

Intercultural Communication Competence and Acculturation among International Students in Central China

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Abstract: Each year, increasing numbers of international students enroll in Chinese universities, yet no literature is available on their intercultural communication competences (ICC) and acculturation status. The study aimed at investigating these two key concepts at Central China Normal University. Two dimensions of intercultural communication competence (affect and behavior) and two dimensions of acculturation (attitude towards maintenance of one's culture and attitude towards contact with other cultures) were employed to measure and analyze the two research constructs. A representative sample of 302 international students shows that Asian international students are less motivated to adapt than other students from other continents. In addition, time and education level do not seem to be sufficient factors in facilitating adaptation. Furthermore, the most preferred acculturation strategy is found to be integration. Finally, attitude towards contact positively correlates with affect and behavior. However, there is no relationship between attitude towards cultural maintenance and the two dimensions of ICC. These findings suggest that a better understanding of intercultural communication competence and acculturation, as well as of factors that help facilitate adjustment to the new culture, are essential in assisting Chinese universities to come up with effective programs that enhance contact between cultures.

Keywords: Intercultural communication competence, acculturation, demographic factors, cultural diversity, international students

1. Introduction

Since the government of the People's Republic of China began an open door policy in 1978, increasing numbers of international students have been entering China (Ministry of Education, 2009). By 2012, the number of international students studying in China reached over 328,000 (Ministry of Education, 2013), and coupled with the government's target of reaching over 500,000 international students by the year 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2010), the number of international students is expected to continue increasing each year. However, there is no available literature on their level of intercultural communication competences (ICC) and acculturation as they interact with local and other international students. These students come from different nationalities

worldwide including China's neighboring countries. As this number continues to grow, students and staff members increasingly interact with those who do not share the same cultural and social norms. As a result, there is no guarantee that international students will demonstrate effective communication since different cultures have different ways of communication; what one culture approves to be the right way, the other culture might not approve the same way.

While it could be argued that hosting international students brings about mutual benefit to the society at large as they bring with them a wide range of assets to the host country and in return gain a higher education, international students are confronted with a number of factors that impact their adaptability to the new environment. Based on the diverse dimensions of different cultures, it is apparent that effective intercultural communication cannot be taken for granted when different cultural groups interact. This intercultural complexity can be threatening for international students. They face social and cultural challenges ranging from language barrier, studying pressure, social adjustment, discrimination and unfamiliarity with the new surroundings. It is not surprising that students' physical and psychological well-being, as well as their academic performance, become affected by these challenges (Berry, 2005; Berry et al., 2006; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

International students are in a quandary of whether to modify their cultural boundaries and adapt to the new culture around them or to hold on to their native culture and surround themselves with people from their own country. Research has shown that students who decide to hold on to their native culture are those who experience the most problems in their university life; to a higher extent, experiencing issues like homesickness, stress and frequent culture shocks (Pedersen et al., 2011; Desa et al., 2012). Those who adapt themselves to the new culture surrounding them increase their knowledge of the host culture thereby lessening their psychological and sociocultural difficulties (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Pedersen et al., 2011).

Similarly, studies in education indicate that international students, who feel a sense of connectedness towards their new cultural environment, are less likely to experience acculturation related stress but are more likely to adjust successfully (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Despite the proven fact that being socially connected with host country citizens results in enhanced cultural adjustment, a number of students find problems in adjusting to their new environment. Some of the reasons why students fail to adjust in a timely manner to the new cultural system are academic pressure, limited personal resources, new language and cultural distance between their culture and the host's (Desa et al., 2012). Consequently, students tend to maintain close social contact with those having or ascribing to similar culture, that is, either with their ethnicity or other international students to form a subculture of their own, as a support group for themselves (Constantine & Sue, 2005).

To overcome intercultural challenges, international students try to adapt or adjust to the new socio-cultural environment, and communication is at the centre of this adaptation process (Zimmermann, 1995). Since international students constantly interact with those who may not share the same cultural and social norms, they eventually become involved in intercultural communication. Effective intercultural communication occurs when a message, produced by a member of one culture, is understood by a member of another culture. The concept of intercultural communication competence, therefore, is particularly very important to international students whose academic success depends on their interaction with native instructors and students. Extending this adaptation concept further, one of the intercultural communication theories where culturally diverse groups adjust to each other is the process known as acculturation (Berry, 2005). Due to diversity of their cultural backgrounds, different

students have different degrees of acculturation to the cultures where they live.

Although intercultural communication and acculturation have long before been studied quite comprehensively, these studies mainly concentrated on migrants and refugees aiming for either long term or permanent settlement (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Additionally, a few studies available on international students have aimed at investigating effects (anxiety and stress) of their failure to adapt. Further to that, a few studies have investigated the acculturation of Chinese students but as international students in universities outside China (Yasuda & Duan, 2002; Gu & Pistole, 2008; Yu & Wang, 2011). However, there are no available studies which empirically investigated how international students, in China, adapt into such foreign environments. As sojourners, in this case, students, intercultural communication competence and acculturation processes to the host culture might not fully develop by the time they go back to their home countries, and there is need to recommend effective strategies for their adaptation during their short-term stay. Since international students form yet another complex international community, within the host culture, where different diverse cultures meet and interact, again, nothing is known, in China, on how these non-local students interact with each other.

This study's critical objective was to investigate the intercultural communication experiences and the acculturation status of international students, at Central China Normal University (CCNU), in order to ascertain areas of importance that would assist them to better adapt to the new environment. Specifically, the study was aimed to answer three research questions:

1. To what extent do international students exhibit intercultural communication competence and acculturation in China?
2. Is there any relationship between students' intercultural communication competence and their acculturation?
3. Which acculturation strategies are predominant among international students in China?

The last research question has extensively been studied elsewhere (Alkhazraji et al., 1997; Swaidan et al., 2001; Zagefka & Brown, 2002; Tran, 2009; Yu & Wang, 2011), but the study setting of the current participants, China, makes this study unique. Thus, we wanted to see whether our study outcome differs from those of the literature. Implications have finally been drawn from the communication experiences and the acculturation patterns exhibited by these international students.

2. Intercultural Communication and Acculturation Models

2.1. Intercultural Communication Competence

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is rather a difficult concept to define. The term ICC can often be subjective to the cultures individuals are involved in. That is, communication competence in one particular culture would be grounded in the context of that culture and would, therefore, differ from one culture to another. Kim (1991) argues that ICC, therefore, should remain constant across all intercultural situations one is involved in regardless of the specific cultures involved. It should be able to focus on one's abilities to interact in a variety of intercultural communication events. From the literature, therefore, ICC can be defined as the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors interacting with individuals from different cultures (Arasaratnam, 2009; Penbek et al., 2009).

Taking a systems-theory approach, Kim (1991) presents her model of ICC which has an internal capacity within an individual point of view. Kim's (1991) model is grounded on a general system's idea of adaptability, "the capacity of an individual's internal psychic system to alter its existing attributes and structures to accommodate the demands of the environment" (p. 168). In her systems-theory approach, adaptability is recognized as an important or key component of ICC. An individual is expected to suspend or modify some of his / her old cultural ways, to learn and accommodate some of the new cultural ways. According to the model, there are three dimensions of ICC that relate to the concept of adaptability. First, the cognitive dimension (CD) which refers to individual's ability to discern the meaning of verbal and nonverbal messages. Second, the affective dimension (AD), which concerns motivation and attitudes relevant to intercultural communication. Aspects of this dimension include emotional states involved with willingness to accommodate others from a different cultural background. Third, the behavioral dimension (BD) which concerns how individuals interact in intercultural contexts. It deals with behavioral abilities to be flexible and resourceful in an intercultural interaction. Since the current study does not really concern finding out the ability of individuals to discern meaning from verbal and nonverbal messages, the cognitive dimension was not part of the construct. Instead, only the two dimensions of affect and behavior formed the concept of intercultural communication competence in this study.

Before individuals are consciously and consistently competent in their intercultural interactions, they need to acquire certain necessary conditions. In Spitzberg's (2000) model of intercultural communication competence, knowledge (awareness), motivation (feelings, intentions and needs), and skills (actual performance behavior) are paramount conditions that must exist. The model postulates that as communicative knowledge increases, so does communicative competence. Similarly, as communicative motivation increases, communicative competence increases. Finally, an increase in communicative skills has a positive impact on communication competence level. According to the model, lacking one of the above conditions, the likelihood of competent intercultural communication is significantly weakened.

2.2. Acculturation

Acculturation is the process of cultural and psychological change that follows intercultural contact (Berry, 2006). This entails that acculturation means learning to deal with a new cultural situation. It is taken as one of the common processes of intercultural competence (Kajiura, 2007). In acculturation, cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions are viewed as stages in increasing intercultural sensitivity to cultural difference (Hammer et al., 2003). This sensitivity, "the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences" (p. 422) is viewed as a central competence for intercultural communication. Other competences include openness, flexibility, self-esteem and confidence.

The process of acculturation is not uniform for all immigrants. Depending on their different backgrounds and other factors, people display different degrees of acculturation towards other cultures, leading to different preferences over which strategies to execute in the acculturation process. From the specific ethnocultural groups' point of view, as opposed to the larger society, four acculturation strategies of assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization have been identified (Berry, 2009). The four ways were derived based on the two main attitudes facing acculturating people: (a) a preference for maintaining one's culture and identity, in this study referred to as Retention of Original Culture (ROC) and, (b) a preference for having contact with and participating in the larger society, in

this study referred to as Acceptance of Chinese Culture (ACC). The first strategy is assimilation, which is defined as occurring when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures. The second is separation, defined as occurring when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture, and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with others. The other strategy is integration, which is defined when there is an interest in both maintaining one's original culture and in daily interactions with other groups; and finally, when there is little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss), and little interest in having relations with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination), marginalization is defined (Berry, 2009).

2.3. Factors Affecting Levels of ICC and Acculturation

There are a number of factors that influence foreign students' levels of ICC and acculturation. Major barriers to ICC and acculturation include ethnocentrism (the belief that one's culture is superior to another culture) and intercultural communication apprehension (the fear associated with real or anticipated communication with people from different groups, cultural or ethnic) (Dong, Day & Collaço, 2006; Neuliep, 2012). Both can impede an individual's willingness to communicate outside one's culture; people become less likely to attempt to engage in intercultural interactions. This is problematic, especially for international students, as these barriers limit their ability to quickly adapt to the host culture, and to approach and communicate with other students and advisors.

As postulated by Berry et al. (1987), the gap or degree of closeness between the original and new culture affects adaptation in the new culture. Closeness between these cultures enhances adjustment in the new culture, and sojourners experience fewer psychological problems and less acculturative stresses. Therefore, in this study, it was expected that those foreign students whose origin is close to China will have significantly higher levels of ICC and acculturation than those from distant origins.

Depending on various factors affecting the adaptation process, international students' communication competence would differ. In this study, demographic factors that influence sojourners' adjustment such as cultural origin, gender, education level (Zimmermann, 1995), and cross-cultural and situational factors such as length of residence and cultural distance between the sojourners' culture of origin and the host culture (Berry, 1987) were expected to have an impact on their communication experience. Other possible factors would include students' different motivation towards their education in China: some might come to learn a skill for their future, some simply because they have been sent by the employer. All this would affect the degree to which they adapt to the environment.

Similarly, it was also expected that depending on the same factors, and the characteristics of individuals and cultures they come from, the process of acculturation would not be the same among individuals. Consequently, in this study, different students were expected to have different attitudes towards cultural maintenance and contact due to their different acculturation strategy preferences.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

A total of 302 international students at Central China Normal University participated in the study. The

university was chosen for its wide range of international students and the study sample consisted of students from different parts of the world: Asia, Australia, Europe, Africa and America. It also consisted of both undergraduate students and post-graduate students in their Masters and PhD programs, representing a wide age range. Table 1 summarises the demographic attributes of the participants of this study.

Table 1. A Summary of the Demographic Attributes of Respondents (n = 302).

Variable	Number	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	159	52.6
Female	143	47.4
<i>Education</i>		
Undergraduate	190	62.9
Postgraduate	112	37.1
<i>Length of Residence</i>		
Less than one year	157	52
1-2 years	62	20.5
More than 2 years(less than 5 years)	83	27.5
<i>Continent of Origin</i>		
Asia	147	48.7
Australia	5	1.7
Africa	111	36.8
Europe	5	1.7
America	34	11.3

3.2. Measures and Procedure

Two separate questionnaires were used to measure students' intercultural communication competence and acculturation. The questionnaires were in English but they were translated into French and Chinese for participants who could not understand English. Back translation by independent persons ensured that meanings of items were not lost during translation. Intercultural communication competence was assessed using an adapted version of a self-report instrument of ICC questionnaire (Arasaratnam, 2009). The instrument addressed two components of affective and behavioral dimensions (AD and BD respectively). AD was assessed by three items such as 'I feel that people from other cultures have many valuable things to teach me' and BD was measured by four items such as 'I usually look for opportunities to interact with people from other cultures'. Students responded to a total of 7 items; each item had a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*), and the scores were averaged to form the indices. In this new ICC instrument, other related variables of attitude towards other cultures, ethnocentrism, motivation and interaction involvement were included.

The acculturation attitudes were measured using an adapted scale from Zagefka and Brown (2002). Attitude towards *Retention of Original Culture* (ROC) was measured with three items such as 'I think it is important that my cultural group in China maintains its own way of living'. Another three items such as 'I think it is important that members of my cultural group also spend time with Chinese

after school' measured attitude towards contact, *Acceptance of Chinese Culture* (ACC). Each item had a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*), and the scores were averaged to form the indices. The two attitudes measured resulted into the four acculturation strategies of assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 2005).

Surveys assessing both constructs were stapled together to match each participant's data, and were given to the participants in their respective dormitory rooms and they were reminded of anonymity and confidentiality. Written approval to conduct the research was taken from the College of International Cultural Exchange (CICE) office and verbal consent was obtained from the participants themselves before they accepted to take part. Upon receiving the questionnaires, they were to indicate when the researchers would come to their rooms for collection. Participants completed the surveys in their dormitories.

3.3. Data Analysis

The current study's data analysis was done using IBM® SPSS® statistics version 20. Prior to actual analysis, the data was screened for the missing values, and study variables were tested for accuracy and normality. Following data screening, reliability analysis for the two instruments was done.

For gender and level of education variable differences, independent samples t-test was used ($p < 0.05$). To further test if there were significant differences on length of residence and continent of origin, one way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) coupled with Least Squared Deviations (LSD) was used ($p < 0.05$). To evaluate the relationships between ICC and acculturation variables, Pearson r correlation was used ($p < 0.05$).

Finally, to calculate the strategies of acculturation, strategy preference was determined by a midpoint scale split, following Alkhazraji et al.'s (1997) procedure. Participants who scored above the midpoint of the ACC scale were assigned to the group wanting contact; participants below the midpoint were assigned to the group not wanting contact. The same was done for the ROC scale; above the midpoint of the scale was for those in need of maintaining their culture while below the midpoint of the scale was for those not in need of retaining their original culture. The two dimensions were combined to derive overall strategy preference, according to Berry's (2005) taxonomy; thus the following procedure was used.

- If ACC > 3.0 & ROC < 3.0 = Assimilation
- If ACC > 3.0 & ROC > 3.0 = Integration
- If ACC < 3.0 & ROC > 3.0 = Separation
- If ACC < 3.0 & ROC < 3.0 = Marginalization

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Demographic Factors that Affect ICC and Acculturation

Demographic factors such as ethnicity of the immigrants, gender, education level and length of residence have all been identified as possible sources of variation in ICC and acculturation (Zimmermann, 1995). An investigation of ICC and acculturation taking into account such variables is important for a complete understanding of these students' experiences. To test if in the current sample, these differences existed,

statistical measures of t-test and one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were used.

4.1.1. Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity variations on intercultural communication competence and acculturation were tested using one-way MANOVA. The mean and standard deviations of AD and BD, and ACC and ROC components are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary Statistics of Cultural Diversity Variations on ICC (AD and BD) and on Acculturation (ROC and ACC)*

Continent	N	AD		ACC		ACC		ACC	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Asia	147	3.287	0.596	3.245	0.806	3.544	0.927	3.779	0.985
Africa	111	3.473	0.770	3.514	0.896	3.682	1.061	4.180	0.904
Australia	5	3.450	0.737	3.867	0.901	2.800	0.837	3.100	1.387
America	34	3.757	0.641	3.559	1.001	3.333	1.195	4.265	0.890
Europe	5	4.100	0.285	4.133	0.298	3.333	0.667	4.300	0.975
Overall Mean	302	3.425	0.687	3.404	0.873	3.555	1.011	3.978	0.976
<i>F</i> (4.297)		5.065		3.329		1.619		4.838	
<i>p</i>		0.001		0.013		0.169		0.001	
η^2		0.064		0.042		0.021		0.061	

*AD = Affective dimension, BD = Behavior dimension, ROC = Retention of original culture, ACC = Acceptance of Chinese culture, M = mean and SD = standard deviation F, *p* and η^2 are MANOVA statistics outcomes.

The analysis on intercultural communication competence indicates that there were significant variations among continents on AD (Table 2). The results show that Asia had a significantly lower level of AD than America and Europe. Africa was also reported to have significantly lower level of AD than Europe. There were no significant differences between other continents. Furthermore, the LSD results of the behavior dimension indicate that Asia had significantly lower level than Africa and Europe. Other comparisons on behavior dimension did not show any variations among other continents.

MANOVA analysis on acculturation shows that there were significant variations on ACC (Table 2). There were no observed variations on ROC for continent of origin. The LSD results indicate that Asia had a significantly lower ACC level than Africa and America. Australia also had a significantly lower level of ACC than Africa, America and Europe. There were no significant differences between other continents.

Cultural diversity results reveal that Asian students scored significantly lower than fellow international students from any other continents on both dimensions of ICC (AD and BD, $M = 3.287$ and $M = 3.245$ respectively) and on one dimension of acculturation (ACC, $M = 3.779$). Furthermore, European international students had high levels of both dimensions of ICC (AD and BD, $M = 4.100$ and $M = 4.133$ respectively) while American students scored significantly high on one dimension of

acculturation (ACC, $M = 4.265$). This outcome agrees with studies, though done elsewhere than in China, which compared Asian students' intercultural communication competence and acculturation with students from other regions. For instance, Gu et al. (2008) reported that Asian students in the U.S.A experienced more acculturative difficulties compared to their European counterparts. A research study conducted in New Zealand by Berno and Ward (2004) found that lack of interactions between locals and Asian international students, and problems such as social isolation and depression came about due to the inability of Asian students to integrate into their host society. Exploring acculturation of Taiwanese international students in Australia also revealed that there was a lack or a very low level of interaction between them and local students (Sullivan, 2008).

Surprisingly, most of the available literature discusses the acculturation of Asian international students outside Asia. This study, however, departs from the usual; it attempted to include Asian students' ICC and acculturation in one of the countries within Asia, China. Interestingly, results are consistent with previous studies despite being in Asia. Another factor that makes these findings exciting is the fact that the cultural distance from China to their respective countries is relatively closer than to those other countries from Africa, America and Australia; yet, they exhibit the lowest scores on ICC and acculturation. According to Berry's (1987) claim that closeness between the original and new culture facilitates adaptation in the new culture, Asian students were expected to demonstrate higher levels of ICC and acculturation than other students from far-away countries. This has not been the case in the current study with Asian international students in China.

One possible explanation for these results is that since their countries are close to China as compared to those for other continents, Asian students come in large numbers. As a result, they create their own circles to form their own sub-cultures and find little or no reason to merge themselves with other foreign students. This is unlike the Europeans and Australians, for example, who as evidenced by their sample sizes, are in very small numbers. They would find any possible reason to interact with students from other countries due to their being in minority.

As suggested by previous studies, these findings might also be due to the most common intercultural communication barrier, ethnocentrism, the belief that one's culture is superior to another culture (Dong, Day & Collaço, 2006; Neuliep, 2012). Due to their being in large numbers from one country, it can be concluded that Asian international students perceive being in their own group as very important, and interacting with other cultures as being of less value. In addition, Dong, Day and Collaço (2006) report that ethnocentrism is also highly related to individuals' identity formation. Cultural identity refers to a set of beliefs and attitudes that people have about them in relation to their culture group membership (Berry et al., 2002). From the current findings, it can also be argued that Asian students might have a high sense of identity. For example, Vietnamese have a vigorous sense of ethnic identity, cultural preservation, and national independence (Pham, 1994). Tran (2009) also found similar traits among Vietnamese students in Australia. Vietnamese form a large group of Asians at Central China Normal University, which might influence ICC and acculturation outcomes among Asian participants.

Other alternative explanations for their lower interaction level with other cultures would be communicative apprehension, and their sense of cultural mistrust towards other internationals and local people (Tran, 2009; Neuliep, 2012). In his study, Tran (2009) discovered that in most Asian international students in Australia, the fear associated with intercultural communication and mistrust appeared to be significant factors associated with their acculturation dilemma.

For students to achieve effective intercultural communication and acculturation, therefore, it is important to promote intercultural communication sensitivity and multiculturalism at schools and multicultural education centers like Central China Normal University. Additionally, it would be of great importance to consider the number of students from one country to a university. A relatively balanced intake from countries would enhance ICC and acculturation among students.

4.1.2. Gender Differences

To test if there were significant gender differences on all the four study variables, independent samples *t*-test was used. Regarding intercultural communication competence, there were significant gender differences on AD. As compared with male students, female students reported higher levels of AD competence; females ($M = 3.507, SD = 0.656$); males ($M = 3.350, SD = 0.708$); $t(203) = 1.984, p < 0.05$. The analysis, however, shows no significant gender differences for BD. Similarly, on acculturation, the analysis shows no significant gender differences for both variables of ACC and ROC ($p < 0.05$).

Social interaction studies reveal that gender differences exist in how males and females communicate. Consistent with current results, basically, women desire more emotional sharing and affection than men, and as a result, they tend to be more cooperative and affectionate when communicating (Floyd & Morman, 1998). This suggests that due to their being more affectionate, female international students seem to be more ready to accommodate and tolerate some intercultural challenges and ambiguities that come about due to their interaction with people from other cultures than their male counterparts. The results also indicate that female students seem more motivated towards intercultural communication. On behavioral abilities of being flexible and resourceful in an intercultural interaction, both male and female international students possess same attitudes, as there were no significant gender differences. Similarly, the level of their acculturation on both attitudes towards contact and retention of culture is the same.

4.1.3. Education Level and Length of Residence

In this study, demographic factors of education level and length of residence as possible sources of variation in ICC and acculturation were also tested. Participants' education level was assessed using *t*-test, and the results show that there were no significant differences between undergraduate and postgraduate students on both variables of ICC and acculturation ($p > 0.05$). One-way ANOVA was used to assess participants' length of residence on both variables of ICC and acculturation. Just like on level of education, there were no significant differences among students who have only stayed for less than a year, those who have stayed for one to two years and those who have stayed for more than two years and less than five years ($p > 0.05$).

Remarkably, how long students had stayed in China was not related to their perception of ICC and acculturation. Normally, the maximum length of stay for almost all students is not more than five years. Statistically, despite their length of residence, all international students display their ICC and acculturation perception in the same way. Further, no significant differences were found between undergraduate and postgraduate students on any measured construct. The outcomes concur with Zimmermann's (1995) findings on international students in the U.S.A. Cultural shock theories, however, explain that after six months or so, an individual becomes more motivated to adapt to the new

culture (Zhou et al., 2008), and this does not show in this study. Ability to adapt has not been found to change over time. Furthermore, some previous studies (Yasuda & Duan, 2002; Berry et al., 2006; Yu & Wang, 2011), have identified international students' education level and length of residence as possible sources of variation in their ICC and acculturation.

A possible explanation for the current findings is that since Chinese culture is impacted greatly by Confucianism, which emphasizes that the ultimate goal of human behavior is to achieve 'harmony' (Yu & Wang, 2011), Chinese natives pursue a conflict-free and group-oriented system of human relationships. In such an environment, it might not only require a post-graduate student or the one who has long stayed to acculturate effectively. It is possible for a new student, whether with higher or lower education level to adapt to the society, hence no significant differences were found on variables of educational level and length of residence, as long as he/she is ready to tolerate the experienced intercultural challenges.

4.2. Relationships between ICC and Acculturation

Pearson *r* correlation was used to test if there were relationships between and among two dimensions of acculturation (attitudes towards ACC and attitudes towards ROC) and two dimensions of intercultural communication competence (AD and BD). Inspection of the means across the study variables reveals that ACC had the highest mean score ($M = 3.978$, $SD = 0.976$). This suggests that participating students had higher attitudes towards cultural contact than maintenance. On the intercultural communication competence dimensions, mean scores are almost at the same level, although with the BD at the lower end ($M = 3.404$, $SD = 0.873$).

Accordingly, there were positive relationships between the two variables within the same construct. ACC and ROC positively correlated to each other ($r = 0.210$, $p \leq 0.01$), and AD and BD positively correlated to each other ($r = 0.484$, $p \leq 0.01$). There were positive relationships between ACC and the two ICC components of AD ($r = 0.168$, $p \leq 0.01$) and BD ($r = 0.176$, $p \leq 0.01$). However, there was no relationship between ROC and the two components of ICC ($p \leq 0.01$).

The analysis suggests that students who perceived contact with other students from other cultures to be an effective attitude towards their stay as sojourners, were able to emotionally relate to others and feel a sense of affiliation with people from other cultures. Affective dimension of communicative competence entails motivation for the communication, relevant attitude towards communication, readiness to accommodate and tolerate some intercultural challenges that arise due to the interaction (Zimmermann, 1995). The results support Spitzberg's (2000) model of intercultural communication competence which stipulates that as communicative motivation increases, communicative competence increases. The findings further show that those students who preferred having contact with others were also flexible to communicate and intentionally seek for interaction and friendship with people from other cultures (interaction involvement). These results are in line with a study by Penbek et al. (2009) which reveals that students' respect for different cultures improves with the level of engagement in international interactions. As the engagement levels improve, students may contribute to less psychological and sociocultural problems.

The positive relationship between ACC and the two ICC components of AD and BD suggests that a preference for having contact with and participating in the new society by international students leads to a better and successful communication among international students and the host citizens.

Eventually, such students adapt successfully into new cultures. The insignificant relationship between ROC and the two ICC dimensions, also partly confirms Kim's (1991) model. It is unlikely for someone who prefers maintaining one's culture and identity to have a positive affective and behavioral attitude towards intercultural communication. Due to lack of published studies on the relationship between components of ICC and acculturation among immigrants, it was not possible to compare these results with literature values. This also serves as a departure from other studies which have only concentrated on ICC and acculturation as independent measures of successful adaptation into the new culture.

4.3. Preferred Acculturation Strategies

One of the additional objectives of the survey was to find out the predominant acculturation strategies among international students in China. Using a midpoint scale split on the two dimensions of acculturation (ROC and ACC), students' scores were categorised into the four preferred acculturation strategies of assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization. Figure 1 displays the distribution of acculturation strategy preferences for the international students as a result of the procedure.

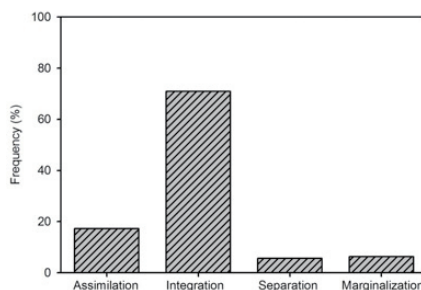


Figure 1. An Illustration of the Frequency (%) of Acculturation Strategies Preferences amongst International Students Studied

As shown in Figure 1, most international students preferred integration (71%) for their acculturation strategy. The second preferred strategy, though relatively low, was assimilation (17%). Accordingly, it can be deduced that strategies that imply contact (i.e., integration and to some extent, assimilation) enjoyed considerable support among international students. However, marginalization (7%) and separation (6%) were the least preferred strategies among the participants. This is consistent with other studies in this field; a number of empirical studies carried out on different cultural groups confirm that integration is the only predominant acculturation strategy preferred by overseas students (Alkhazraji et al., 1997; Swaidan et al., 2001; Zagefka & Brown, 2002). For instance, in a survey conducted by ICSEY among immigrant youths in 13 countries, the results indicate that integration is the most preferred strategy (Berry et al., 2006). In another study investigating Vietnamese international students in Australia, the analyses of data revealed that the most preferred acculturation strategy was integration (Tran, 2009). Just like other studies, finding out preferences in acculturation strategies among Chinese students in Germany, Yu and Wang (2011) also discovered that the most dominant strategy was integration, followed by assimilation.

The results on acculturation strategies seem to have an element of discrepancy. On one hand, it has been argued that due to their closeness to China, Asian students come in their large numbers to the University, and they might also largely be part of the integration preference (71%). On the other hand,

it has also been discovered that Asian students (who are also part of the 71%) have less motivation to adapt to the Chinese culture than other foreign students. A possible explanation to this incongruity could be that as Tran (2009) observed, attitude (perceptions) and actual behaviors of the participants in ICC and acculturation would not correspond sometimes. Just as it has been observed in this study, most Vietnamese Asian international students in Australia preferred 'integration' whilst their actual acculturation behaviors often reflected a 'separation' (Tran, 2009). It would also happen, in this study, that most Asians did not indicate what their real behavior would reflect, hence the discrepancy.

The results show that in as much as students want to maintain their original cultures, they also want to accept other cultures and in this case, predominantly, Chinese culture. There may be several reasons why their attitude towards contact is mostly preferred. The first would be attempts to improve their Chinese language. In China, most undergraduate and some postgraduate programs are taught in Chinese, a language which is not familiar to most international students. Therefore, for such international students to survive academically, they have to interact a lot with the natives in order to practice their Chinese. Especially for most undergraduate international students, Chinese language remains a challenge despite their intensive learning during their first year. Since it is the medium of instructions for most classes, most foreign students interact with native students for academic support. Natives help international students understand course content where they do have problems with language. Other possible reasons for their integration preferences would include enriching themselves with cross-cultural knowledge.

5. Limitations and Directions for Future Studies

One major limitation of the present study is the participants. Europe and Australia were under represented, that is, 1.7% for each region, which would not bring in a true representation of the overall students from these regions studying in China. This was due to the few available participants at the University. Future studies should widen their sample areas to include more universities so that their participants would be represented in some regions with relatively fewer students.

The second limitation is that the study lacks longitudinal data. Intercultural communication competence and acculturation are processes which take place over time and are influenced by age, experience and sometimes environment. The development and changes in the process of ICC and acculturation would better be understood by studying the same participants for a longer period of time (Berry, 2006). This needs more time and resources for the researchers. Unfortunately, time did not allow the researchers to collect longitudinal data in this current study.

The other limitation is that the study only concentrated on participants' perceptions towards communication competence and acculturation without considering their actual experience (which could be assessed through interviews and focus group discussions). As noted by Tran (2009), attitude (perceptions) and actual behaviors of the participants in ICC and acculturation would not correspond sometimes. It is, therefore, paramount to consider their actual experiences in order to establish a concrete level of integration and adaptation to the new culture.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This current research was an attempt to investigate international students' intercultural communication experiences and acculturation. Despite the limitations of the study, responses to the questionnaire reveal

that compared to other international students, Asian international students' intercultural communication and acculturation skills seem to lag behind their fellow international students from other regions worldwide. Considering cultural distance, Asian international students, in China, would have been expected to show better motivation to adapt than other students from far regions. Asian international students in China need to be encouraged to be open to the active interaction modes and be willing to even initiate conversations. They need to venture out of their own circles and submerge themselves with other students and the host community through various activities to acquire the communication competence needed for their being on the campus. They should be flexible and more willing to interact with other people outside their own communities and enjoy the benefit of being at a multicultural university.

Another outstanding outcome of this study is that length of stay and education levels have not been found to be factors that influence foreign students' levels of ICC and acculturation. An encouragement to multicultural interaction to all students without considering the length of stay and their level of education would not only enhance their cultural experiences but also their sense of oneness, as a university family. Gender, however, has been discovered to be the only demographic factor that is sufficient to facilitate adaptation. In this regard, male students should be encouraged to increase their motivation towards intercultural interactions by accommodating and tolerating some intercultural challenges.

Furthermore, it has been found that students who expressed more need for interaction with other students from other cultures showed more affection towards communication and exhibited relevant perceived behavior towards such communication. The findings provide more opportunity to universities in central China to have university offices like Central China Normal University's Centre for International Cultural Exchange (CICE) which should provide outreach programs to international students to help them gain greater familiarity with the customs, behaviors and other cultural aspects of living in China. Such additional exposure, to people who are already willing to interact, may assist them to feel more connected to the host culture. Additionally, it would also help them improve their Chinese language as it is an essential tool for their living, and more importantly, for their academic pursuits.

The study also reveals that the most preferred acculturation strategy is integration. International students come to China with diverse cultural backgrounds and different languages. Cultural uncertainty and language barrier can cause a lot of cultural stress and anxiety among international students, resulting in poor academic performance. Therefore, it is paramount that international students interact with natives. Universities therefore should develop programs and organizational structures which facilitate interaction between international students and the host community at large.

To sum up, a number of studies confirm that adjusting to new environments improves international students' life psychologically, academically and socially (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Thomson et al., 2006; Pedersen et al., 2011; Desa et al., 2012). As noted by Zimmermann (1995), central to the adaptation process for international students is communication. Therefore, a better understanding of intercultural communication competence and acculturation, and of the factors that help facilitate adjustment to new cultures are essential in assisting universities to come up with better programs for international students. Furthermore, out-reach programs that enable international students interact with the natives not only help the international students, but also the host community in gaining better intercultural communication competence and appropriate acculturation.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire (English)

Intercultural Communication Questionnaire

Effective intercultural communication has various benefits and international students who successfully engage in intercultural interactions tend to experience these gains academically and socially. In this survey, we are trying to find out how different students perceive intercultural communication. The results of the study will help international students become competent intercultural communicators.

In this questionnaire, there are no right or wrong answers - we are simply trying to find out, from your personal opinion, how you feel and experience this multicultural setting. This questionnaire is anonymous, so please be honest in your responses. Participation in this survey should take about 15 to 20 minutes of your time.

Background Information

1. Tick on your education in China	Undergraduate <input type="checkbox"/>	Postgraduate <input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Tick on your gender	Male <input type="checkbox"/>	Female <input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Do you often access local media? (Newspapers, TV, magazines)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Do you like (enjoy) Chinese food	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
5. For how long have you been in China	less than a year <input type="checkbox"/>	1 to 2 years <input type="checkbox"/>	more than 2 years <input type="checkbox"/>
6. Indicate your country of origin			
7. What language do you use:			
a) For your study (your major)			
b) When you interact with natives			

Read each item carefully and RESPOND USING THE SCALE PROVIDED. Please indicate how you agree or disagree to the following statements; record your opinion circling the appropriate number.

Acculturation Strategies					
<i>Strongly agree</i>					<i>Strongly disagree</i>
1	2	3	4	5	
1. I think it is important that my cultural group in China maintains its own culture					1 2 3 4 5
2. I think my cultural group in China should maintain its own religion, language and clothing					1 2 3 4 5
3. I think it is important that my cultural group in China maintains its own way of living					1 2 3 4 5
4. I think it is important that members of my cultural group have Chinese friends					1 2 3 4 5
5. I think it is important that members of my cultural group also spend time with Chinese after school					1 2 3 4 5
6. I think that members of my cultural group should stick to their own kind					1 2 3 4 5
Communication Competence					
<i>Strongly agree</i>					<i>Strongly disagree</i>
1	2	3	4	5	
7. I often find it difficult to differentiate between similar cultures (Ex: Asians, Europeans, Africans, etc.)					1 2 3 4 5
8. I feel that people from other cultures have many valuable things to teach me					1 2 3 4 5
9. Most of my friends are from other cultures.					1 2 3 4 5
10. I feel more comfortable with people from my own culture than with people from other cultures.					1 2 3 4 5
11. I find it easier to categorize people based on their cultural identity than their personality.					1 2 3 4 5
12. I often notice similarities in personality between people who belong to completely different cultures.					1 2 3 4 5
13. I usually feel closer to people who are from my own culture because I can relate to them better.					1 2 3 4 5
14. Most of my friends are from my own culture.					1 2 3 4 5
15. I usually look for opportunities to interact with people from other cultures.					1 2 3 4 5
16. I feel more comfortable with people who are open to people from other cultures than people who are not.					1 2 3 4 5

If you need this research findings' feedback inform us on the email below

fishanin@wira@gmail.com

Thank you for your participation

Appendix 2. Questionnaire (French)

Questionnaire Interculturel De Communication

La communication interculturelle efficace a de divers avantages et les étudiants internationaux qui s'engagent avec succès dans ces interactions interculturelles sont amenés à en bénéficier sur le plan scolaire et social. Dans cet aperçu, nous essayons de découvrir comment les différents étudiants perçoivent la communication interculturelle. Le résultat de l'étude aidera les étudiants internationaux à devenir les communicateurs interculturels compétents.

En ce questionnaire, il n'y a aucune bonne ou fausse réponse - nous essayons simplement de découvrir votre avis personnel, comment vous vivez et éprouvez cet échange multiculturel. Ce questionnaire est anonyme, donc soyez honnête dans vos réponses. La participation à cet aperçu devrait prendre environ 15 à 20 minutes de votre temps.

Informations

1. Niveau d'études en Chine	licence <input type="checkbox"/>	Master/Phd <input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Votre genre	Mâle <input type="checkbox"/>	Femelle <input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Avez-vous souvent accès aux médias locaux ? (journaux, TV, magazines)	Oui <input type="checkbox"/>	Non <input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Vous aimez (apprécier) la nourriture chinoise	Oui <input type="checkbox"/>	Non <input type="checkbox"/>	
5. Depuis combien de temps êtes-vous en Chine	moins d'une année <input type="checkbox"/>	1 à 2 année <input type="checkbox"/>	plus de 2 ans <input type="checkbox"/>
6. Indiquer votre pays d'origine			
7. Quelle langue utilisez-vous :			
a) Pour vos études (votre spécialité)			
b) Quand vous échangez avec les chinois			

Lire chaque article soigneusement et RÉPONDRE EN UTILISANT LA BALANCE FOURNIE. Veuillez indiquer votre accord ou désaccord par rapports aux avis suivants ; enregistrer votre avis en entourant le chiffre approprié.

	Strategies d'acculturation				
	<i>Fortement d'accord</i>		<i>Fortement en désaccord</i>		
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Je pense qu'il est important que ma communauté en Chine maintienne sa propre culture	1	2	3	4	5
2. Je pense que les membres de ma communauté en Chine devraient maintenir sa propre religion, langue et habillement	1	2	3	4	5

3. Je pense qu'il est important que ma communauté en Chine maintienne sa propre manière de vivre	1	2	3	4	5
4. Je pense qu'il est important que les membres de mon groupe culturel aient des amis chinois	1	2	3	4	5
5. Je pense qu'il est important que les membres de ma communauté passent également du temps avec le Chinois après l'école	1	2	3	4	5
6. Je pense que les membres de mon groupe culturel devraient s'en tenir à leur propre culture	1	2	3	4	5
Compétence De Communication					
<i>Fortement d'accord</i>			<i>Fortement en désaccord</i>		
1	2	3	4	5	
7. Je trouve souvent difficile de différencier les cultures semblables (ex : Asiatiques, Européens, Africains, etc...)	1	2	3	4	5
8. J'estime que les gens d'autres cultures ont beaucoup de choses valables pour m'enseigner	1	2	3	4	5
9. La plupart de mes amis sont de cultures différentes.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Je me sens plus confortable avec des personnes de ma propre culture qu'avec des personnes d'autres cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Je trouve plus facile de classer les personnes en se basant sur leur identité culturelle que leur personnalité.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Je note souvent des similitudes de personnalité entre les personnes qui appartiennent à des cultures complètement différentes.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Je me sens habituellement plus près des personnes qui sont de ma propre culture parce que je peux échanger facilement avec eux.	1	2	3	4	5
14. La plupart de mes amis sont de ma propre culture.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Je recherche habituellement des occasions d'échanger avec des personnes d'autres cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Je me sens plus confortable avec les personnes d'autres cultures qui sont ouvertes que les personnes qui ne le sont pas.	1	2	3	4	5

Si tu as besoin des résultats de recherches nous en informer sur l'email ci-dessous

fishaningwira@gmail.com

Merci de votre participation

Appendix 3. Questionnaire (Chinese)

跨文化交际问卷

有效的跨文化交际能力对留学生的学习和社交均有益处。本问卷旨在调查不同学生对跨文化交际的理解，问卷结果可以帮助留学生提高跨文化交际能力。

本问卷的选项没有对错之分，仅尝试了解您对一些跨文化环境的理解和感受。

本问卷完全匿名，请诚实填写。完成问卷仅需 15 到 20 分钟。

背景信息

1. 您在中国的教育水平	本科 <input type="checkbox"/>	研究生 <input type="checkbox"/>	
2. 您的性别	男 <input type="checkbox"/>	女 <input type="checkbox"/>	
3. 您是否经常浏览本地媒体? (如报纸、电视、杂志等)	是 <input type="checkbox"/>	否 <input type="checkbox"/>	
4. 你喜欢中国食物吗?	是 <input type="checkbox"/>	否 <input type="checkbox"/>	
5. 你来中国多久了?	1年以内 <input type="checkbox"/>	1-2年 <input type="checkbox"/>	2年以上 <input type="checkbox"/>
6. 你的国家是			
7. 你使用什么语言?			
a) 学习时			
b) 与当地人交往时			

请认真阅读下列问题，然后根据你的感受在问卷中选择合适的选项。

跨文化适应策略	
非常同意 1	非常不同意 5
2	3
4	
1. 我认为我所属的文化群体在中国保持自己文化的独立性很重要。	1 2 3 4 5
2. 我认为我所属的文化群体在中国应当保持自己的宗教、语言和服饰。	1 2 3 4 5
3. 我认为我所属的文化群体在中国保持自己的生活方式很重要。	1 2 3 4 5
4. 我认为我所属的文化群体的成员拥有中国朋友很重要。	1 2 3 4 5
5. 我认为我所属的文化群体的成员在课余时间与中国交往很重要。	1 2 3 4 5
6. 我认为我所属的文化群体的成员应当坚持自己的文化特性。	1 2 3 4 5

交际能力					
非常同意					非常不同意
1	2	3	4		5
7. 我发现区分相似的文化很困难（如亚洲、欧洲、非洲等）。	1	2	3	4	5
8. 我认为来自其他文化群体的人身上有很多值得我学习的东西。	1	2	3	4	5
9. 我的大多数朋友来自不同的文化群体。	1	2	3	4	5
10. 我觉得跟我自己文化群体的人待在一起比跟其他文化群体的人待在一起更舒服。	1	2	3	4	5
11. 我认为根据文化比根据个性更容易区分不同的人。	1	2	3	4	5
12. 我经常发现不同文化背景的人有着相似的个性	1	2	3	4	5
13. 我跟我同一文化背景的成员更加亲密，因为我们的联系更密切。	1	2	3	4	5
14. 我的大多数朋友都跟我有相同的文化背景、	1	2	3	4	5
15. 我经常尝试着与不同文化背景的人交往。	1	2	3	4	5
16. 我更喜欢那些对其他文化很开放的人。	1	2	3	4	5

如果您对本次研究的结果有兴趣，请发送邮件至：

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感谢您的合作！