very carefully and found the gender and cultural differences in the view on these two aspects. Finally, each team was supposed to post their findings or analysis of the reasons on the intercultural communication wiki page. 4. Students in both universities completed and shared their film projects (4-5minutes), which introduced CUMTB and NCC in English or Chinese via wiki. <p>(Exchanges between pen pals were written half in English and half in Chinese)</p>
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When assigning the above topics, it is crucial for teachers to communicate their expectations for each assignment and to decide ahead of time how each assignment will be graded. How much target and native language will be used? What criteria will be used to grade assignments? Clear guidelines should be given about how often students should post, how long the post should be, how many hyperlinks should be included in each post, what is appropriate to write and how to avoid temptation of plagiarism. Assessment can also be done by peers or oneself. Learners can reflect on how well the team works, how they feel about their work and progress and what skills and knowledge they are gaining. Questionnaires, checklists or essays can help learners do this by inviting them to reflect critically on the skills and knowledge they are gaining.

2.3.2.3. Step 3: Real-Time Conversations and Visiting the Other

Engaging students in real-time conversations is an exciting and motivating task that brings the language and culture to life, gives it purpose, and creates a reason to develop intercultural sensitivity and understanding (Lomicka, 2006). That is also the ultimate goal of intercultural communication. Students should experience intercultural interaction first hand rather than reading about it in assignments (Lischke, 2002). Students conversed in real time approximately twice a month with their peers across the ocean. A webcam and microphone were set up so that students can both send and receive video and audio. Students came to class having prepared questions based on readings and class discussions relating to a cultural theme. They chatted for approximately 25 minutes in Chinese and 25 minutes in English. This structure helped them to apply the grammar and vocabulary studied during the week, which was integrated with the cultural theme. From a more logistical standpoint, it is necessary to spend time before starting the project to establish topics, install and test equipment for both written and video chat, guide students to set up their blogs, wiki, create podcasts and do in-class chat, and plan dates for video chat and a trip to visit the partner class. If online collaboration can be arranged, a private room equipped with computers for the live chat is ideal.

The academic year closed with an opportunity for students to visit the other country and observe what had been discussed during the year. Instructors at the American university started a course which provided an opportunity for American students to explore the global world with a specific focus on China. The course was designed to guide the student to get an authentic and in-depth touch of China – present, history, culture, business, people, and life – through an eight-week trip in three cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Harbin) in China. American Students took history, culture, business, and social lectures of professors at the Chinese university, toured in historical sites and museums, visited high-technology centers, appreciated traditional Chinese performance and cuisine, and home stayed with a Chinese host family for two nights. Students were exposed to a genuine China from all perspectives, which were not possibly done in the United States. Meanwhile Chinese students took the hosting role and had the chance to meet up with their pen pals. A variety of doing-culture exchange activities will be carried out. Every week there was a workshop held on Chinese campus on different themes, such as Chinese campus sports (table tennis, basketball, soccer and so on), art and music (esp. the performance by Chinese students), traditional Chinese culture, such as calligraphy, Taichi, folk dance, Chinese chess and mahjong, Chinese students' associations, such as robots, model UN, English corner, debating club, dancing club and so on. Chinese students took American partners to visit their associations and involved them into their activities. Pair or group activities such as paired drill practice, shopping, bar or tea house chatting, karaoke and organized campus activities were organized to underscore the idea that communicating across cultures is a process of making meaning, of people understanding one another so they can get to know one another, build relationships, and solve problems together. It should not be words on paper, but ideas in practice. The exchange (seen below) closed with a party attended by American and Chinese students who displayed their talents.

Week 1: Breaking the ice and pairing up Chinese and American students

Chinese students took the host role and introduced themselves to American students. Then they helped American students work out a schedule about what they would like to do during their stay in Beijing on a win-win basis by showing some pictures of famous sights in China, Chinese and American students' hometowns and popular campus activities in both China and America.

Week 2: Group discussion about world capitals

Both Chinese and American students took part in the seminar on world capitals and brainstorm what makes a city a "capital". Based on their own living experiences, they may focus on the cultural differences between Chinese and American capitals in terms of architecture, layout, history and some hidden aspects such as values and patterns of thoughts.

Week 3: Hands-on experience of bicycle tour in Beijing

To expose American students to authentic life in Beijing, Chinese students and teachers organized a bicycle tour to downtown Beijing, which included some famous historical sights such as Confucius Temple, an Ancient Academy, NanLuogu Lane and Houhai bar street. American and Chinese teachers and Chinese students introduced the features of Chinese folk architecture like old quadrangle courtyard, the moral and ethical system Confucianism — Ren (benevolence) and Li (a set of ritual and musical systems) and the modern popular culture like bar-culture and pop music in both China and America.

Week 4: Watching traditional Chinese art — cross-talk organized by students art association at CUMTB

Before watching this art, Chinese students and teachers gave a brief introduction about this form of art. Xiangsheng(cross-talk) is a traditional Chinese comedic performance in the form of a dialogue or, much less often, a monologue or even less frequently, a multi-player talk show. The language, rich in puns and allusions, is used in a rapid, bantering style. It is one of China's foremost performing arts. Modern xiangsheng is made up of four skills — speaking, imitating, teasing and singing. During watching, Chinese teachers and students kept American students and teacher company and provided the simultaneous translation. After watching they shared their experience on comedic show both in China and America on line by blog, renren (Chinese face book) or Wiki.

Week 5: Chinese national holiday***Week 6: Practicing Chinese Kongfu (Taichi, nunchakus)***

Chinese students from students Kongfu association taught American students and teachers

how to practice Taichi. Then both American and Chinese students and teachers were invited to “show” or talk about the differences between Chinese Kongfu and Western freedom fight, esp, the philosophical root. This exchange activity is in accordance with the spirit of making friends through Kongfu — a core in traditional Kongfu philosophy.

Week 7: Chinese calligraphy and weaving traditional craft like Chinese knot and bracelet

Chinese students and teachers helped American students and teachers to write calligraphy and weave Chinese knot and bracelets. Through this activity, the development of Chinese characters and differences between Chinese and English were brainstormed and presented by students and teachers on both sides.

Week 8: Watching tea performance and throwing a party as the end of the exchange

Both American and Chinese students and teachers went to a quintessential tea house opposite to the Chinese university. The motif there is three-kingdom period style. All the waitresses are dressed in ancient costume and present the tea performance with the traditional tea sets. American students found themselves in an ancient period, sitting in period chairs, reading the bamboo menu, playing period swords and drums, and listening to traditional music played by Guzheng (a 21- or 25-stringed plucked traditional instrument). Chinese students and teachers taught their American counterparts how to play Chinese chess, I-go, poker and mahjong. American partners were encouraged to teach Chinese friends their relaxing games. Both of them could learn more about the history and development of Chinese tea culture.

Assignments:

- 1) Both Chinese and American students were required to write a blog once a week about their exchange activities. Both of them are required to post at least 2 comments both in Chinese and English on the blogs of their partners.
- 2) In the form of groups, both Chinese and American students were required to conduct a mini-research about one aspect of Chinese or American culture by qualitative or quantities approach.

3. Findings

After the three stages of intercultural communication exchange above, my observation, interview, surveys and students’ journals highlighted certain findings about the students’ intercultural communication competence in terms of *savoirs*, *savoir comprendre*, *savoir etre*, *savoir apprendre/faire* and *savoir s’engager* which I would like to focus on in the following description.

3.1. Savoirs (Knowledge) — Knowledge of Social Groups and Their Products and Practices in One’s Own Country and in the Interlocutor’s Country and of the General Processes of Societal and Individual Interaction

With the exchange between Chinese and American students, my EFL students became more accustomed, adaptive and tolerant to cultural differences, realized the variety and subtlety of culture and achieved personal growth in some degree.

In terms of language, Chinese students became more fluent in oral and written English and learn many colloquial expressions and cyber language commonly used by American students. For example, “bullshit” is not a bad word. It can be used as “lie”. They felt not fettered by grammar. One Chinese student mentioned his error “more cheap” can be understood by American students as cheaper. Some Chinglish can be used properly by American students: good good study, day day up (好好学习 天天向上. It means working hard). Chinese students realized it’s unnecessary to use some big and formal expressions and long sentences during their first meeting: it’s my honor to... They believed in future intercultural communication they would be more self-confident and independent.

“I’ll not feel incompetent in future intercultural encounter. I think I will adopt an active and leading role in conversation and not cater to American students any more. Since I know about their hobbies and daily life very well, I will establish an equal and natural friendship with them” — A Chinese female student

“I’ve learned a lot of fresh and practical colloquial expressions. I realized the importance of context for EFL students. When I watched English movies, I found them much easier to understand because the American students often used the language in the movies.” — A Chinese male student

I suddenly found English written chat with my American friends was much more fun and meaningful than writing class. I couldn’t help writing in English even in my free time. I was so highly motivated and can’t help resist the impulse to communicate with them in English — A Chinese female student

In terms of attitude towards target and home cultures, Chinese students longed for the multi-culture, freedom and individuality of the American culture. Meanwhile, they realized the weaknesses and essence of both cultures. Take Chinese college students for instance, unlike Western men, many males didn’t value rituals, especially “lady first”. But some American boys are also so “selfish” that they even asked Chinese girls to pay for them and appeared very rude which was later verified by American girls. So we should observe cultural differences more objectively rather than blindly imitate the West. As genuine Chinese, my students felt they knew so little about traditional culture, such as Kongfu, Beijing opera and calligraphy and can teach very little to American students. Chinese students believed some Chinese overreacted towards foreigners by trying to show our politeness and be hospitable hosts. My students, therefore held that an equal relationship should be built. They also felt they had a more realistic attitude towards American life and felt less envious. All American students are not crazy party animals. Their parties are like Chinese students’ dormitory discussion. Both need a sense of connection and belonging. Sometimes American students live a harder life than Chinese students due to little connection with their families. There really exists a kind of paradox of cultural values in both cultures. For example, in individual American culture American students also love to engage in many collectivistic campus activities, such as music festival and super

bowl. Comparatively, in Chinese collectivistic culture some Chinese students rejected campus group activity due to the lack of individuality. Chinese students found a combination rather than a separation of Eastern and Western values in both American and Chinese students. They felt more tolerant rather than shocked by cultural differences.

In terms of worldview, my students prefer the different outlook and lateral thought.

“Before communicating with American students, I took it for granted that collectivism is observed everywhere. Even if I know the definition of individualism, I find little effect of this value on my life. Since most Chinese students and friends around me do the same thing, pursue the same target, like the same style, why should I resist them and open a new way? But from my communication with American students, I found individual life could be very varied and colorful. Every one is unique and can have his or her own life story. It’s so interesting to display one’s individuality and try different things.” — A Chinese female student

“I became more tolerant towards cultural differences as a result of this kind of intercultural communication and no longer feel some topic like sex is a taboo in my daily conversation.” — A Chinese female student

3.2. Savoir Etre (Attitude) — The Curiosity and Openness, Readiness to Suspend Disbelief about Other Cultures and Belief about One’s Own

My observation and interviews suggested that my Chinese students felt elated and uneasy and held an “incorrect” attitude during the preliminary stage of intercultural communication.

“Every time I went out with American students, I felt excited and nervous. Gradually I could express myself more naturally and fluently in English. But the next time when I saw them, I felt the same anxiety again.” — A Chinese female student

“At the very beginning I felt there were such vast differences between us and them. I thought they were much more open and free and well-to-do than us. But in reality they were not like that.” — A Chinese male student

They looked forward to being exposed to the foreign culture and felt a little bit scared at once. They thought American students are very smart, open and superior to them in terms of language proficiency, self-confidence and socializing. These ideas were mainly from movies and the mass media. Chinese students felt very uneasy when they wanted to express themselves, because they didn’t know what topics to choose and always wanted to cater to American students, only to find they were both more embarrassed. For example, Chinese students always mentioned some popular American singers and movies which are household in China, such as Lady Gaga, Gossip Girls or Friends. But their American partners may have their individual tastes or think these popular movies in China failed to reflect the genuine American culture. Facing this embarrassing situation, Chinese students may feel the gap between their second-hand cultural experience and their intercultural communication in authentic environment.

With their further communication, Chinese students found cultural differences were frustrating.

Table 2. Cultural Shocks in Savoier Etre

Intercultural Exchanges	Cultural Shocks
Daily Communication	When both parties communicated in English, Chinese students had nothing or very little to say and felt depressed and insulted by the “silent” moments.
Paying the Bill	Due to “face culture”, CS felt embarrassed when dining outside because they couldn’t afford treating AS but AS didn’t mind waiting for them while CS were eating and drinking.
Hobbies	CS often shared similar hobbies and did something together while AS really vary from person to person and very unique in the choice of their hobby and activity.
Recreation: Bar-going	AS considered this as a very natural communication while CS thought this very bad and improper, influenced by their Confucian heritage.
About Attending College	<i>Self-support, and huge financial pressure vs. carefree and dependent life</i> Out of Chinese students’ expectation, their American peers are under huge financial pressures and very independent and hard-working while Chinese live a relatively easy life with the support from their families. So my students tended to feel guilty and immature.
The Relationship between Students and Teachers	<i>Close and equal VS distant and hierarchical</i> American professors will introduce job and internship opportunities to students and hang out with them while most Chinese professors mainly communicate with students in class.
Course Design and Choice	<i>Practical and free VS stiff and aimless</i> American Students can learn extensively during the first year and choose what they really like as their majors during the second year while most Chinese students have to choose their majors upon entering college, among whom some are really aimless and know very little about the prospect of their majors. Some American students choose the reverse course plan: to learn the most difficult in the first two years and the easiest in senior years to save time for job hunting.

<p>Attitude towards Employment</p>	<p><i>Highly-motivated and clear VS blind and following the others; equal VS hierarchical attitude towards jobs</i> <i>Practical expectation VS high and ideal expectation</i> Through part-time jobs and internship, American students know more about the society and have a clear career plan while most CS spent most of their time on study and won't take risks in job-hunting. Some still hold onto very stable jobs, for example, the postgraduates and civil servants. Some just rush to hunt a job due to the social pressure, while American students may work after graduation from high school and consider some low-end job in garage and restaurant as accumulation of social experience.</p>
<p>Campus Love</p>	<p><i>Practical and short-term VS romantic and long-term; mutual respect and freedom VS controlling and conservative</i> AS thought CS dated each other too long while CS considered it natural and right and hold love is exclusive. Some CS even called each other wife and husband in public cyber couple space, which for AS went too far.</p>
<p>Attitude towards Money</p>	<p><i>Money-savvy VS planless</i> CS thought AS were more thrifty and rational when spending money (keeping a record) while CS sometimes tend to waste when it comes to face issue or lux brand. American students are more hair-splitting in money even between friends, which makes CS feel embarrassed.</p>
<p>Students' Character</p>	<p><i>Independent and individualistic VS modest, cute and sweet and collectivistic</i> American students consider them as men and women while most Chinese students consider them as boys and girls. So in intercultural communication CS often felt they were treated by AS as naïve kids.</p>
<p>Food and Religion</p>	<p>When it comes to religious belief, it really depends. Some American students don't believe in Christianity at all despite the fact that they really want to believe in that. They even find Buddhism more interesting. Therefore, some American students don't mind breaking the food taboo and would love to eat animal parts in China</p>
<p>Friendship</p>	<p><i>Mature, spiritual and short-term connection VS intimate, lasting and stable relationship</i> American students value spiritual support and friendship based on shared activities and experience. They also like to enlarge their friends circle by introducing friends to each other. So their friendship tends to be short, practical and mature. Chinese students tend to develop very intimate friendship without any privacy among them. They also like group activities in which they seldom make the third-party introduction. They hold that friendship should last forever.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Family Values</p>	<p><i>Distant and weak VS intimate and strong</i> AS seldom communicated with their parents when travelling or visited them after going to college while most Chinese students go back home every semester and feel more attached to their families.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Misunderstanding towards Another Culture</p>	<p><i>Cross-gender communication</i> Some Chinese students are even more open than American students, especially the kissing behavior in public places. Chinese opposite-sex friends also hug each other. But AS are very careful about physical touch when communicating with Chinese female students and try not to engage in very intimate physical behavior. <i>Abortion</i> American students took it for granted that most Chinese girl students maybe experience it. So they ask them very embarrassing questions with great interest.</p>

However, these cultural shocks didn't pose cultural barriers in the communication between Chinese and American students. My EFL students gradually realized these are due to different cultural values. For them it was very necessary to acknowledge and respect these differences. With further interaction, they became adapted to the needs and habits of each other and even enjoyed the different "zest" of life.

3.3. Savoir Comprendre, Avoir Apprendre/Faire, Savoir S'engager (Behavior) — the Ability to Interpret and Relate; The Skill of Discovery and Interaction; The Ability to Critically Evaluate Perspectives, Practices and Products in One's Own and Others' Cultures and Countries

In terms of behavior, Chinese students felt more at ease and confident about engaging in flexible and effective intercultural communication. After experiencing some difficult situations and sharing joys and sorrows with American students (eg. buying train tickets in a large crowd and overcoming some painful moments when traveling), both parties felt they were true genuine friends. Chinese students even didn't consider them as foreigners and could communicate with them freely, especially on telephone. Chinese students wanted to try something exotic and new in distant countries and cultures because they knew very well they would socialize with Americans more flexibly and properly in future. Meanwhile they would relapse back very naturally and adopt the Chinese habits when communicating with Chinese. When it comes to third-party introduction, most Chinese college students said they were not used to that due to Chinese' anonymous privacy. Just as a Chinese student said, "I have become very sensitive and tolerant towards cultural differences, but it's very hard to adopt their behavior overnight, especially in Chinese environment. After all, the influence of Chinese behavior pattern is too strong."

They valued their home culture more because they saw American student appreciate Chinese tradition. Some American students admired Confucius so much that they made Qufu the first

stop when traveling across China. An American student even stuck a picture of Confucius on his computer screen, and said, “It’s not good to play computer games.” Chinese students tended to make comparisons when observing some cultural phenomena: what will American students think of it? They would like to engage in critical thinking by challenging and doubting what they have learned in books and even got into the habit of inferring the conclusion by logic due to their debate with American students about some social issues. They have become used to approaching a problem from different perspectives. For example, Chinese students took it for granted that Chinese students association should be organized hierarchically. They value form, official titles and politeness very much. But when American students kidded them, “There are so many ministers everywhere on campus.” “What we value is team spirit, equality and result”, my students began to rethink about their organizational form.

In terms of cultural study method, some Chinese said they had learned how to make surveys and write papers about intercultural communication research. Two Chinese students majoring in English were very interested in cultural differences in food and employment attitude. I guided them how to design questionnaires and make pre-tests. Then these questionnaires were sent to American students and collected for further analysis from perspectives of value orientations.

Sample of a student’s paper

The Analysis and Interpretation on Distinctions of Diet Habit between American and Chinese College Students

Abstract: This study adopts the method of qualitative and quantitative analysis and states the distinctions of diet habit between American and Chinese college students. The distinctions of diet habits will largely affect the result of intercultural communication. Therefore, finding out the distinctions between Chinese and American diet habit, understanding the profound cultural connotation and probing into its culture will promote the cultural communication, complementation and compatibility between two countries. As for the foreign language learners, understanding the Chinese-American diet habits distinctions will not only promote further understanding of the language, but also improve the effectiveness of intercultural communication and help us cross cultural communication barriers. We hope that this thesis can help the Chinese students cross cultural communication barriers and adapt to the Western culture better and faster.

Key Words: American and Chinese College Students; diet habit; distinctions; intercultural communication

4. Conclusion

This research is aimed to find some new ways to increase students’ intercultural communication competence in the authentic environment. As is illustrated above, my students experienced the intercultural awareness from inadaptation to acculturation to some extent in a relatively short time. In terms of *savoirs* (knowledge), Chinese EFL learners became more proficient in the target language, realized the variety and subtlety of both the home and target cultures, and acquired a different worldview. In terms of attitude (*savoir être*), Chinese EFL learners experienced the U curve mode — from excitement and blind admiration of the target

culture to frustration about the differences between the target cultural and home culture, and eventually to toleration of cultural differences, adaptation to the target culture and openness and readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and believe about one's own. In terms of behavior (*savoir comprendre, savoir apprendre/faire, savoir s'engager*), Chinese EFL learners felt more at ease and confident about engaging in flexible and effective intercultural communication, could critically evaluate the target culture and home culture, and master some cultural study approaches.

This project has the potential to create student-centered learning atmosphere that allow students to set the pace and learn according to their own rhythm, style and needs. These socio-culturally-based activities also teach students how to be responsible learners, collaborators, and problem-solvers. (MacDonald, 2003) Hopefully, this research will serve as a valuable reference for intercultural communication teaching and open up new possibilities to extend the classroom teaching by bridging the gap between second-hand knowledge and hands-on experience. More importantly, computer-mediated communication adds some useful dimensions to face-to-face intercultural communication. Students not only increase their cultural and linguistic competence through text, but also know that "they are probably heading for a lifelong experience of using their English through electronic intercultural communication" (Chapelle, 2008). Of course there is still much room for improvement. For example, I feel that my data collection leaves much to be desired. It would have been better if more Chinese and American students were involved and the quantitative approach was adopted. Some more effective intercultural communication activities may be designed with the further exchanges between the two universities. And finally I hope this kind of authentic intercultural communication could benefit EFL students more and stimulate their interests to identify influences on intercultural communication processes in daily life and apply their knowledge of intercultural communication processes to their own personal experiences.

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