Re-examining Intercultural Competence:
Three Case Studies in Chinese Higher Education

The Dissertation Presented

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Abstract

The present research aims to re-examine intercultural competence within the context of Chinese higher education. Intercultural competence is regarded as a critical skill in 21st-century China due to the increasingly globalized world, which facilitates interactions among individuals from different countries shaped by different values, beliefs, and experiences. China commenced research on intercultural competence in 2000, with theoretical frameworks originating from abroad. Predominant understandings of intercultural competence in China emphasize the individual, neglecting external factors and not considering these as integral to the role individuals play. Additionally, this perspective overlooks the social action aspects of communication and the outcomes of co-constructed (inter)actions, which are foundational to our comprehension of intercultural competence. Furthermore, intercultural competence is perceived as a tangible reality, encompassing actual experiences of cultural interactions and engagements encountered by individuals from various countries. Interpreting these so-called realities, knowledge, and culture through a static, fixed perspective without recognizing the necessity for interpretation and examination leads to stereotyping and biases. Moreover, the educational system in China presents intercultural knowledge as natural and neutral. However, serving China's strategic policies inherently includes political purposes and ideological elements, resulting in contradictions and conflicts. These contradictions and conflicts are primary sources of the concept's dilemma, confining discussions of intercultural competence in China to the seemingly neutral domains of language and individual skills.

To address these issues encountered by the concept of intercultural competence, I have abandoned the traditional individual-centered approach, instead conceptualizing intercultural competence as a network. I adopted the Actor-Network Theory (ANT), a theoretical framework that provides a unique perspective on intercultural competence. ANT considers and observes all participating actors within an integrated system, including human and non-human elements. It disrupts conventional thinking by encompassing human and non-human actors, prompting a re-examination of intercultural competence. This

approach shifts the focus from understanding intercultural competence as an individual-centric concept to examining the relational network and identifying which actors have the potential to act. By moving away the notion that intercultural competence is solely an individual's responsibility, we can understand actors as enacted by the relational network. Their characteristics are determined entirely by the connections within the network; that is, actors derive their capacities and potentials through their relationships with others. This approach prompts us to consider how actors in a network relate to one another.

Practically, I conducted three case studies employing the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) method to illustrate this perspective, focusing on three distinct aspects: educational leadership, teaching practice, and social media outside the classroom. These case studies demonstrate the construction process of intercultural competence in Chinese higher education. Through these examples, I aim to elucidate how the concept is constructed and its relevance to the Chinese context. By this approach, I aim to reveal the political nature of intercultural competence in Chinese higher education and propose that culture is not predetermined but constructed through the connections and associations within a network. It consists of patterned networks of heterogeneous materials composed of people, machines, animals, texts, architecture, symbolic materials, and more. It is an ongoing negotiation, translation, and alignment of interests among different actors rather than a static entity. And it should be the start of rethinking intercultural competence.

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Introduction

Higher education in China refers to education beyond the secondary level, typically at universities, colleges, and other post-secondary institutions. Universities are integral components of higher education and serve as primary institutions for disseminating knowledge. In the context of my research, the cultivation of intercultural competence predominantly occurs within the university setting.[1]

The restructuring of higher education after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 was primarily influenced by the Soviet model.[2] Characterized by centrally-planned mechanisms, such as governments allocating higher education resources, appointing university leaders, assigning graduates jobs, and deciding enrolment numbers for individual institutions (Cai, 2004, p. 158). The emphasis was on regrouping and realigning higher educational institutions and faculties along specialization lines (Cai, 2007, p. 8). The system of higher education had been seriously destroyed by the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). During the early stages, the higher education system was closing down. Since the late 1970s, with the introduction of the opening-up policy, China has launched a series of reforms, especially in the economic sphere. Over time, the country has been gradually transformed from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one. The reforms in Chinese higher education since the 1980s have witnessed a movement away from the Soviet model toward American patterns.[3] (Yang, 2000, p. 328).

Applying international experience as a source of expertise is expected to offer a shortcut for China to advance its higher education system. However, such an effort also causes various problems confronting Chinese higher education, such as tensions

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[1] Due to historical reasons, China's education system varies across its regions, including Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. The higher education institutions referenced in this study primarily pertain to the higher education system and universities in Mainland China.

[2] Soviet higher education represented an unusual organizational construction with an umbilical connection to the communist party ideology and Soviet autocracy. It emphasized state control and central planning and focused on providing education to serve the needs of the state and industry. Admission to higher education institutions was often based on academic merit and political loyalty.

[3] American higher education is an optional stage of formal learning following secondary education. It emphasizes autonomy and diversity and prioritizes individual choice and freedom in education. It features a decentralized system with a wide range of institutions offering diverse programs and curricula. Funding comes from a variety of sources, including government subsidies, tuition fees, donations, and endowments. Admission is typically based on a combination of academic achievement, extracurricular activities, personal essays, and sometimes standardized test scores.

between socialist values and Western values, weak creativity, and global market competition (Cai, 2004, p. 165). Similarly, Xu (2005) explained that the dilemma in Chinese higher education reforms is how to reconcile the market mechanism as well as decentralization learned from the West and the Chinese institution focusing on hierarchy and centralization.

The intercultural competence theories in China predominantly incorporate and utilize vital theoretical concepts from European and American scholars, including theorists such as Deardorff, Bryam, and Bennett. In the dominating theories, the mainstream idea of intercultural competence is mainly described as the ability to communicate and interact across different cultures, emphasizing individual language proficiency and attitudes. For example, Deardorff (2006) defines it as the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills, and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions. Byram (1997) underscores the pivotal role of linguistic competence in this framework and believes intercultural competence encompasses knowledge of others, knowledge of self, skills to interpret and relate, skills to discover and interact, valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. According to Leung and Tan (2014), intercultural competence is the ability to function effectively across cultures, to think and act appropriately, and to communicate and work with people from different cultural backgrounds – at home or abroad. Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) understood intercultural competence as thinking and acting in interculturally appropriate ways. These theories and perspectives have profoundly influenced the cognition of intercultural competence in China. They may align well with the modern knowledge required for China's modernization process, such as citizenship, cultural diversity, living in harmony with different communities, etc., but relatively escape from the political debates by focusing on individual capabilities.

It can be observed that the influencing theories of understanding intercultural competence focus primarily on the individual, neglecting factors beyond the

individual and not considering them as essential to play roles as individuals. Moreover, intercultural competence is seen as a reality, as actual experiences of cultural interactions and engagements individuals encounter from different cultural backgrounds. For instance, when a Chinese and an American meet, it is often perceived as a collision and exchange of Chinese and American cultures, as if both sides already possess fixed cultures. Similarly, when learning a language like French, a student might express a desire to learn about French culture. However, people who speak French and the places associated with the language are not exclusively French or located solely in France.

Such perspectives indicate a relatively static cultural cognition, wherein culture is perceived as pre-existing and fixed entities, and intercultural interactions are seen as exchanges between these established cultures. According to Hall (1959, p. 169), culture is communication, and communication is culture. From this perspective, intercultural communication does not result from a meeting of individuals carrying pre-existing cultures since cultural diversity can only be produced in communication (Hall, 1992, p. 281). Thus, the problem is not understanding what the cultures that meet each other look like but rather how cultural interaction is constructed in communication.

However, educational practices often treat culture as a complete fact and view intercultural(跨文化)as the result of encounters between individuals carrying pre-existing cultures. Mainstream theories of intercultural competence also treat cultural exchange as a natural reality, considering it an outcome of cumulative social developments by humans. As a result, the education of intercultural competence conveys the knowledge that culture is a practice, a human practice, facilitated through communication among individuals by using different languages, and the culture portrayed here is depicted as a static completion. At the same time, it portrays the participants in a social event as individuals who will follow specific cultural orientations with their values based on their own group's provenience. Moreover, it

follows that communication is understood as an intercultural fact in which participants will act by positioning themselves as members of specific cultural groups (Baraldi, 2015, p. 52).

Such knowledge of intercultural competence is imparted and still imparted through education within universities. In the process, people pay more attention to the most direct teaching-learning relationship between teachers and students while overlooking the broader influencing factors within the educational system. For example, establishing and maintaining universities involve various roles, including the state, the Party, the government, policies, funding, policies, technologies, leadership, teachers, students, etc. Universities are spaces for knowledge provision, but there is often a lack of awareness or neglect of the mechanism by which universities are also considered ideological institutions of the state. They are essential means for disseminating the ideological stance of the ruling class. Universities dictate terms and even shape the actualities of knowledge and action that constitute acceptable educational competence and performance. However the university-represented educational system often excludes political factors in shaping the knowledge of intercultural competence and practical actions, attempting to ignore how reality is formed/produced.

China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 symbolically represents China's engagement in global competition and a new era of modernization, dramatically influencing and accelerating the development of the Chinese higher education system. The study of intercultural competence in China also began during this period. China just started research related to the topic of intercultural competence in a real sense since 2000, the background of its emergence already foreshadowed its political nature.

Furthermore, the theories of intercultural competence in China originated from abroad. It attempts to borrow those knowledge and concepts to package its modern facade, accelerating the process of global modernization and response to entering global

competition. The educational system shapes intercultural knowledge as natural and neutral. However, as part of serving China's strategic policies, it cannot escape its political purposes and ideological elements. It is contradictory and conflicting. Contradiction and conflict are the primary origins of the concept's dilemma. This leads to discussing intercultural competence in China, staying within the seemingly neutral realm of language and individual skills. On the other hand, facing the discontent of globalization, the challenges of globalizing economic, security, ecological, and cultural interdependencies, the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts between countries and regions, and the hot wars have removed the intercultural veil over some sections of society and revealed prevalent forms of injustice, xenophobia, and racism, etc. These crises have demonstrated that the cultivation of intercultural competence over the past decades has failed to help us meet new and unprecedented challenges.

Therefore, intercultural competence failed to be understood deeply and failed to help us meet new and unprecedented challenges in practice, with greater contextual and political aspects being overlooked. To better understand intercultural competence, we need to think outside the traditional box (such as an individual-centered approach) and start by observing how it is generated and constructed. It is essential to explore approaches incorporating a more comprehensive range of elements into the analysis, such as actor-network theory (ANT), developed by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law. ANT disrupts conventional thinking by encompassing human and non-human actors, prompting a re-examination of intercultural competence. It encourages us not only to focus on human actors but also to consider non-human actors; it also challenges traditional dichotomies and binary distinctions, providing an alternative perspective on the relationships between actors and actants. ANT analysis maps networks of actors/actants, that is, not simply expanding our perspective on who or what is acting but also considering how those heterogeneous actants form part of a network.

Thus, my present study examines intercultural competence in the Chinese context by exploring its education in Chinese higher education, mainly in universities. It aims to illustrate how intercultural competence is constructed within the heterogeneous elements of Chinese higher education, utilizing Actor-Network Theory to analyze information acquired through observation and investigation. Abandoning the traditional individual-centered approach, the construction of intercultural competence is viewed as a network. Three case studies will be conducted, focusing on the three different aspects of educational leadership, teaching practice, and social media outside the classroom to demonstrate the construction process.

The first case study delves into observing how intercultural competence is mapped in universities through educational leadership, unfolding continuously with the practices of different roles such as government, Party, university, leaders, etc. In tracing the process of translation, including the four moments[4]: problematization, interessement[5], enrolment, and mobilization, I found the development of intercultural competence is the result of negotiations among national policies, university leaders, business partners, teachers, students, activities and other stakeholders.

In the second case study, I investigated classroom teaching and how knowledge about intercultural competence is solidified as natural knowledge through teaching practice. I found that the education of intercultural competence is achieved through "knowledge", which is blackboxed. The teacher's classroom teaching is likened to a laboratory of knowledge production and transmission. It is a network of heterogeneous actors, including the curriculum, teacher performances, course documents, textbooks, moments of classroom interaction, and classroom equipment, which change mutual translations.

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[4] The four moments are raised by Michel Callon in *Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay.*
5 From Michel Callon's explanation, it originally refers to a series of processes by which the researchers sought to lock the other actors into the roles that had been proposed for them in that program.

In the third case study, I explored the connections between humans and non-humans through the material practice of social media outside the classroom. Human and non-human actors (including social media) are part of networks that collectively produce "knowledge" of culture and reshape an intercultural reality. Social media is viewed as a mediator of material, space, and time and plays a crucial role in constructing actor networks. It is not merely an instrumental entity that is acted upon by human actors but also actively changes and shapes human actors themselves. In other words, it is not merely a passive tool but an active participant in shaping our understanding of intercultural reality. For example, social media platforms, algorithms, smartphones, and other technological devices participate in a digital age that regulates our interaction with culture and shapes our perceptions of reality. At the same time, the power relations of social media with other Chinese institutions (such as the government and Party) are materialized through the process by way of the media frame and shaping the means (technological/ideological).

Through these cases, I try to explain how the concept is constructed and its relevance to the Chinese context. I also provide a new perspective on understanding intercultural competence, addressing the theoretical gap in both theory and practice in Chinese higher education.

Main Methods and Theories in The Current Research of Intercultural Competence

The research on intercultural competence can be traced back to the late 1940s. In 1948, the United Nations issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which mentioned that the goal of education should be "to promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups" (UN, 1948, Article 26). The state as a form of existence has continued to develop after World War II, and the results of modern war are increasingly unacceptable to people. On this basis, for the sake of their interests and development, different countries were seeking development plans that suited their conditions on military, economy, diplomacy, and civil society

through the interaction between cultures, which pushed them forward to be interested in cultivating talents with intercultural competence (Jiang, 2017, p. 16). For example, in the United States, the government allocated substantial subsidies to develop the field. Its development is almost synchronous with the communication and development or modernization paradigm that emerged at the beginning of the Cold War. It is also isomorphic within academic politics and responds to the communication and cultural hegemony needs of the United States' global expansion after the war. It was vitally important to define the character, behavior patterns, mentality, and culture of the nations that the US was coming into direct contact with at that time, and knowledge about allies was just as necessary as knowledge about enemies (Zhao, 2019, p. 117). Later, it gradually emerged in Europe and worldwide and received the attention of important international organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Scholars formally proposed the term "intercultural competence" in the 1970s and researched and explored its conceptual connotation and constituent elements (Deardorff, 2009, p. 9). it gradually became an essential area of intercultural communication research after the 1980s (Dai, 2018, p. 1).

Intercultural competence is part of the research in the intercultural field, the theme covering a more comprehensive range of subject areas, which may involve interdisciplinary research. Regarding research methodology, scholars have also drawn on intercultural communication in their approach to studying intercultural competence. Research Methods in Intercultural Communication: A Practical Guide[6] by Zhu Hua, Professor of Applied Linguistics and Communication at the University of London, provides a systematic account of the research findings of the past thirty years on methodological issues in intercultural communication. It covers existing and emerging

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[6] Research Methods in Intercultural Communication: A Practical Guide, edited by Zhu Hua, was published by Wiley-Blackwell in January 2016.

research methods such as paired variable grammars, discourse-completion test questionnaires, critical incident methods, critical discourse analysis, ethnography, virtual ethnography, corpus analysis, multi-modality, pair talk analysis, narrative analysis, questionnaires, interviews, etc. Intercultural competence research emerged with quantitative research aiming at positivism in the 1970s (Dai, 2018, p. 21). Increasingly, scholars nowadays are using mixed methods, combining quantitative data surveys with qualitative analysis, including interviews, role-playing, diaries and blogs, questionnaires, and data testing, to apply the complementary nature of quantitative and qualitative to the study of intercultural competence.

Theoretical research in intercultural competence is primarily grounded in the works of three influential scholars: M. J. Bennett, Michael Byram, and Darla K. Deardorff. Their substantial impact on the field extends beyond international borders, and the study of intercultural competence in China is also heavily based on their theories.

A. M. J. Bennett, a renowned professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Milano-Bicocca in Italy, is renowned for developing the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). His extensive body of work includes numerous articles related to intercultural competence. According to Bennett's understanding (2014), intercultural competence is widely acknowledged as the ability to interact effectively and appropriately across different cultures, encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics.

Among them, he believes that the success of intercultural adaptation first depends on the people's sensitivity to different cultures. Bennett (1993) developed the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS), and he believes that developing intercultural sensitivity is an expanded awareness of an individual's understanding of his identity as a cultural factor. It describes six developmental stages of intercultural sensitivity and communication: Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration. The process begins with Denial, where an

individual perceives their cultural perspective as the only real, accurate, or valid interpretation of reality. It culminates in Integration, where one internalizes multicultural awareness and develops the ability to interact productively across cultural differences. Moreover, Bennett edited *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence*. The book contains 20 themes and 261 entries, systematically organizing and integrating theoretical research on intercultural competence.

B. Michael Byram, a distinguished professor at Durham University in the UK, is a renowned scholar in language education and intercultural studies. His primary research focuses on teaching foreign languages and developing intercultural communication competence within this context. Byram's definition of intercultural competence encompasses knowledge of others, knowledge of self, skills to interpret and relate, skills to discover and interact, valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors, and relativizing oneself (Byram, 1997, p. 34). He underscores the pivotal role of linguistic competence in this framework. In his understanding, as a consequence of Globalization, new technologies, and mass economic and refugee migration, it has become clear that communicative language teaching, too, with its focus on sociolinguistic appropriateness and politeness, is inadequate for the task of teaching communication. This new social context requires considering how people of different languages, including language learners, think and act and how this might impact successful communication and interaction. The 'cultural turn' – the introduction of 'intercultural competence' to complement 'communicative competence' – has further refined the notion of what it is to be competent for communication with speakers of different languages (Byram et al., 2013, p. 251).

Beginning his collaboration with the European Commission in the mid-1990s, Byram has produced influential works in intercultural communicative competence and intercultural citizenship education. Notable publications include *Teaching and Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence* (1997), *From Foreign*

Language Education to Intercultural Citizenship Education: Collection and Reflections (2008), and *Intercultural Citizenship Education: From Theory to Practice* (2016), co-edited by Irina Golubeva, Ha Hui, and Manuela Wagner. Additionally, he co-authored the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning* with Adelheid Hu (2012). His writings and thoughts on intercultural communicative competence, intercultural education, and global citizenship education have had a profound and lasting impact.

Byram's core intercultural communicative competence theoretical model integrates language learning, cultural awareness, attitude, and intercultural perspectives. This model encompasses skills such as analyzing and interpreting unfamiliar social and cultural phenomena, collecting information, and understanding others from emotional and cognitive perspectives. Through specific operational practices like classroom teaching, the use of media technology, and extracurricular intercultural social interaction activities, Byram's model facilitates learners' participation in intercultural interactions, resolution of cultural conflicts, negotiation of identities, and critical evaluation of their own and other's cultural values, behaviors, and customs, ultimately instilling a sense of intercultural responsibility (Byram et al., 2014, p. 6).

Nevertheless, Byram's theory has faced scrutiny from some scholars, including Japanese scholar Catherine Matsuo, who critiques his intercultural communicative competence model. Like many other intercultural communication competence models rooted in the West, Byram's model is individual-oriented, reflecting the typical Western worldview (Matsuo, 2014, p. 15).

C. Darla K. Deardorff, a notable intercultural education expert and research fellow at Duke University, is recognized for her significant contributions to the field. Apart from being a UNESCO advisor on intercultural competence policy, she boasts over twenty-five years of experience in international education. Deardorff has an extensive publication record, with over 60 articles and book chapters, including notable works

such as *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (2009), *The SAGE Handbook of International Higher Education* (2012), and *Intercultural Competence in Higher Education* (2017). Her latest publication, *Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles for UNESCO* (2020), further underscores her commitment to advancing intercultural understanding.

In her seminal work from 2006 (p.247-248), Deardorff defines intercultural competence as the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills, and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions. Additionally, she proposes the Model of Intercultural Competence Development, positing that the formation of intercultural competence is a continuous cyclic process comprising four stages: attitude, knowledge and understanding, internal benefits, and external benefits. These four stages concurrently represent the fundamental components of intercultural competence. She believes attitude, serving as the starting point, is a prerequisite and fundamental condition for developing intercultural competence. The second stage involves knowledge and understanding, representing the acquisition phase of intercultural competence. Moving forward, the third and fourth stages encompass internal and external benefits. Internal benefits involve changes in the existing ideological system, while external benefits pertain to the appropriateness and effectiveness of behavior and communication. Notably, internal benefits can stimulate and enhance external benefits.

Indeed, an examination of the theoretical content and models constructed by these scholars reveals that their research predominantly centers on the individual, encompassing aspects such as individual knowledge, language and communication skills, and personal attitudes. This emphasis on the individual approach extends to the development of intercultural competence in China, which primarily concentrates on individuals and specifically within the realm of language learning. However, this individual-focused approach overlooks the influence of environmental and contextual

factors, such as politics and economics, which hinders a broader discussion of intercultural competence.

Primary Debate of Intercultural Competence by Scholars

Intercultural Competence–the key competence in the 21st century, which is considered a valuable asset in an increasingly globalized world where we are more likely to interact with people from different cultures and countries who have been shaped by different values, beliefs, and experiences, by promoting the development of intercultural competence, it aims to remove barriers to intercultural contacts, such as xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and prejudice (Hajisoteriou, 2020, p. 251). Furthermore, it is also perceived as an essential ability for students in higher education to be able to address global challenges, act in an integrated world system, and resolve intercultural conflicts (Council of Europe, 2008; Deardorff, Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017); The development of intercultural competence speaks more than preparing people for the global workforce but also carries significance for building a harmonious international community where people from different backgrounds engage in respectful interactions (e.g., Buchtel, 2014; Demetry, Vaz, 2017; Wang, Kulich, 2015). Developing such skills is vital to acquire intercultural competence and correspond effectively in super-diverse and complex environments. However, there has never been a unified definition of intercultural competence, and scholars hold differing views on the matter.

Since beginning intercultural competence research, scholars have been trying to define intercultural competence comprehensively and understand its meaning. They have put forward a variety of definitions but have yet to reach a consensus. The exploration and debate continue. Among them, several concepts are related to intercultural in English and Chinese. The most commonly used today is intercultural, which includes cross-cultural and trans-cultural, all translated as 跨文化 in Chinese. The Chinese term for intercultural communication is also a matter of debate. Some

translate it as 跨文化交际, others as 跨文化沟通, and others as 跨文化交流 and 跨文化传播. Some scholars argue that the different translations imply different research orientations. For example, 跨文化交际 and 跨文化沟通 focus on interpersonal interactions, 跨文化交流 focuses not only on interpersonal interactions but also on intercultural interactions between organizations and even countries, and 跨文化传播 focuses mainly on intercultural interactions achieved through the mass media. Another concept related to intercultural studies in English is cross-cultural communication. According to Gudykunst's (2004) distinction, intercultural communication emphasizes intercultural interaction, while cross-cultural communication emphasizes intercultural comparison, so an accurate translation of cross-cultural communication studies would be comparative cultural studies, and some scholars use the two concepts indiscriminately. Moreover, trans-cultural communication complicates the conceptual issues. In English literature, the concept concerns the phenomenon of mingling or intermingling of cultures. These concepts intersect with each other, and ambiguity persists.

Another controversial point is whether intercultural communicative competence and intercultural competence are two different concepts. Fantini (2000) and YoungYunKim (2001) considered that intercultural communicative competence and intercultural competence are two ways of saying the same concept. In Fantini and YoungYunKim's view, intercultural communication skills are used interchangeably, and only intercultural communicative competence is more placed on language communication, while the other stresses the purpose of cultural communication. In his early research, Byram also often used intercultural competence and intercultural communication interchangeably. However, in recent years, he proposed in his research that foreign language education is transforming and should shift from language education to intercultural citizenship education. Foreign language is not only a tool for communication but also an essential cultural competence. Based on this cognition, his related works in recent years use the term "intercultural competence" instead of "intercultural communicative competence".

Meanwhile, the approaches that see intercultural competence as a means to more efficient interaction typically define the term emphasizing productivity in intercultural interactions. Proponents of this perspective, therefore, see intercultural competence as an instrument and a means to success. Thomas (2003, p. 141) defines intercultural competence as the ability to (help) shape the process of intercultural interaction in a way that avoids or contextualizes misunderstandings while creating opportunities for cooperative problem-solving in a way that is acceptable and productive for all involved. Schönhuth (2005, p. 102) summarises similar definitions of intercultural competence as the ability within an intercultural context to establish contact in an appropriate way and to establish conditions that are acceptable for the free expression and effective exchange of all involved. Ting-Toomey (1993) suggests that intercultural competence is the ability of communicators to negotiate effectively with members from other cultures to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

Furthermore, intercultural competence is viewed as a personal characteristic of communicators, such as openness, sensitivity, knowledge, flexibility, and cooperation (Howard-Hamilton et al., 1998; Hunter et al., 2006). Some scholars argue about intrinsic human potential and extrinsic effects, such as Gudykunst (1998), who argues that intercultural competence is communicative effectiveness and that competence and effectiveness are almost equivalent and interchangeable concepts. Other scholars, on the other hand, argue that intercultural competence is not the external effectiveness of communicative acts but the communicator's inner literacy, potential, and strength of personality (Gao, 1998; Yang, 2012).

Most of these scholars have explored and reflected on intercultural education from an individual perspective while ignoring the historical, cultural, and political contexts of different countries across the globe. Luckily, several others have realized and moved beyond the human-centered framework of interpersonal interaction, have begun to see the neglected part of the concept of interculturality, and understand intercultural competence in terms of the concept and connotation of interculturality. Martine (2006)

summarizes her main argument for interculturality in her research by stating that the concept of culture is a "thing of the past". She suggests that one should focus on the various cultural fragments rather than the totality of culture and proposes the concept of culturality as a substitute for culture to reflect its flexibility, dynamicity, and variability. Through the study of interculturality, Dervin (2016, 2020) reveals the political and ideological nature of intercultural competence and emphasizes that power relations and dynamics behind the concept of interculturality cannot be ignored, as well as the importance of critical thinking development. Fred points out that intercultural competence can vary depending on the field of study or the context in which it is applied and highlights views that are at odds with the official and orthodox position on intercultural competence to encourage a new approach. He also suggests the limitations and one-sidedness of intercultural education from a Western perspective and that each country and region should find concepts and models that are appropriate for themselves. Rathje (2007) derives the requirement for an applicable understanding of intercultural competence from questioning the goals and foundations of intercultural competence, as well as whether it is universal or culture-specific and in which contexts it is needed, leading to a series of recommendations and developing the concept based on a contemporary, cohesion-oriented definition of culture. Ferri Giuliana (2016) takes an interdisciplinary approach to a philosophical investigation of the epistemological assumptions of the concept of competence and the ethical implications of intercultural dialogue and attempts to argue that the concept of culture represents an 'essentialist trap' that fails to account for the complex character of intercultural communication. He shifts the focus from culture to the intercultural 'between,' demonstrating the interactive communication processes and highlighting the complexity, contingency, and power relations that characterize communication as part of interculturality. Adrian Holliday (2010) also suggests looking at 'intercultural' critically and reflectively. It includes eliminating the powerful ideologies associated with different uses of the term "intercultural".

These scholars have criticized the approach of focusing on individuals towards intercultural competence, providing us with a broader space for further discussion. However, their research still largely remains within the framework of Western paradigms. Intercultural competence encompasses different connotations and has different historical and political circumstances; when using intercultural competence as a term, indiscriminately universalizing it is something that scholars easily overlook. As for China, although some scholars have begun to recognize and point out the significant limitations and issues of viewing intercultural competence from an individual-centered perspective, this mainstream approach still profoundly influences intercultural competence research in China.

The Research State of Intercultural Competence in China

Intercultural studies in China is a relatively young and increasingly popular field. It encompasses various aspects such as cultural communication, foreign language acquisition, and cultural comparison. Additionally, the study of intercultural competence is inseparable from the broader scope of intercultural studies; it is an essential component and is generally interconnected with intercultural communication. In contemporary research, interdisciplinary collaboration is a notable feature of intercultural competence due to the widespread interest it has garnered across various disciplines. Judging from current studies, research on intercultural competence spans across various disciplines. However, based on current academic achievements, the theory and practice of intercultural competence have primarily evolved within two disciplinary scopes: intercultural communication and foreign language education, particularly within the context of foreign language teaching and international Chinese education.

The current research on intercultural competence in China is mainly influenced by the US and Europe, including constructing concepts, methods, and models. There are relatively few theoretical constructions of intercultural competence in China, and they mainly draw on the achievements of European and American researchers. The 1980s

were a promising period for studying intercultural communication in China. Scholars engaged in foreign language teaching and research, such as He Daokuan and Hu Wenzhong, introduced this emerging discipline from the West to China in the early 1980s (Dai, 2018, p. 23), and Chinese scholars began to use theories and methods of intercultural communication in an attempt to construct an intercultural model that fits their own country. However, to a large extent, they still did not break away from the Western theoretical framework.

On the other hand, many scholars have begun to explore how cultural contexts affect foreign language learning and teaching around the relationship between language and culture, which provides a sound basis for research on intercultural competence in foreign language acquisition. China started research related to the topic of intercultural competence in a real sense at the beginning of the new century, and it is mainly concentrated in the field of foreign language teaching. Like foreign countries, domestic scholars also pay attention to intercultural competence, its evaluation and measurement, and related issues of intercultural competence cultivation (Jiang, 2017).

In the research on intercultural competence in China, the theories were imported from abroad, mainly from the US and Europe. It also has a short story in theoretical study compared to the US and Europe. Chinese scholars followed European and American methods and theories in this area, focusing mainly on individual knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In China, the dominant scholars in this area are Hu Wenzhong and Zu Xiaomei. Hu was one of the relatively influential ones in the early times during the rise of intercultural competence in China, and Zu's works have had a vast influence in the recent period. The textbooks they compose are still the main ones for intercultural courses in Chinese universities. In their description of Intercultural competence, Hu Wenzhong (2013) believes that Intercultural competence is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds. In contrast, Zu Xiaomei (2003) believes that intercultural competence, in addition to communicative ability, should also include knowledge, attitude, cultural awareness,

and other levels. Their theories are also primarily applied to intercultural competence education within foreign language and international Chinese education programs.

In China, scholars have also discussed intercultural competence in relation to foreign language teaching and believe that intercultural competence is one of the essential objectives of foreign language education and plays a significant role in cultivating international talent. Zhang and Yao (2020, p. 37) proposed a theoretical framework of four perspectives, three levels, two contexts, and one platform for developing intercultural competence based on an analysis of the actual needs of Chinese students' intercultural competence development. By combining the relationship between intercultural communication and intercultural competence, Li (2021, p. 119) points out that teachers should correctly apply the relevant theories in the classroom and guide students to analyze intercultural communication cases with examples in order to develop students in intercultural competence, make them more sensitive and inclusive to cultural differences, and analyze the differences in communicative behavior with an objective perspective to guide their behavior patterns in future communicative scenarios.

In recent years, more attention has also been paid to exploring intercultural competence in teaching Chinese as a foreign language (International Chinese education) in China. The School of International Exchange of Shanghai University has published two series of academic festival proceedings edited by Yao Ximing (2015), *Language and Culture Communication in the Context of Globalization*, which focus on the intercultural issues involved in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, including not only specific curriculum, teaching, teaching materials, teachers, educational technology, intercultural communication, but also the construction of Confucius Institutes. In addition, Ren (2018, p. 147) stated cultivating intercultural communication competence is an essential element in the training program for the Master of Chinese International Education, and it is urgent to improve the intercultural communication competence of Chinese international education

students. But Meng (2021, p. 159) pointed out the problems in curriculum resources, communication environment, teachers' level, and necessary evaluation system are related to the lack of clarity of talent training objectives, insufficient investment in education, too much emphasis on foreign language learning, and neglect of teaching. The problems are related to the lack of clarity in the training objectives, insufficient investment in education, too much emphasis on foreign language learning, and neglect of the practical aspects of teaching. Therefore, it is necessary to optimize the proportion of curriculum, integrate curriculum resources, increase investment, optimize the environment of intercultural communication, improve teachers' intercultural communication ability, and improve the evaluation system of intercultural communication. From Shi's perspective (2001), he questions the intercultural approach to understanding and intercultural pedagogy based on linguistic and translation knowledge. He points out that the power factor and ideology behind it should be seen, proposing a discourse with rational-moral motives.

Additionally, some other Chinese scholars, such as Yang and Zhuang (2007, p. 16), believe that equalizing intercultural communicative ability and intercultural competence is conducive to liberating our concepts from the narrow vision of language communication, it can remind us not only to focus on language communication skills but also pay attention to intercultural awareness, thinking ability, non-verbal communication skills. While Jiang (2013, p. 20) based on distinguishing intercultural communicative competence and intercultural competence, refining the classification of intercultural competence from different dimensions and summarizing the tripartite method: attitude, skills, and knowledge and binary classification of intercultural competence: general abilities and specific abilities, and subject classification dimensions. The research emphasizes that the analysis of the components of intercultural competence cannot be inseparable from the human subject. Intercultural competence needs to be reflected in people's practice. According to the classification of intercultural competence, it is proposed that the cultivation of intercultural competence should not only pay attention to the structure of intercultural

competence but also focus on the subject of intercultural competence.

Moreover, *The study of the Integrated Model for Chinese Students' Intercultural Competence Development* by Zhang Hongling and her team (2023) constructs a framework of reference for intercultural competence teaching in China's foreign language education. Informed by the theories of learning taxonomies and developmental psychology, the study adopts mixed methods, such as focus group interviews and teaching experiments at different stages, to develop the framework empirically. The framework includes three dimensions and nine components, namely knowledge (foreign cultural knowledge, Chinese cultural knowledge, general cultural knowledge), attitudes (cultural awareness, national identity, global mindedness), and skills (intercultural experiencing, intercultural dialogue, intercultural exploration).

Besides, assessment models are also emerging continuously in China; they are also influenced by models from foreign scholars such as M. J. Bennett's model of intercultural sensitivity development, Byram's model of intercultural competence, which focuses explicitly on foreign language education, Darla K. Deardorff's Pyramid Model, the ICSI measures dimensions like openness to spirit, individualism, collectivism, and flexibility (Bhawuk et al., 1992), Hofstede (2001) 's five cultural dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and long-term orientation–short-term orientation, additional assessment scales include the Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (ICSI) and the Intercultural Conflict Scale. Moreover, Fantini (2009) comprehensively organized over 40 evaluation items and scales, encompassing the intercultural sensitivity scale, life and work abroad scale, intercultural competency scale, intercultural development scale, which includes teaching objectives, communication aspects (building relationships, communicating), four dimensions of cooperation and intercultural competence (awareness, attitudes, skills, knowledge), language proficiency in the home country, etc. has also greatly inspired Chinese scholars in the development of intercultural competence assessment models. They committed to measuring and

evaluating it, leading to the development of numerous assessment tools. Examples include Chen and Starosta's integrated model of intercultural communication competence, Chen's model of global communicative competence, Gao and Wu's intercultural competence model of Chinese expatriates, Yang's building intercultural competence model for company F, Li and Tang's intercultural competence of expatriates: theory and modeling review, Li's intercultural competence model and empirical research of expatriates, Zhao's theoretical and empirical study of Chinese expatriates' competency model, Xiao and Zhang's components of intercultural competence in international business, and Luo's Guanxi competence as intercultural competence in business contexts.

In these models, the individual-centered approach is evident. On the one hand, they treat intercultural competence as a procedural system in which individual abilities are assigned to specific categories. For example, the model incorporates affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions into a larger framework of intercultural competence (Gertsen, 1990). On the other hand, some models emphasize the context in which the interaction occurs or, rather, the interdependencies between participants involved in a particular intercultural communication episode (Thomas, 2003, p. 142). The dizzying number of these models is overwhelming. However, this is also explained to a great extent by the lack of unity in the definition of the term 'intercultural competence' itself. Moreover, the widespread use and generalization of these concepts and theories often lack a concrete and solid basis to establish their universality. Many models developed by Chinese scholars are often replicas of American or European models. In addition, regardless of whether intercultural competence research and assessment methods are scientific, scholars have made evaluation models, measurements, and scales of intercultural competence. However, whether intercultural competence should be seriously assessed still needs to be discussed. The concern arises from the potential risk of conceptualizing intercultural competence as a static ability, neglecting its dynamic nature of development. On the other hand, using evaluation models can create an illusion that only individuals

included in the scale system are relevant to culture. Within the evaluation models, there's a potential issue wherein individuals rated as 'incompetent' may face criticism or belittlement. Alternatively, even with a more tolerant approach, there's a risk that the language and culture they carry might be subject to criticism.

From the ideas on intercultural competence, it can be noted that most scholars focused on the individual as the subject. It has remained the intercultural competence research of most scholars based on individuals. Although some scholars have also challenged it, the concept of intercultural competence is still mainly on the level of an individual's language, skills, and attitude. Especially among Chinese scholars, the research history of intercultural competence is not long. It was only a few decades ago. Its emergence is related to the historical background, which cannot be ignored. In Chinese intercultural competence research, modernization and globalization are often considered the general background of it. Some scholars, for example, Jiang (2017, p. 12), believe that the ultimate purpose of research on the definition, theory, and model of intercultural competence and the development and research of assessment tools is to cultivate the abilities everyone should have in this context of globalization. Wang (2021, p.214) stated that in the context of the globalization era, intercultural communication skills are the bridge between our country and other countries. Li (2018, p. 58) explained that as the world becomes more globalized, countries come closer together, and the earth becomes a global village, intercultural communication activities become essential, but only a few people have the ability to communicate across cultures. In the face of this shortage, the task of teaching English at the university level has become a priority, and it is crucial to train more people with intercultural communication skills. In addition, Deng (2013, p.13) thinks globalization has increased the possibilities of intercultural interaction worldwide, and intercultural interaction calls for intercultural education and innovation in developing intercultural competence. Intercultural education emphasizes respect for difference and diversity, equality-based interaction and engagement, and democratic values; intercultural competence encompasses intellectual tolerance, human understanding, and

adaptability. Ren Yuhai (2014, p. 8) argues that it is necessary to strengthen learners' cultural subjectivity and creativity in intercultural education, cultivate their intercultural competence to transcend the limitations of cultural patterns and boundaries, gain positive interaction with the cultural other, and draw on and integrate various cultural resources. He explored the development of intercultural competence in terms of cognitive, communicative, ethical, identity, and creative dimensions, with the intention of proposing a more systematic theoretical construction of this "transcendence" dimension. Shi (2020, p. 1108) explained that globalization has brought about a wealth of multicultural experiences, which have broadened people's horizons but also created a cognitive burden, and existing theories of cultural competence can no longer cope with the new changes brought about by globalization. The existing theories of cultural competence can no longer cope with the new changes brought about by globalization. Culture should be seen as a dynamic system, and the construction of a model of multicultural competence with meta-knowledge as the core will help to understand globalization in-depth.

Those discussions are supplemented by perspectives from foreign scholars and international organizations such as UNESCO. Byram mentioned, today, Intercultural competence is considered a key qualification in a globalized and/or glocalized world in which border crossings and cultural exchange have become unavoidable (Byram, Masuhara, 2013, p. 143). Given that globalization has created increased interactions of global cultures, helping students to develop tolerance of uncertainties is invaluable (Nganga, 2016, p. 84). Besides, UNESCO's intercultural competence framework in 2013 also remarked: globalization shrinks the world, bringing a more comprehensive range of cultures into closer contact than ever before. Inevitably, cultural boundaries are shifting. The pace of social transformations is increasing. As a result, cultural diversity and intercultural contact have become facts of modern life, so intercultural competence has become a requisite response (UNESCO, 2013, p.7). Gradually, intercultural competence has become vital because of the increase in intercultural communication brought about by globalization in China.

As the research of intercultural competence takes globalization as a perspective or background, some scholars consider countries to be a unit in conducting their research, especially in China, which is largely discussed based on country boundaries. Yi'an Wang, Darla K. Deardorff, and Steve J. Kulich (2017) examined the critical dimensions and frameworks of intercultural competence from a Chinese perspective. It outlines practical implications and recommendations for educators, both in the limited domestic 'home' context of higher education in China and in British and American universities where the number of international students continues to grow significantly. With the increasingly close global connections, developing intercultural understanding between other cultures from different countries has become essential, and cultivating intercultural competence is also vital for China and globally.

However, this kind of approach is the narrow 'inter-national' understanding of culture and its emphasis on intercultural competence as a national phenomenon; it reduces the difficulties inherent in intercultural competence to a category of national culture supported by the subjective feelings of alienation and the high probability of misunderstanding that are frequently associated with encounters between members of different national cultures. At the same time, "Culture" has been demoted to a solidified word for explaining rather than traceable assemblage. It is split off from material arrangements, and then is later wheeled back onstage as a deus ex machina to motivate and order to explain the human actors in the modern drama (Entwistle, Slater, 2014, p. 165). Besides, the approach is oversimplified or encourages intra-national homogeneity (Rathje, 2007, p. 259). What receives less attention is the nexus between globalization and intercultural competence, including the often-overlooked power relations that underlie it. Meanwhile, in such a context, increased "intercultural interactions" actually have offered many new social, political, and economic "trouble spots".Other than studying abroad, migration issues, multicultural social environments, workforces that operate internationally, and certainly mergers between foreign companies，the intersection of political interests with economic marketability has not become a part of the discussion on China's intercultural competence.

While some scholars have suggested that intercultural competence is intricately linked to existing unequal power relations, encompassing dominant socio-economic power, cultural interests, and commercial motives, there remains a gap in in-depth discussions on the practical implications and social environment. For instance, within the context of China, there is a need for more comprehensive examinations of intercultural competence's political and ideological nature, considering its potential connection to power-motivated practices. For the current study of intercultural competence, scholars are still focused more on strengthening intercultural communication in the context of globalization with language teaching to enhance the development of intercultural competence and explore this aspect. They attempt to treat intercultural competence as a concept understood simply as a 'key to success' and emphasize the importance of effective human interaction in the expectation that successful intercultural competence will manifest itself in the participants as a kind of palpable personal development. Under their explanation, intercultural competence seems considered as grounded in the experience and knowledge of one or more foreign cultures (at the level of national cultures, for example, Chinese culture to other cultures), and equate intercultural competence with a specific cultural competence, which stereotypically identifies that some individuals with a certain level of experience in foreign environments are more adept at navigating through other unfamiliar situations.

Firstly, considering globalization and the "intercultural" realities within its context as naturally formed objective realities and incorporating them as a knowledge background in their studies; treating language as a neutral element embedded within the concept of intercultural competence; dividing cultures by nation (such as Chinese culture and other cultures), carrying a view of a static, fixed perspective when interpreting so-called realities, knowledge, and culture for explaining intercultural competence without realizing that they should be interpreted and examined—these lead to the stereotyping and biases that intercultural competence often scoffed at.

Furthermore, the prevalent perspective treats the cultivation of intercultural competence as an individualized goal within the broader context of intercultural development. However, a paradigm centered solely on individual knowledge, skills, and attitudes may overlook communication's inherently joint and social nature. It may neglect the social action aspects of communication, including speech acts and the consequences of co-constructed (inter)actions, and they are the foundation for our understanding of intercultural competence.

Questions

At the turn of the century, guided by policy documents from China's Ministry of Education (e.g., the Chinese English Syllabus for English Majors, 2000; the Chinese College English Curriculum Requirements, 2004; the Chinese High School English Curriculum Standard, 2004)[7], foreign language teaching (FLT) in China was directed to incorporate intercultural competence (cf. Xu, 2006a).[8] This initiative is evident at all educational levels. Most Chinese publications on intercultural competence focus on knowledge and skill-oriented training within the context of foreign language teaching. Scholars, emphasizing *language ability, knowledge, skills, and attitudes*, promote intercultural competence through diverse intercultural practices in foreign language classrooms. They also design various tests and surveys to explore individual qualities. For instance, Chang and Zhao (2012) conducted action research to investigate intercultural teaching in a college English Integrated Course, demonstrating the effectiveness of teaching "cultural knowings" in enhancing learners' intercultural awareness. Zhao (2013) utilized Chinese-American literary works as training resources to improve learners' intercultural competence, often employing the Chen and Starosta (2000) Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) to measure growth. Yang (2009) designed a three-phase study, including pilot interviews and a survey

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[7] China's Ministry of Education. (2000). English syllabus for English majors (ESEM). Beijing: Higher Education Press (In Chinese). China's Ministry of Education. (2004a). College English curriculum requirements (CECR). Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (In Chinese). China's Ministry of Education. (2004b). High school English curriculum standard (HSECS). Beijing: People's Education Press (In Chinese).

[8] Xu, L. S. (2006a). Intercultural communication competence. In Paper presented at the sixth Chinese symposium for intercultural communications sponsored by the CAFIC May, Nanjing Normal University, (20–22).

study, to generate a framework, as well as the design of an intercultural competence test (ICCT). Generally, it has been widely promoted and applied, especially in the language educational field. In Chinese universities, intercultural competence has become an integral part of the curriculum. The cultivation of intercultural competence is progressively becoming one of the goals in nurturing talent across various professional disciplines in Chinese universities. Scholars in diverse fields incorporate this concept into their research, defining it based on individual qualities. However, despite its widespread use, there has been limited examination of what intercultural competence exactly entails in the Chinese context.

In the realm of intercultural competence, the prefix "intercultural" is a subject of controversy when translated literally. While the typical expressions in Chinese for Kua (跨) include "cross-," "inter-," and "trans-," a more fundamental question arises: What exactly do "inter-," "cross-," or "trans-" pertain to? What does "culture" mean in the contemporary context for those studying and practicing intercultural competence? Furthermore, how is culture defined in the Chinese educational context?

Practically, culture is defined in general, inclusive ways but operationalized in narrow, specific ways. Hofstede (1980), for instance, saw culture as the collective programming of the mind, but primarily studied cultural differences related to nationality. Gudykunst and Kim (1992) considered culture as systems of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people, but identified groups regarding political boundaries between countries. Haworth's (1989) channel ratio model of intercultural communication seemed applicable to any context, but all their illustrations related to differences in nationality. In the Chinese context, the practice of defining cultures based on countries is prevalent. Many intercultural events or activities center around participants from different countries sharing aspects of their cultures, such as food, drink, music, etc. However, is using the country as a proxy for culture an oversimplified and limited approach? Notably, Chinese and Western cultures are commonly used as distinguishing factors for understanding intercultural competence

in China. For example, typical Chinese culture focuses on collectivism, and Western culture focuses on individualism (Hofstede considers collectivism and individualism as one of the dimensions for cultural differentiation), which represents a typical way of dualism. Can the so-called cultural differences still be explained concerning cognition, such as "Western rationality" as opposed to "the mystery of the East" (Jensen, 2005, p. 201)? Chinese culture and Western culture are like two labels for cultural categories, but we do not know exactly what they contain. And culture is seen as an explanatory concept in intercultural competence rather than a phenomenon needing explanation.

Such concepts might initially seem like rather closed-off boxes; they seem to have clear boundaries and work the way we expect them to. However, taking a second look, one might notice how a jumble of entities, actors, and relations, all of which are very hard to define and delineate, makes up such concepts. How can one describe what appears as closed and efficient boxes at one point and another as a jumble of entities, actors, and relations (Ren, Petersen, 2013, p. 101)? Max Weber believed that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he has spun. Geertz considered culture to be those interpretive webs searching for meaning; he espoused culture as essentially semiotic (Geertz, 2017). In other words, culture is the ordered system of meaning and symbols. He used the term 'thick description' to characterize the behavior's intentional, communicative, interpretative meaning: why it was done, how it was read, and using which social codes. And Geertz (2017) believed that if you want to understand what science is, you should look in the first instance not at its theories or findings and certainly not at what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners of it do. Isn't that what we need to do if we want to understand those concepts? Intercultural theories try hard to describe the intercultural process as a neutral and natural process of cultural exchange between people. However, the actual situation involves all aspects of politics, economy, ideology, environment, business, society, etc. It is filled with cultural hegemony or cultural colonialism, Eurocentrism, and Sinocentrism (narrow cultural nationalism), depending on the standpoint to

present it. According to Latour (2004, 2005), interconnectedness and hybridity are the characteristics of the "modern world", neither pure science nor pure politics; they muddle and mix in an ever-weaving network of social and technical relations; he suggests that understanding the world requires considering the chains of practices, technologies, and materialities that constitute it. The same is true: Isn't the culture in intercultural concepts a network made up of heterogeneous entities and actors in a mixed construction process that involves all kinds of interactions? Therefore, the final source of dispute involves understanding the term 'culture' when used in the context of intercultural competence. (Rathje, 2007, p. 260).

As previously mentioned in the dominating theories ((including Deardorff, Bryam, and Bennett) and Chinese research, intercultural competence emphasizes language skills, personal cognitive understanding, establishing interpersonal relationships, attitudes, and emotional perception, including empathy, adaptability etc. This leads to the question: Does the emphasis on intercultural competence place too much responsibility on individual interaction and the ability of individuals to acquire the required skills? Isn't the presumption of a seemingly objective perspective from which the individual can transcend the subjective inherently reflecting a Western-centric viewpoint? As Ferri (2018) argues, a view on intercultural communication predicated on the search for a final moment of understanding when all cultural conflicts are resolved is problematic. As Blasco (2012, p. 476) puts it, this paradoxically reproduces an ethnocentric way of perceiving oneself as perspicacious, self-transcendable, and able to expose the features of a fixed and knowable other. A further issue is that constructions of interculturality are frequently predicated upon solid approaches to culture (Dervin, 2016), in which cultures are seen as stand-alone entities that influence how individuals think and behave. This can easily lead to pigeonholing individuals into static identities related to national cultures or other racialized identity markers (Kim, 2007; Tian, Lowe, 2014). In intercultural competence training, many methods focus narrowly on learning about culture as a static, self-sufficient entity, making it possible to essentialize and stereotype cultural

belonging.

Moreover, due to business reasons, the focus for some scholars shifted from theoretical investigation to attempts to create scientific models that could be used to identify other nations' characteristic features, mainly to ensure good understanding and smooth communication, as well as to predict behavior. Research became dominated by the aspiration to find simple solutions to complicated problems, and researchers focused on developing cultural parameters that would make it possible to fit all the nuances of different peoples' behavior, thinking, and feelings into some rigid frameworks. It was necessary to promptly devise methods of teaching people with no relevant training to communicate with people of other nations – without spending too much time gaining knowledge about their history and culture (Meissner, 2006). Then, the so-called experts attempted to ram diverse cultures into definite parameters suitable for teaching practical communication skills and gradually try to turn it into a competence that can be scientifically measured and evaluated. The question arises: Who defines this specific cultural relationship? Secondly, who is encompassed within this so-called ability range? Does it target individuals in business, government officers, or agents? Or does it focus on those with access to contact with "other countries' cultures"? For example, in a study on communication competence across social classes, Whiting (1971,p.41) suggests that since most researchers are middle class and insensitive to working-class communication strategies, scholarly investigations of "competence" may exhibit class bias. In a similar vein, Colquit (1977) argues that definitions of "competence" are class and race-biased and privilege the communicative style of middle-class white Americans. Likewise, the cultivation of intercultural competence in China today is primarily concentrated in foreign language majors and international Chinese education in Chinese higher education. Are only those who study in these areas and who can become diplomats, translators, and teachers of Chinese as a foreign language considered qualified to possess intercultural competence? To which group does China's intercultural competence refer? When faced with these questions, much like Carey (1975) asks: Where, if anywhere, does

ideology leave off and science begin?

In addition, foreign language education remains the primary domain for cultivating intercultural competence, as evident in current research. Specifically, research in China predominantly centers on language learning, particularly in international Chinese language education and the practical application of other foreign languages such as English, French, German, Japanese, etc.[9] Suppose languages of different countries serve as the basis for dividing cultures. Does it imply that people who speak the same language do not encounter intercultural issues or that people who speak different dialects are exempt from such issues? To pose the question in reverse, what distinguishes intercultural issues from interpersonal communication issues if the answer is negative? In terms of research, the majority of teaching and theory in this domain concentrates on proficiency in the target language, familiarity with the target culture, and competence in translation or understanding between the target language and the native language. Educational departments and language training institutions specializing in intercultural communication often equate knowledge and skills of the relevant language and culture with intercultural competence. This perspective rests on the belief that such competence minimizes miscommunications and misunderstandings in intercultural encounters, thereby ensuring intercultural success. This belief is rooted in a broad concept of human communication and its pedagogy, viewing communication as exchanging information or knowledge that can be objectively expressed and understood. This approach suggests that proficiency in the target language, familiarity with the target culture, and competence in translation between the target language and the native culture are crucial for successful intercultural communication. The outcome of communication is perceived as the effect of knowledge, and the role of pedagogy is seen as providing knowledge and information to students. Is the origin of this kind of view caused by a lack of investigation into the concept of reality, knowledge, or culture?

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[9] According to the official release of the "2023 Academic Ranking of Majors in Chinese Universities" by the higher education professional evaluation institution, the top ten foreign language major rankings for Chinese foreign language majors are English, Russian, German, French, Spanish, Arabic, Japanese, Persian, Korean, Filipino.

Method and Aim

My approach for this research follows the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as developed by Bruno Latour (1987, 2005), Michel Callon (1986), and John Law (1992). The primary tenet of ANT is the heterogeneous network (combining technical and social elements). ANT focuses on the relationships in which actors participate and how these are used to influence the build/shape of a network. It considers the world full of hybrid entities containing human and non-human components (Latour, 2005). An actor/actant network consists of and links together both humans and non-humans. There is no difference between human and materials or the social and the natural (Callon, 1986, p. 20). An actant is also defined as an effect generated by a network of heterogeneous, interacting materials (Law 1992, p. 383). ANT examines the motivations and actions of human actors that align their interests with the requirements of non-human actors. It can be used to investigate the process whereby the respective interests of different human and non-human elements are aligned into a social and technological arrangement of artifacts, and focusing on actors is not based on notions of "identity" but "agency". This is because what matters to the analysis is not the self-consciousness or "natural state" of the actor but, rather, its relations with other actors, which means between humans and non-humans, where roles are not pre-determined but *translated* in interactions. The core of ANT is the process of translation (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1986). Through the negotiation in the translation process, a multi-factored interaction in which actors and actants share in the network reconstruction leads to system stabilization.

ANT also introduces the concept of "black-boxing" (into a "blackbox," a statement fixed as an uncontested scientific fact, with any history of contest or controversy in its production completely erased), just like Latour (1999, p. 304) said, one needs to focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become. In other words, it is the process by which the network's complexities are hidden within a "blackbox" when an actor or a process becomes stable and unquestioned.

Once black-boxed, these elements are taken for granted, and the focus shifts to their outputs rather than their internal workings. This suggests that what we consider as reality and knowledge is not inherent but rather constructed through networks. As my research indicates, the term "intercultural competence" as a term of explanation needs to be rethought is the result of multiple practices.

ANT offers a framework to investigate how actors, beyond individual entities, function and challenge the conventional perception of an individual as the sole subject of intercultural competence. Simultaneously, the approach will consider and observe all participating actors, including both human and non-human elements, within an integrated system. It disrupts conventional thinking by encompassing human and non-human actors, prompting a re-examination of intercultural competence. ANT shifts the focus away from how we understand intercultural competence, which focuses on the individual, towards how we read the actual relational network and identify which actors have the potential to act. Thus, abandoning the notion that intercultural competence is solely an individual's responsibility, we can understand actors as being enacted by the relational network. Their characteristics are determined purely by the connections of which they form part within the network; that is, actors derive their capacities and potentials through their relationships with others (Latour, 2005). It prompts us to answer how actors in a network relate to each other.

In the process, intercultural competence will be observed by how it is constructed through actors rather than assuming that intercultural phenomena already exist and form a specific subset of reality. In other words, ANT describes a process in which heterogeneous elements are woven together and assembled into reality. At the same time, ANT defines what constitutes knowledge (epistemology) and provides a set of assumptions about the nature of the world's reality (ontology).

Therefore, according to ANT, if we want to understand intercultural competence, it is not enough to merely observe individual performance. We also need to consider

questions such as how intercultural competence is shaped into an essential skill through policies and education, how politics is linked to individual abilities, etc. In taking ANT, we need to follow both human and non-human actors to see how things such as multiple practices are constructed in a given circumstance. This marks a departure from traditional notions of who or what is capable of acting and retains the relational perspective, shifting the focus from individuals and their actions to how human as well as non-human actors are connected in a network.

This approach can illustrate that intercultural competence is a constructed concept rather than a natural one in the Chinese context. It explains how a network is built and operated by various actors, with historical and social elements not merely serving as a background but actively participating as key actors in the construction of the network. In this framework, the individual is not the sole and most crucial subject but plays a role in establishing the network.

In this process, I can also gain insights into the reasons that China's intercultural competence has developed in its current way rather than another, thus to lead me to find answers for the questions I raised. In the traditional understanding mode, culture is initially perceived as a completed fact, thereby framing intercultural as the outcome of encounters between individuals carrying pre-existing cultures. If we follow ANT, culture is not predetermined but constructed through the connections and associations within a network. It is an ongoing negotiation, translation, and alignment of interests among different actors rather than a static entity. The development of intercultural competence is not solely an individual task but rather a collective effort shaped by diverse participants' collective actions and networks. In other words, intercultural competence is a collective endeavor, and the collective is not a homogeneous entity. On the contrary, it comprises various elements that form networks. It includes individuals and groups, various entities, such as states, parties, governments, educational institutions, and other actors like policies, language exchange programs, media, communication technologies, etc.

Similarly, the traditional understanding of the educational system is leaders with school curriculum, teachers' performance, and student achievement are the leading educative practices that influence intercultural knowledge study. It is a reality that is part of people's lives. Indeed, when the negotiation and policing in the network are forgotten, and the assemblage has become routinized, it will appear to be a fact of life for an educational institution. It becomes natural to appear in our life.

However, according to ANT, this implies the need to constantly trace the functional roles and their assemblage because reality is not confined to a predefined set of objective entities or facts. In Latour's (1993, p. 6) view, the real is not limited to a predefined set of objective entities or facts. Instead, reality is seen as a complex network of associations and relationships between human and non-human actors, and everything that exists, whether human or non-human, contributes to the construction of reality, which emerges through ongoing processes of mediation and translation. It is constructed through the relationships of various actors, and the networks constructed by actors are not only real; they are real, collective, and discursive.

In Latour's framework, society is not an independent domain separate from nature or technology. It is seen as a collective that includes various actors, both human and non-human, who participate in shaping social reality. Intercultural educational practices are not only considered real social practices but also discourses shaped by the collective. The discourses mix with things and societies and are embedded in translation, where translators negotiate meanings and create shared understandings during the process of translation.

Therefore, by following ANT, we must inquire into how knowledge of intercultural competence is generated in universities. We not only need to observe educational practices as reality but also track how the collective performs. They translate, mediate, and extend the networks; they trace networks; they build the actor networks. They embody a set of relations, a set of memories, and a set of preferences. Their

discourses are embodied in a set of performances, a set of materials, and a series of spatial arrangements, corporeal and otherwise. None is necessarily crucial, but they generate the effect if we take them together (Law, 1993, p. 143). Performances that work are not created out of thin air. A large assemblage of actors must be assembled and put in place (Rowan, Bigum, 2003, p. 184). In universities, it means an extensive collection of policy documents, institutions, staff, students, teachers, leaders, computers, offices, and so on have to be brought into play and carry out roles negotiated for and with them.

ANT provides us with a new methodological approach. Its contribution directs attention toward studying how reality comes into being (Faŕıas, Mu ̈tzel, 2015, p. 526). Therefore, the main focus of my research is to describe how reality is formed. Using description as an analytical tool means that, for example, culture should not be explained as a social result or product of a certain class, city, or nation. Rather, I must describe and analyze how cultures practically assemble through such results or products. The current task is to reopen the blackbox of intercultural competence. I need to trace it not only as a real educational practice but as a collective, including the roles and how they build the network through their actions, words, and performances.

Therefore, I conducted three case studies to present how ANT helps me to trace and observe the construction of intercultural competence in different aspects at the educational level through networks. In my first case study, I observed that intercultural competence is mapped in universities through leadership, unfolding continuously with the practices of different roles such as government, Party, university, leaders, etc. ANT argues that power, domination, and structure are processes resulting from actor-network relationships rather than given systems attributes (Law 1992). Firstly, I identified significant elements within the network. According to ANT principles, the leaders of the colleges are not the sole actors; the government, policies, time and space, environment, and more all contribute to the action—multiple actors generate the action. As such, any actor is active and enacted by other actors because

its capacities are established, limited, or mediated by its network (Latour, 2005; Law, 2009; Mol, 2010).

I tracked the translation process of this network, including the four moments of translation of problematization, interessement, enrolment, and mobilization (Callon, 1986), identified stakeholder interactions and investigated the relationships between stakeholders in terms of extent of communication, power, resource control, and influence. It raises the attention of politics and ideology in intercultural competence. In tracking the development of this network, I found that the development of intercultural competence is the result of social negotiations among national policies, university presidents, staff, business partners, students and managers, social media, technology, etc. (When the negotiation process changes, so do the results).

Throughout this process, I compared some conditions in China and those in the US and European countries. Utilizing comparative conditions presented a clear opportunity to identify the actor networks. It showed that too many elements vary from condition to condition to say that the 'interpretation' of the substance explains the central variation. Instead, the conclusion was that what varies is the substance, not the interpretation of it. What it identified were different enactments of culture enabled by the different condition setups. During the process, the actors are performative and generate realities. Realities are not immutable but shaped, enacted, and contested (Law, 2009, p. 151). At the same time, the performance incorporating entities, spaces, and materials is not static and separate but constantly flows in movement and relations in educational leadership. As one part of such a functional system of education, leadership is a power relation formed by multiple roles, both human mainly leaders such as the dean of the college, deputy of the dean, and the head in charge of the majors, and non-human entities engaged in social interactions such as the state, governments, Party and educational policies with their interests, which means we also need to see how the actors perform the reality of the leadership.

Simultaneously, I investigated the classroom teaching practice and found the school education of intercultural competence is mainly achieved through "knowledge" which is blackboxed in my second case study. The knowledge about intercultural competence is solidified as natural knowledge through classroom teaching practice. The teaching practice is a network of heterogeneous actors, including the curriculum, teacher performances, course documents, textbooks, moments of classroom interaction, and classroom equipment, which undergo changes during mutual translations.

Knowledge from an ANT perspective is not a latent attribute of any one element or individual but a series of actions as a network becomes enacted into being. That is to say, knowledge is also not bequeathed or given but constructed through reflective, dialogical practice（Roberts, 2008, p. 100). At the same time, whether or not a statement of knowledge is believed depends far less on its veracity than on the conditions of its construction: who is making it, to whom it is being addressed, and from which institutions it emerges and is made visible.

ANT necessitates a deeper exploration of the ontology of scientific knowledge, considering internal and external factors, objects and environments, cognitive processes, and results, among others. The teacher's classroom teaching is likened to a laboratory of knowledge production and transmission. I need to understand how all actors in the laboratory create connections among each other, ultimately enabling intercultural competence to become a black box through translation.

Thus, I explored how elements converge, interact, and become ingrained or black-boxed and investigated how teaching activities encapsulate the knowledge of intercultural competence, emphasizing a focus on teaching processes rather than solely on outcomes. It challenges conventional, teacher-centric perspectives and prompts a reevaluation of this phenomenon as a manifestation of an intricate and dynamic network encompassing not only the teacher but also various other actors,

such as the teaching aids, curriculum, classroom space, students, and the texts they engage with, etc. (Rubin et al., 2021, p. 320). Moreover, it underscores that this is not merely a process in which individuals are entangled but simultaneously a material practice dispersed across diverse materials, including textbooks, teaching materials, professional standards, tools, technologies specific to professional practice, and institutional contexts. At the same time, I found that teaching is never merely about skills and methods, and teaching and learning are always non-neutral, political, and ethical processes. It is a profoundly political process since so many forms of social control rely on erasing or silencing various processes and deleting them from representations of the practice. We need to see the constructive nature of knowledge in the narrative of the teaching process. The classroom is revealed as a network that emerges through translation between specific actors. In essence, altering the effects of teachers necessitates a change in the actor networks of which the teacher is a part.

Furthermore, I traced how material practice builds a network. The network extends beyond the physical realm, incorporating empirical knowledge sourced from digital forums and technologies employed for online learning and entertainment. I attempt to describe how actors coalesce through their heterogeneous assemblages and how the black box solidifies into a tangible reality. I traced the actors to explore how things come to be.

I explored the connections between humans and non-humans through the material practice of social media outside the classroom. Human and non-human actors (including social media) are part of networks that collectively produce knowledge of culture and reshape an intercultural reality. Social media is viewed as a mediator of material, space, and time and plays a crucial role in constructing actor networks. It is not merely an instrumental entity that is acted upon by human actors but also actively changes and shapes human actors themselves. In other words, it is not merely a passive tool but an active participant in shaping our understanding of intercultural reality. For example, social media platforms, algorithms, smartphones, and other

technological devices participate in a digital age that regulates our interaction with culture and shapes our perceptions of reality. At the same time, the power relations of social media with other Chinese institutions such as the government and party are materialized through the process by way of the media frame and shaping the means (technological/ideological).

ANT presents an innovative theoretical approach, offering a framework to understand how social media shape and are shaped by the network structures in which they are embedded. It provides a unique lens to explore the material practices through which the collective and social media construct intercultural reality and the power dynamics inherent in this process. It reflexively extends a theory of interconnectedness, reimagining material practices as spatialized practices of knowledge/cultural construction. They do not merely represent reality but enact it.

In these three cases, I aim to translate its discourse of how intercultural competence in Chinese universities is currently constructed in collective practices or how it comes into being. In this same sense, this research is a narrative of various realities, ANT, educational leadership, teaching, and other labeled phenomena. The research presents a representation of these realities and simultaneously makes these realities.

In my studies, the methodology for ANT requires recording actors' interactions, connections, and effects. Thus, I traced human actors based on the interviews and questionnaire and explored non-human actors, including policies, documents, reports, physical/geographical entities, technology, etc.; the diverse data–as opposed to interviews alone–are useful in the research. In the process, I used interviews to explore human actors; I acknowledge that the network is limited by the interview method; ANT studies draw on qualitative data – primarily ethnographic observations and documents, but also, to some extent, on qualitative interviews. Observation and documentation are considered better ways to "follow the actor" and maintain an open mind about the field of study (Latour, 1987; Latour, 2010). In my studies

incorporating qualitative interviews, I knew human actors should not be privileged over non-human actors.

Latour (2005) argues that qualitative interviews, due to their researcher-driven approach, not only collect but filter the data, making them a less suitable method for ANT-inspired research. However, over the last decade or so, several studies have sought to apply ANT concepts to interview material, often with a focus on mapping interactions between human and non-human actors (Tatnall, 2002; Jóhannesson, 2005; Konrad, 2006; Blok et al., 2008; Demant, 2009; Törrönen, Tigerstedt, 2018). I place myself this way but acknowledge that applying ANT concepts to interview data requires careful consideration.

Thus, in employing an interview approach, it is crucial that the interview becomes a space in which to "engage the explored" (Despret, 2005, p. 82), a space in which interviewees are allowed to articulate those elements in the networks that are important to them. In other words, the interview needs to adopt a relatively open and exploratory or experimental approach. And human actors' statements (for example, in interviews) at face value instead of explaining their statements with reference to factors outside the data.

As a method, ANT acknowledges the use of multiple data sources as a way to strengthen a case. Therefore, I collected the data from various sources and performed observation, documentary material, questionnaire and interviews, etc. Semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate for this research due to flexibility. Using this type of interview enabled me to vary the questions freely, add new questions, amend the questions, or even omit some questions depending on what was going on during the interview. It helped me to understand the human actors' perceptions with regard to non-human actors and to what extent these non-human actors affect their actions. At the same time, it is possible to identify key actors within the network in the research, recognizing interactions and relationships between non-human actors.

In this sense, ANT can offer a relatively loosely formulated strategy for empirical analysis, encompassing methods such as interviews, questionnaires, data collection and analysis. This encourages me to conduct broadly defined studies, making it empirically feasible to address my research questions comprehensively. Moreover, I assert that ANT offer additional perspectives because materials, space, time, etc., are not mere neutral backdrops, contexts or social interaction; instead, they are constitutive elements enacted within the network. By combining space and time with physical and material aspects, the ANT perspective becomes distinctive and becomes a suitable choice for intercultural studies focused on these dimensions.

In summary, with the present study, I aim to shift the perspective on intercultural competence, traditionally grounded in individual and language use, by adopting a comprehensive analysis to address the complexities of intercultural competence. This approach allows for a broader analysis that avoids reduction (or stabilization) to a one-dimensional process. Using the ANT method allows me to challenge the traditional notion of viewing culture as a static and predefined system, proposing a more dynamic understanding that culture is continually constructed through the interactions of various actors. Similarly, within the ANT framework, intercultural competence emphasizes the ongoing processes of translation and mediation within the network, disregarding traditional cultural boundaries. ANT's focus on the agency of both human and non-human actors reshapes our thinking about culture and intercultural concepts. Just as Latour (2005, p. 109) reminds us, we have to free matters of fact from their reduction by "nature" exactly as much as we should liberate objects and things from their "explanation" by society.

Case Study One

Mapping Intercultural Competence: The Educational Leadership in Chinese Universities

1. Introduction

Since entering the 21st century, intercultural competence has received widespread attention (Lv, 2019, p. 271). Intercultural competence is an essential ability for talents in the 21st century; it is an inevitable requirement for social progress and economic development, and enhancing students' intercultural competence is also considered a practical and urgent requirement for the new century (Cong, 2014, p. 37). In 2018, the Chinese Ministry of Education officially included intercultural competence in the standards for cultivating undergraduate foreign language professionals, which shows that the country attaches great importance to the cultivation of intercultural competence of foreign language professionals. The *Outline of the National Medium and Long Term Educational Reform and Development Plan* (2010-2020) also pointed out that it is necessary to adapt to the requirements of the state's economic opening to the outside world and cultivate a large number of students who have an intercultural competence with an international perspective, are familiar with international rules, and can participate in international affairs and international competition talent (Tao, 2022, p. 48).

The degree of attention it gets nowadays and its main development area can be seen; the primary calling seems to fall precisely within the terms of higher education, particularly in universities, and one part of its educational programming also in terms of supporting the leaders to cope with the challenges of the new social situation. Mapping intercultural competence as part of education in the universities is one of the aspects. Leadership constitutes an indispensable facet of the educational framework. The conventional perspective on leadership predominantly emphasizes the actions of a singular leader. For example, Cherkowski and Ragoonaden (2016, p. 33) emphasize that the professional development of school leaders is the key to establishing a

proactive and diverse leadership model within and among schools. It neglects the underlying power dynamics inherent in leadership in Chinese universities and the multifaceted roles that leadership assume within these interactions. Therefore it becomes imperative to delve into a more comprehensive examination, shedding light on the intricate relationships and the presence of power within them.

By broadening our focus beyond human leaders in the intercultural domain and scrutinizing who (government officials, school leaders), and what is leading (educational policies, funding, and the significant entities—the state, government, the party) and from where (universities), within the interconnected endeavors of hierarchical educational systems, we open avenues for a more nuanced understanding. What alterations in our perspectives might arise if we acknowledge their contributions or hindrances to creating, advancing, or impeding intercultural competence? This shift in perspective prompts us to re-examine the approach used in mapping intercultural competence by educational leadership.

Thus, I intend to approach the study through the lens of Actor-Network Theory (ANT). This allows exploring leadership as a practice shaped by human actors and non-human entities engaged in social interactions. Firstly, Latour's question: Who is the actor? Now, it splits into two different questions: Who are the entities that—by translating each other—together build up and realize a specific overall program of action? Moreover, who are the entities to whom the resulting action is attributed (Ingo, 2006, p. 138)? Secondly, how does a network produce? What translation processes enable these diverse entities and humans to exert their respective functions and influences, thus constructing and expanding the network? What and who is included and excluded in this process? Klenke (2008) argues that leadership is essentially a relational practice. As I described earlier, as one part of such a functional system of education, leadership is a power relation formed by multiple roles, both human mainly leaders such as the dean of the college, deputy of the dean, and the head in charge of the majors in the universities, and non-human entities engaged in social interactions

such as the state, governments, party with their interests, which means we also need to see how the actors perform the reality of the leadership.

The approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of the heterogeneous elements that make up a network, and this interconnectedness is elucidated in the process of translation. This process has been described as pivotal in analyzing how the different elements in an actor-network interact (Callon, 1986). Callon and Latour (1981, p. 279) state: By translation, we understand all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion, and violence thanks to which an actor or force takes or causes to be conferred on itself the authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force.

I aim to offer an ANT perspective on educational leadership and its power relations for describing the process of mapping intercultural competence at Chinese universities. I observed it in this case study and examined the correlations engendered through translation. The analysis, drawing on data from documents, policies, interviews, and questionnaire, is geared toward unveiling the key roles and functions of the universities involved in translation and, eventually, the translation process. ANT is a valuable lens for exploring educational leadership, and it enables a nuanced understanding of what is explicated, amplified, and interconnected and unravels those rooted in "taken-for-granted" assumptions of "intercultural competence" in an actor-network re-description (Michael, 1996, p.56). Simultaneously, recognizing the centrality of power in shaping spatial and contextual understanding within networks of socio-material relations (Fenwick, Edwards, 2012), I observe the power relations constructed by these roles during the translation process. This entails examining how power operates the conceptualization and mapping of intercultural competence in the Chinese educational context, shedding light on the intricate interplay of human and non-human actors in shaping the educational landscape in China today.

2. Practical Trace and Observation

By employing ANT's theoretical approach, my primary focus is on the translation process, during which I identified the activities of multiple roles, such as educational leaders, teachers, students, and the state, government, and party those non-human entities. Practically, I conducted semi-structured interviews with those university leaders, following their thoughts and observing their interactions with other roles. I also conducted a questionnaire to gain information on the current situation of education on intercultural competence in universities. Additionally, I tracked the relevant policies and news related to intercultural competence as the agencies of those non-human entities such as the state, government, party, and universities, examining how they attempt to map intercultural competence into universities and stabilize the network. Through this way, I seek to understand these relationships' dynamic and evolving nature, shedding light on how various roles come together and contribute to the assemblage process. By doing so, I discern how the assemblage process unfolds and how translation occurs within the network. At the same time, I narrate the translation process of mapping intercultural competence and gain insights into the complex processes that shape intercultural competence in the Chinese educational context.

University leaders, particularly the college dean and deputy deans, play a crucial role in mapping intercultural competence. Their function is instrumental in initiating and guiding the college's approach to intercultural interactions. They are responsible for overseeing educational, budgetary, and administrative matters within their units, under the guidance of national and regional policies. Their role extends to providing the vision and leadership necessary for their departments or colleges to excel and contribute to the university's teaching, research, and service missions. Those in charge of major responsibilities oversee discipline development, teaching and research initiatives, faculty and staff development, administrative management, and international exchange and cooperation.

The interviews with university leaders are conducted to gain insights into their practices and perspectives. It is designed to serve as a platform for the leaders to articulate their perspectives. The objective is to evoke their vocabulary, allowing them to express the intricacies of their practices. The interviews aim to uncover not only what they do but also how and why they engage in specific actions. By using specific terms and phrases that are deeply felt, widely accessible, and commonly intelligible to participants, the interviews are sought to identify words that hold symbolic significance, capturing a profound sense of identity, relationships, actions, emotions, and locations.

Additionally, examining relevant documents, particularly policies, has indicated that policy is a significant factor. Policies are continuous assemblages shaped by interests, priorities, negotiations, and struggles within networks and relations. In some instances, policies function as non-human agents, facilitating the initial connections among elements. Within ANT, the agency is extended beyond human intentionality. An agent is plainly understood as "anything that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference" (Latour, 2005, p. 71). Such a claim asserts that what matters is not the intentionality itself but how intentionality is shaped (allowed, encouraged, blocked, rendered possible) by an extension of causal relations between humans and non-humans. From an ANT perspective, non-humans are active, vibrant agents that also exert power rather than being passive resources at the disposal of humans. In this case study, they establish the organizational behavior framework, shaping expectations and standards for "intercultural competence".

Through the investigation of multiple data (including interviews, questionnaire, documents, policies, etc.), I observed the current situation and discerned the education of intercultural competence in those Chinese universities. This approach allows for the construction of a narrative model depicting how Chinese universities map intercultural competence in this case study.

3. Procedure

This case study tracked diverse data, incorporating the questionnaire and interviews and collecting relevant documents and policies. The questionnaire, administered to students in Chinese universities, utilizes it to gather fundamental information on intercultural courses, subsequently informing the interview structure. The interview process encompasses seven interviewees. Additionally, documents and policies are examined by collecting pertinent texts and scrutinizing their interactions in mapping intercultural competence. It is structured according to the following steps:

Questionnaire Administration:

I conducted questionnaire among Chinese university students to gather essential information on intercultural courses (Appendix 4).

Interview Design:

I structured interviews with seven different interviewees, including the dean of the college, the deputy dean of the college, and the major's charge. These interviews aim to provide in-depth insights into perceptions and practices related to intercultural competence.

Document Collection:

I gathered relevant documents, especially policies that play a role in mapping intercultural competence within Chinese universities.

First Stage

In the initial stage of this case study, I executed a questionnaire survey, and the information gathered in this questionnaire is also used in the other two case studies. The survey involved a randomly selected cohort of university students from different places in China, resulting in 527 valid responses. The participants encompassed both undergraduate and postgraduate (including master and doctoral) students, representing various universities across different regions and majors, as illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 1

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE

PhD Student:2.47%

Master Degree Student: 37.57%

Undergraduate: 59.96%
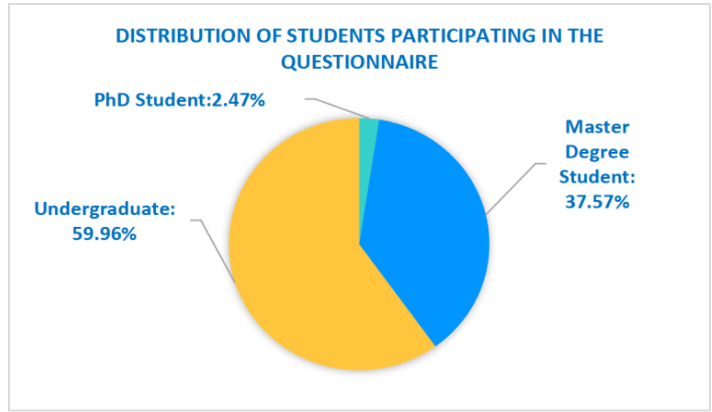
Table 1

Number of Sample	Number of University	Number of College or Department	Number of Major
527	48	60	68

According to the statistics of the questionnaire survey, 68 majors participated. 31 majors chose whether to offer intercultural courses. However, through screening, only 13 majors provided practical information and gave the names of the intercultural courses directly related to the cultivation of intercultural competence. Please see the figure below.

Figure 2

THE PROPORTION OF INTERCULTURAL COURSE OFFERING

Intercultural course offered, 19.12%

No Intercultural course offered, 80.88%
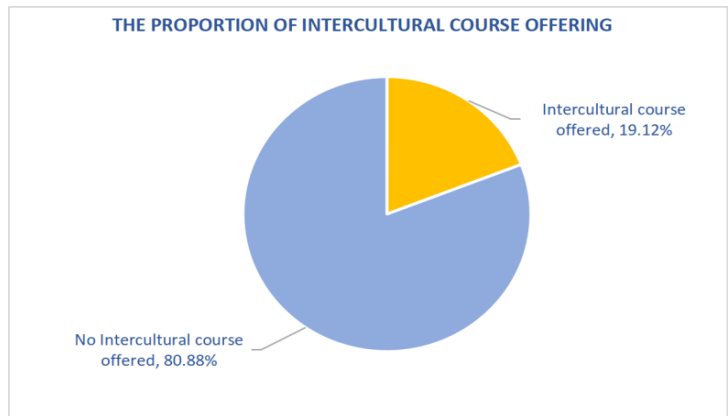
Among them, 19.12% of majors offering courses[10] are as follows:

Table 2

Major	Course Title	Course Level
Communication	跨文化传播研究 Intercultural Communication Studies	Master's Degree Course
German Language and Literature	跨文化交际 Intercultural Communication	Master's Degree Course
French Language and Literature	跨文化交际 Intercultural Communication	Master's Degree Course
Translation	跨文化交际 Intercultural Communication	Undergraduate Course
International Chinese Language Education	跨文化交际 Intercultural Communication	Master's Degree Course
Portuguese	跨文化交际 Intercultural Communication	Undergraduate Course
Business English	跨文化商务沟通 Intercultural Business Communication	Undergraduate Course
Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics	跨文化交际 Intercultural Communication	Master's Degree Course
Marketing	跨文化交际 Intercultural Communication	Undergraduate Course
English and American Literature	跨文化交际 Intercultural Communication	Master's Degree Course
English literature	跨文化交际 Intercultural Communication	Master's Degree Course

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[10] According to the investigation, none of these universities offer a course specifically named Intercultural Competence. The courses available are generally called Intercultural Communication, but the content of these Intercultural Communication courses includes aspects of Intercultural Competence.

Linguistics and Applied Linguistics	比较文学与跨文化研究 Comparative Literature and Intercultural Studies	Master's Degree Course
German	跨文化交际 Intercultural Communication	Undergraduate Course
English	跨文化交际 Intercultural Communication	Undergraduate Course
Comparative Literature and Intercultural Communication	全球化与跨文化传播 Globalization and Intercultural Communication	Ph.D. Course

The information illustrates that the majority of universities providing direct offerings of intercultural communication courses predominantly concentrate on language-related professional fields. This emphasis is particularly notable in foreign languages and international Chinese education disciplines. While some institutions extend intercultural courses to majors in communication and foreign trade, these offerings often maintain a connection to foreign languages. Colleges providing intercultural courses or training programs for students and teachers in intercultural competence primarily operate within the domains of these majors above.

Second Stage

The research employed semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions to directly gather insights into understanding intercultural competence and its developmental status within universities, as perceived by leaders. The choice of semi-structured interviews was motivated by their flexibility and capacity to encourage reflection (Brundrett, Rhodes, 2014; Cohen et al., 2007; Wengraf, 2001). Semi-structured interviews provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on and explore issues they deem significant. While a list of predetermined questions (Appendix 1) was prepared before entering the field for data collection, the

semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for adaptability. This flexibility facilitated the restructuring of interview questions and encouraged further discussion, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of intercultural competence and its development within university settings.

In this phase, I conducted interviews with seven leaders representing different colleges across various universities. These leaders held positions as deans of colleges, deputies of colleges, or heads of majors related to intercultural courses. Specifically, they were affiliated with institutions such as the College of Foreign Languages, the College of International Chinese Culture, and the School of Communication, among others (refer to Table 3 for detailed information). The interviewees' ages ranged from 40 to 60. These interviewees were selected based on their leadership roles in colleges offering intercultural courses and their willingness to participate in the study. Due to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic and associated anti-epidemic measures in China, all interviews were conducted online through video or voice calls. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The discussions were conducted in Mandarin, recorded with the interviewees' consent, and transcribed by the researcher. To ensure the confidentiality of the interviewees, pseudonyms were employed in the research. Basic information about these seven interviewees as participants is provided below:

Table 3: Basic Information on Interviewees

Interviewee	Position	Professional Background	Years of Educational Work Experience	Teaching Experience of Intercultural (跨文化) Course	Location of the University	Majors Offer Intercultural (跨文化) Course	Foreign Language Background	Abroad Experience
Interviewee1	Deputy Dean of the College	Linguistics	Worked 15 years	Non	Beijing	International Chinese Language Education	English	Yes

Interviewee2	Dean of the College	Communication Studies	Worked 20+ years	Yes Intercultural Communication 2 Years	Chongqing	Communication	Non	Yes
Interviewee3	Deputy Dean of the College	Linguistics	Worked 20+ years	Non	Nanjing	International Chinese Language Education	English	Yes
Interviewee4	The Dean of the Department	Linguistics	Worked 20+ years	Non	Yichang	International Chinese Language Education	Non	Non
Interviewee5	Discipline Leader	English Literature	Worked 20+ years	Yes Intercultural Communication 11Years	Ji nan	English	Yes	Yes
Interviewee6	Discipline Leader	Linguistics	Worked 10+ years	Non	Xi'an	International Chinese Language Education	Yes	Yes
Interviewee7	Deputy Dean of the College	English Literature and Education	Worked 15+ years	Yes Intercultural Communication 1Year	Hangzhou	English	Yes	Yes

Simultaneously, in this case study, the document investigation encompassed a collection of documents acquired during the research process, some of which were referenced by the interviewees. These documents originated from primary or secondary sources (Brundrett, Rhodes, 2014; Merriam, Tisdell, 2016). Documents sourced from primary outlets comprised policies, government publications, school websites, and news articles from observed websites. These documents were either publicly available or directly obtained by the researcher. To identify relevant documents addressing intercultural competence and support my research, I extensively examined official websites, including those of the Ministry of Education

of the People's Republic of China and the Center for Language and Cooperation. Additionally, I utilized search engines and electronic archives in my document retrieval process. The selection of documents adhered to specific criteria:

1. Inclusion of documents published by the Chinese government related to intercultural competence.

2. Consideration of documents available on the official websites of universities.

3. Inclusion of publicly available documents.

On the other hand, documents from secondary sources were those gathered indirectly, often through the experiences or insights of the participants. Examples include policies or internal publications mentioned by the interviewees during the interviews. This dual-source approach to document investigation allowed for a comprehensive exploration of materials that influenced this study's understanding and construction of intercultural competence.

This extensive document collection process is crucial for enhancing my understanding of the actions of non-human agents in this network process and tracking their efficacy in the translation process. Table 4 details the primary documents central to this study. Given my specific focus on mapping intercultural competence within Chinese universities, these policies formed the central and significant component of my analytical framework. Table 4 provides the primary policy documents that guided my research.

Table 4. Main Policy Documents Collected and Referenced for This Research

1. The 14th Five-Year Plan
2. Outline of the national program for medium and long-term educational reform and development (2010-2020 years)
3. China's One Belt, One Road initiative
4. Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Work at

Universities under The New Situation 2017

5. National Standard for Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Specialty in General Colleges and Universities

6. Teaching Guide for Undergraduate English Majors

7. Guiding training program for students of Master's degree in Chinese international education

8. The new curriculum outline for German majors for 2020 at Shanghai Jiaotong University

9. Undergraduate Program of Chinese International Education (Version 2022) at International College Southwest University

10. Guiding Opinions on Strengthening the Reform of the Construction of Teachers in Colleges and Universities in the New Era

Total number of documents referenced: 10

In addition, specific pertinent news articles that I accessed online will be presented in the subsequent findings.

4. Findings

Initially, through tracking human leaders and relevant documents and policies, other main entities except leaders involved in mapping intercultural competence in these Chinese universities were identified (at the university, apart from leaders, administrative faculty, teachers, and students are also integral human roles of this network. This study primarily emphasizes the role of leaders in the translation process (the roles of faculty, teachers and students will be presented in other case studies). The entities include universities, government, states, political parties, and funding/financial entities as an economic supporting role. In the translation process, specific roles do have implications that are specified by different kinds of institutions (e.g., 'leader' in a hierarchically organized institution) for which functionality needs to

be implemented. Subsequently, I traced the intricate connections between them and described how the network was constructed through translation. This approach aimed to comprehend how these roles collaborate in mapping intercultural competence.

4.1 Identification of Leading Roles of Leadership

A. Universities

This case study found that intercultural competence education predominantly occurs in universities. The interviewees involved in this case study are all affiliated with Chinese universities, where the relevant policies highlighted in this study are both advocated and implemented. This case study found that universities function as intermediaries, facilitating the transfer and integration of intercultural competence concepts into educational practices. At the same time, they serve as the primary environment for constructing intercultural competence, playing a pivotal role in mediating, translating, enrolling actors, and influencing power dynamics within the network that shape educational processes and outcomes related to intercultural competence. Universities serve as the main location in this network construction, where both human and non-human activities take place, providing the necessary space for these activities. As a platform for leadership development, universities provide spaces where leaders implement pertinent educational policies, teachers impart knowledge, and students absorb this knowledge within physical settings. Acting as an intermediary, the university negotiates between elements such as students, faculty, curriculum, and external influences by enrolling stakeholders into its network, thereby becoming a key player in shaping the educational landscape for intercultural competence.

Moreover, the university as a set of performances provides a template onto which new performances of the university need to be articulated. Securing the participation of large actors like leaders, teachers, and students, as well as policies, courses, texts, and technologies, not only helps knowledge become blackboxed but also stabilizes and expands the networks. For example, intercultural curricula must undergo ideological

scrutiny, including implementing a review mechanism for university textbooks and courses. This pertains to a discourse on examining and revising instructional materials involving various stakeholders. Several interviewees engaged in this case study have consistently mentioned that textbook scrutiny, especially the ideological part of the textbooks, needs to be examined. From what interviewee 3 stated: 这个一般我不会去具体去审查用什么东西，你知道现在学校他有一个导向的，你不能乱讲，我想他们都是经验丰富的老师，这个不存在问题。(I generally do not go to review what textbooks they use specifically. The universities have the orientation. You know what you cannot talk about. They are all experienced teachers and worked for many years, so there will not be a problem.) According to the interviewee's statement, it appears that teachers are already well-versed in the ideological aspects that warrant attention by the leadership. Interviewee 7 also mentioned in his description:因为现在教材审核会比较严,有个原则，就是这个这个教材它必须是在国内出版过的。(Nowadays, the checkup is stricter. There is a principle, that is, the textbooks must have been published in China.)

As a potent institution, universities impact the distribution of resources and the development and implementation of intercultural competence programs. They play a crucial role in negotiating meanings and practices within the network. For instance, universities allocate and plan resources to different colleges or departments, establish various majors based on socio-economic and political factors, and define professional boundaries for cultivating intercultural competence. This may involve translating educational goals into curriculum, aligning technology with pedagogical practices, adapting teaching methods to suit diverse student needs, fostering an atmosphere for diverse communication, and providing a tangible platform. For example, it found that language-related disciplines, such as English, German, French, and international Chinese language education in Chinese universities, play a crucial role in cultivating intercultural competence. Based on survey data, intercultural competence is emphasized and developed in these language-related majors. These disciplines serve as focal points for the targeted development of intercultural competence, acting as

proxies for other actors' broader deployment of intercultural competence.

Hence, these universities are not isolated entities but integral parts of a more extensive network encompassing relationships with government bodies, industries, research organizations, and broader society. These external connections influence the university's decisions and actions, reflecting the broader socio-political context. Universities are embedded within society, establishing a spatial relationship of social power.

B. State, Government, Party

Though the interviewees did not directly articulate the roles of the state, government, or Party in intercultural competence, they grounded their understanding of culture in a state-centric framework. Specifically, their definition of culture revolves around the state, exemplified by the demarcation between Chinese and foreign cultures. For instance: (I have excerpted relevant segments from my interactions with Interviewee 3 and Interviewee 4 as examples)

With Interviewee 3:

我：您是怎么理解跨文化和跨化能力的吗？

受访者 3：跨文化就是跨越,比如说不同的民族，不同国家的这种文化。

(Me: How do you understand the concept of intercultural and intercultural competence?

Interviewee 3: Intercultural, to me, means crossing different cultures, such as cultures of different ethnicities and the cultures of different countries. That is how I perceive it.)

With Interviewee 4:

我：什么叫不同的文化背景呢？您可以举例吗？

受访者 4：比如中国的这个文化，跟这个泰国的肯定不一样，各种风俗礼仪，语言，各方面都不一样。

(Me: What do different cultural backgrounds mean? Could you provide some

examples?

Interviewee 4: For example, the culture in China is different from that in Thailand—various customs, etiquette, language, and many other aspects are distinct.)

Indeed, throughout my interviews, a notable pattern emerged as most participants consistently exhibited a pronounced inclination to describe cultures according to the state, which holds considerable significance in comprehending cultural distinctions.

Simultaneously, in China, a predominant proportion of universities operate as public institutions, and even private educational entities are not autonomous in their functioning, as they are subject to the leadership of the Party and governmental supervision. Directed by the Party's guidance, these institutions fall under the oversight of either the Ministry of Education or local education authorities. Besides, government-issued policies play a pivotal role as substantial influencers, embodying the officially endorsed position of the government. Furthermore, school leaders assume the role of spokespersons, thereby reinforcing the interconnectedness between educational institutions and the broader political milieu.

In the meantime, the leadership of the state and the Party consistently takes precedence in policies, with a conspicuous emphasis on the roles of socialism, the Party, and the State in public education. This emphasis is exemplified by, for example:

It is necessary to carry forward the excellent traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture, implement the project of inheriting Chinese culture, promote the integration of excellent traditional Chinese culture into education and teaching, strengthen the education of revolutionary culture and advanced socialist culture, deepen the history of the Communist Party of China, the history of the People's Republic of China, The study and education of the history

of reform and opening up and the history of socialist development...[11]

Moreover, school leaders are required to 坚持党对高等学校的领导，坚定中国特色社会主义道路自信、理论自信、制度自信、文化自信，全面贯彻党的教育方针，坚持社会主义办学方(Uphold the Party's leadership over higher education, maintain confidence in the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, theoretical self-confidence, institutional self-confidence, and cultural self-confidence. Thoroughly implement the Party's education policy and adhere to the socialist direction in running schools).[12]

Through the trace and observation, I found that entities such as the state, government, and party hold the control within the network. Laws, policies, and regulations act as their agents, including university leaders. Practically, the function of the state in the endeavors of school leaders is delineated by emphasizing adherence to national-level laws, policies, and regulations. It plays a pivotal role in actively shaping and directing the agenda-setting process. Concurrently, the Communist Party has retained its authoritative influence in decision-making processes. Besides, some may contend that distinguishing between the Party and the Chinese State poses a formidable challenge. The extensive penetration of Party organization into State institutions may serve as a discouraging factor and raise questions regarding the meaningfulness of such an endeavor (Zheng, 1997, p. 11). In response to this concern, the term "party-state" is used to characterize a state like China. Moreover, government entities, notably the Ministry of Education (MoE) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), constitute an additional category of stakeholders engaged in formulating leadership standards. While they frequently wield considerable influence in policy development, they exert their impact by extending invitations to diverse stakeholders to participate in the standard-setting process and foster connections with them.

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[11] The paragraph excerpted from 2017 关于加强和改进新形势下高校思想政治工作的意见（Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities under the New Situation 2017）.

[12] The content selected from2017 中共中央组织部 教育部关于印发《高等学校领导人员管理暂行办法》的通知 (Notice from the Organization Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Ministry of Education on Issuing the 'Interim Measures for the Management of Leaders in Higher Education Institutions).

C. Funding

According to interviewee 4's description, for example, 课程建设，培养师资，比如说支持我们建立孔子学院，这个是很大的支持......培养方案，包括我们这个培养方案的资金，包括海外实习，实习期建立管理，学生的管理管理派出我们这些学还有一系列的政策......建立研究中心与实训基地......(Curriculum development, faculty training, support for the establishment of Confucius Institutes - these are significant forms of support. This includes training programs, funding for our curriculum, overseas internships, establishing and managing internship periods, student supervision, and a series of related policies. This also involves the establishment of research centers and training bases); it has to have funding support from the government or the universities.

The support shown in the relevant national policies inherently encompasses financial backing. This financial support enables the initiation of diverse projects, the establishment of new academic programs within universities, and a heightened probability of organizing a spectrum of activities and executing construction projects，which provides a solid foundation for network expansion.

Funding for Chinese universities emanates from diverse channels, encompassing contributions from the central government, local administrations, and tuition fees. Public universities receive substantial financial support from the government. In contrast, private institutions predominantly rely on tuition fees and other private funding streams (from the official report of 2022 National Education Development Statistical Bulletin by MoE,民办高校 764 所，占全国高校总数的比例 25.36%。其中，普通本科学校 390 所；本科层次职业学校 22 所；高职（专科）学校 350 所；成人高等学校 2 所.There are 764 private colleges and universities, accounting for 25.36% of the total number of universities in the country. Among them are 390 regular undergraduate institutions, 22 undergraduate-level vocational schools, 350 higher vocational (associate degree) schools, and two adult higher education

institutions).[13] The People's Republic of China's central government allocates substantial funds to bolster higher education institutions. This financial support is typically disseminated through the Ministry of Education and other pertinent government agencies. Provincial and municipal governments additionally contribute to the financial support of higher education institutions within their respective jurisdictions. The extent of this funding varies based on each region's economic capacity and priorities. Governments sometimes incentivize universities to forge partnerships and collaborations with foreign institutions and organizations to facilitate intercultural interactions, offering students opportunities for international exposure. Financial support is allocated for joint projects, exchange programs, and initiatives to foster intercultural understanding.

Based on recent data on financial allocations to Chinese universities, as detailed in the 2022 China University Financial Allocation Rankings, government financial contributions emerge as a crucial and substantial source of income for these institutions, holding a pivotal role in their economic development. News releases also indicate that universities and governments allocate funds for diverse intercultural training projects, promoting the advancement of intercultural activities and initiatives. For example, the National Arts Fund funded an Intercultural Arts Management Talent Training project in 2022. It is a collaborative effort between the School of Arts at Peking University and the National Research Base for International Cultural Exchange[14]. Furthermore, the funding project 'Promoting Chinese Culture Globally' initiated in Shanghai in 2023 has started the application process.[15]

Moreover, universities seek support from private individuals, alumni, and corporations. Donations and endowments can be used for various purposes, including

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[13] The data is from 中国教育部 2022 年全国教育事业发展统计公报(2022 National Education Development Statistical Bulletin by Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China),the link is:
http://www.moe.gov.cn/fbh/live/2023/55167/mtbd/202303/t20230324_1052582.html?ivk_sa=1023197a.
[14] The information comes from the website:
https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzI1MTUyNzkyNQ==&mid=2247484275&idx=1&sn=35b1d317b271e71fb76ec86ceb6a1e4e&chksm=e9f0d4e9de875dff6d1e1f1a68668d6e8dbf75244a59ce64436ff4b500ad91013bf2bfb54f7b&scene=27
[15] The information comes from the website: https://new.qq.com/rain/a/20230923A010S000.

scholarships, research facilities, and infrastructure development. Universities also may collaborate with private companies for research projects, development programs, and other initiatives. This also can result in financial support for the university.   This funding can support the development and implementation of new technologies and infrastructure within universities, influencing the overall network configuration. As a result, funding sources are among the various roles that also contribute to the construction and development of the leadership as a complex socio-technical network.

4.2 Translation of The Actor Network

Following ANT in this case study, mapping intercultural competence emerges through the assemblage of power dynamics among diverse entities, including the state, political parties, government agencies, academic institutions, school leaders and financial entities, among others. The accentuation and development of intercultural competence are derived from these socio-material relationships. Within these interactions, stakeholders translate their affiliations with others, endeavor to strike common interests, and are dedicated to promoting their respective agendas.

According to Callon (1986), a network is of miscellaneous actors through a four step process (the four moments of translation): problematization, interessement, enrolment and mobilization. In the process, the non-human entities, educational leaders, teachers and students' interests may vary widely. They may encourage or constrain the map of intercultural competence. Mapping of intercultural competence requires the aligning of the interests of the multiple roles within the network. This involves the translation of those interests into a common interest in adopting and using "intercultural competence". Translation explains how intercultural competence become a result of negotiations between the involved subjects, it is the process of heterogeneous entities and their agents negotiate to align their interests, striving to achieve common goals and stabilize the network.

A.Problematization

Problematization is the agent becoming aware of a problem, and forming a conceptualization of that problem. During problematization, a primary actor tries to establish itself as an obligatory passage point (OPP) between the other actors and the network, so that it becomes indispensable. The OPP is in the primary actor's direct path while others may have to overcome obstacles to pass through it (Callon 1986, p. 26). In this case study, problematization is the initial phase of the translation process where a focal actor in this network, non-human entities such as the state, government, and party serve as the core controllers. They exercise their influence through policies, which act as their agents to identify a problem and form a conceptualization of that problem. During the problematization phase, the focal actor defines a specific point or process that all other actors must go through to achieve their goals and address the identified problem. It ensures that all actors align their interests with those of the focal actor, thereby reinforcing the centrality and indispensability of the focal actor within the network. By establishing an OPP, the focal actor effectively controls the network by making itself an essential intermediary that facilitates the interactions and negotiations among other actors.

Simultaneously, I found the inception of intercultural competence is considered an international landscape that follows the pace of globalization and its response to the challenges of the new era. It can be seen from the interviews, for example, interviewee 4 described in this way:

我：为什么要推广跨文化课程呢？主要原因或背景是什么？(Me: Why promote intercultural courses? What is the main reason or background?)

受访者 4：汉语国际教育指导委员会给我们推荐了一个培养方案，里面有一门我门必修课，其中之一叫跨文化交际。任何高校不允许把这门课拿下,就是国家硬性的规定。可能更一个大的背景是因为全球化加强了国家与国家之间的联系,一个是全球化，第二个是适应我们国家的战略。(Interviewee 4: The Chinese International Education Guidance Committee recommended a training plan, which includes a required course for us, one of which is called intercultural communication.

No university is allowed to take this course; it is a rigid rule of the country. Perhaps a more extensive background is that globalization has strengthened the connection between countries. One is globalization, and the second is adapting to our country's strategy.)

Globalization interacts with the state. The state must also modify itself to meet the requirements of a globalized system with strategic Initiatives aligned with its interests. With China's emergence as a global economic player, especially after joining WTO, Cultural policy has gradually become an essential part of national strategy; intercultural competence has become essential in professional settings as a part of national cultural soft power. The 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China expounded the significant importance of constructing socialism with Chinese characteristics. In particular, it emphasized establishing a development system for the Chinese characteristic culture. It also proposed that establishing an ideological awareness of Chinese characteristics in higher education is crucial for developing Chinese cultural soft power. Furthermore, the *14th Five-Year Plan* in China also emphasizes the enhancement of cultural soft power:

Part Ten Develop an advanced socialist culture (社会主义先进文化) and enhance National cultural soft power.

Section 3. Enhance the influence of Chinese culture

We will strengthen foreign cultural exchanges and multi-level civilizational dialogues, innovate and promote international communication, use online and offline, tell the Chinese story well, spread the voice of China, and promote bonding between people..... We will build a Chinese communication platform and construct a global communication system in Chinese language and culture and an international Chinese language education standard system.......

It can be observed that the state, recognizing its significance, begins to accord it priority, thereby propelling the development of cultural policies, including intercultural competence. The institutional level of ownership and support through

policies has been vital in prioritizing intercultural competence from a systems perspective. Leaders function as agents, communicators, and implementers of policies. Educational institutions must acquaint themselves with numerous government policies, which can significantly impact their decision-making processes. In this process, intercultural competence has been problematized.

These policies entail systematically developing intercultural competence within university settings, particularly in language-related disciplines. Based on interviews conducted with university leaders, it is notable that a considerable number of them possess academic backgrounds in linguistics or closely affiliated language-related disciplines, as indicated in Table 3. Moreover, interviews with these leaders showed that their comprehension of intercultural competence revolves around communication and transmission behaviors rooted in a linguistic foundation, which strengthen the language as a crucial component of intercultural competence. For example, interviewee 3 stated 多语言的能力也应该被视为跨文化能力(multilingual abilities should also be considered intercultural competence).

The integration of intercultural competence into curricula is realized through the concerted efforts of educational institutions, wherein school leaders, teachers, and students collectively execute educational policies. The intercultural courses offered by universities, cultural activities organized, cultural projects undertaken, and media initiatives also collectively contribute to emphasizing the importance of intercultural competence in the cognitive dimensions under the influence of ideology. For instance, a mandatory intercultural communication course has been incorporated in the revised 2020 curriculum for German majors at Shanghai Jiaotong University, as retrieved from the official university website. A significant aspect highlighted in the class schedule and requirements section is the course's ideological and political integration, emphasizing understanding cultural differences, enhancing national self-confidence,

and serving national strategies(了解文化差异，增强民族自信，服务国家战略)[16]. Gradually, intercultural competence has emerged as a focal point of discourse. Numerous scholarly research articles, introduced theories mentioned earlier, and policy guidance collectively contribute to promoting intercultural competence. Intercultural competence, primarily through foreign theoretical frameworks, is introduced to show China's integration into the modern global environment. However, the practical application requires cultivating intercultural competence by China's developmental goals and ideological needs. As such, it becomes imperative to define and confine this competence within specific training domains, particularly in language-related disciplines, which can focus on proficiently describing China's stories with various foreign languages. This adaptation is impelled by the state, party, and government requisites, with school leaders assuming the role of steadfast supporters and implementers. By effectively implementing policies, they ensure the network's resilience and stability.

Consequently, the execution of policies become requisite checkpoints (OPP: Obligatory Points of Passage) for the state in cultivating intercultural competence, and mandating it as a core curriculum course guarantees its recognition and value by both educators and learners. For instance, interviews with respondents indicate that intercultural courses are compulsory in international Chinese language education.

我：课程重要性如何呢？

受访者 1：我们学院的这个课程，分为几个模块儿，语言本体知识是一个模块，教育教学法是一个模块，还有第二语言认知习得，另有一个就是文化。文化里面的跨文化交际应该是里面就很重要的一门课。

我：重要性体现在哪些方面？专业是必修课吗？

受访者 1：对，他是必修课，是学科基础课。

(Me: What aspects highlight the importance of the course?

Interviewee 1: The course is divided into several modules in our college. Language ontology knowledge is one module, education pedagogy is another, there is also

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[16] The information is from the link: https://sfl.sjtu.edu.cn/Data/View/5504.

second language cognitive acquisition and one more is culture. Within the culture module, intercultural communication is considered a very important course.

Me: In what aspects does it demonstrate its importance? Is it a mandatory course for the major?

Interviewee 1: Yes, it is a mandatory course for the major and falls under the category of foundational courses for the discipline.)

Furthermore, *the full-time Master's degree program in International Chinese Education* has explicitly outlined the mandatory position of intercultural courses in its guidance-oriented training plan for graduate students.

In this process, national policies concerning the development of intercultural competence within universities primarily emphasize language-related disciplines. This delineates a distinct trajectory for universities to establish intercultural competence by establishing a comprehensive intercultural competence training network with a primary focus on linguistic proficiency. As exemplified by *the National Standards for the Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Majors in Ordinary Colleges and Universities* (referred to as the National Standards), particularly within *the National Standards for the Teaching Quality of Foreign Languages and Literatures*, out of the comprehensive set of over 60 language-specific proficiency criteria, intercultural competence stands out as a distinct and vital requirement.

B. Interessement

Interessement, or "how allies are locked in place" uses a series of processes that attempt to improve the identities and roles defined in the problematization on the other actors. It means interesting and attracting an actor by coming between it and some other actors. This is the process of recruitment of actors – creating an interest and negotiating the terms of their involvement. My interviews and examination of relevant documents found that, under the influence of party policies, the current stage predominantly relies on fostering consistency in interests and cultural identity.

Firstly, several interviewees highlight intercultural competence as the capacity to comprehend diverse cultures and adeptly navigate potential conflicts. Possessing this skill greatly facilitates smoother experiences in living, studying, and working abroad and fosters more harmonious business cooperation. For example:

我：您认为推广跨文化课程的主要原因或者背景是什么？(Me: What do you think is the main reason or background for promoting intercultural courses?)

Interviewee 1:我觉得就是全球化，人类命运共同体，大家要互相理解，互相交流，才能够避免一些不必要的误解矛盾甚至冲突。(I believe it is due to globalization and the concept of a global community of shared destiny. In order to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings, conflicts, and even confrontations, there is a need for mutual understanding and communication among people.)

我：您觉得跨文化能力和这个全球化有没有什么关系？(Me: Do you think there is any relationship between intercultural competence and globalization?)

Interviewee 5: 之前确实应该有一个相辅相成的感觉，和这个经济上的全球化，互相这个不能分离，当然现在又开始进行一些这种独立，但疫情之前，那种交流的频繁，已经真的是从世界美国化走向世界全球化，接触越来越频繁，差异摩擦就越来越多，所以跨文化这种需求就越来越强，特别是商务上，很多跨文化咨询公司在国际上蛮有这种需求的。(Previously, there was indeed a sense of complementarity, closely intertwined with economic globalization. The two are inseparable. Of course, recently, there has been a trend towards some degree of independence. However, before the pandemic, the frequent exchange had shifted from Americanization to globalization. As interactions became more frequent, the friction arising from differences increased. Consequently, the demand for intercultural understanding has grown stronger, especially in business. Many international intercultural consulting firms have experienced a notable increase in demand).

The leaders have acknowledged the role of intercultural competence in practical interpersonal relationships and business development. It translates intercultural competence into practical market and individual needs. It enhances people's interest in

learning and cultivating intercultural competence, as possessing such competence makes individuals more competitive and better equipped to address conflicts and contradictions. In their cognition, as interpersonal interactions intensify and cultures become more diversified, the imperative of intercultural competence becomes evident as a cognitive perspective to mitigate conflicts. Acquiring so-called intercultural knowledge and practical experience in communication with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds becomes pivotal in cultivating intercultural competence. Subsequently, this proficiency aids in the resolution of cultural conflicts and facilitates harmonious coexistence.

Simultaneously, intercultural competence is also employed to emphasize identity. In this case study, it is found that intercultural competence highlights the importance of disseminating Chinese culture. Emphasizing the importance of culture and tradition in intercultural competence aligns well with China's cultural transformation. Traditional Chinese culture, particularly Confucianism, has undergone a revitalization and promotion. The widespread establishment of Confucius Institutes worldwide indicates that China's reshaping of Confucianism is a strategic move to enhance its soft power through cultural diplomacy. The special attention given to Confucianism lies in its alignment with the discourse advocated by the state, such as constructing a harmonious society. This alignment underscores the synergy between traditional values and the state's strategic objectives.

It establishes common interests and a shared commitment by emphasizing cultural identity to identify unified identities. In the *Full-Time Master's Degree Program in International Chinese Education Guidance Training Plan of 2018*, the training objectives prominently feature the cultivation of Chinese cultural literacy, communication skills, and intercultural competence. Notably, "Chinese Culture and Communication" and "Intercultural Communication" have been designated core courses within the curriculum, underscoring the program's commitment to enhancing students' proficiency in these critical areas.

Indeed, it is also found that intercultural competence standards have been tailored to suit the specificities of the Chinese context. This adaptation aligns seamlessly with China's overarching agenda to enhance its soft power through cultural diplomacy, particularly in promoting traditional Chinese culture, notably Confucianism (Becard et al., 2019; Cheung, 2012; Kwan, 2014). Moreover, the underlying reasons or assumptions that underpin China's government-backed educational policy development align with Confucian values. Rooted in pragmatism, Confucian values aspire to strike a harmonious balance between collective rationality and moral commitments to societal development (Li, 2016; Li, 2017, p.136). Promoting Chinese culture and its profound significance permeates throughout this developmental process, with ideology exerting a considerable influence on the entire endeavor. For example, policy guidance places great emphasis on the promotion of Chinese culture，the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the *Opinions on Implementing the Project for the Inheritance and Development of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture*（关于实施中华优秀传统文化传承发展工程的意见）, It emphasizes that 文化是民族的血脉，是人民的精神家园。文化自信是更基本、更深层、更持久的力量。中华文化独一无二的理念、智慧、气度、神韵，增添了中国人民和中华民族内心深处的自信和自豪。为建设社会主义文化强国，增强国家文化软实力，实现中华民族伟大复兴的中国梦。 (culture is the lifeblood of a nation and the spiritual home of its people. Cultural self-confidence is a more fundamental, profound, and enduring force. Chinese culture's unique ideas, wisdom, temperament, and charm add to the deep-seated confidence and pride of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation. To build a socialist cultural powerhouse, enhance the country's cultural soft power, and realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, this cultural self-confidence is crucial to achieving the Chinese Dream.)

Moreover, the influence has also permeated into universities. In *Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Work in Universities Under*

New Circumstances（关于新形势下加强和改进高校思想政治工作的意见）, it stated: 要弘扬中华优秀传统文化和革命文化、社会主义先进文化，实施中华文化传承工程，推动中华优秀传统文化融入教育教学。(To promote outstanding traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture, implement the Chinese cultural heritage project, integrate excellent traditional Chinese culture into education and teaching.)

Apart from a focus on the study of core socialist values, recent years have witnessed a conspicuous emphasis on elements such as "telling the Chinese story well" and promoting Chinese cultural communication within the framework of intercultural competence. To illustrate, during interviews, a multitude of respondents underscored the crucial nature of adeptly narrating the Chinese story. I have excerpted relevant segments of the description from Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 7 as examples:

Interviewee 2: 跨文化，我们现在在政府主导层面也提到这样一些相关的，就是这个命运共同体啊，文明互建啊，这样一些概念。还有包括就可能现在的政策里面就是说要讲好中国故事，做好中华文化传播，我其实觉得这些里面都有一定的政治性。(Intercultural, currently at the government-led level, involves concepts such as the community of shared destiny and the mutual construction of civilizations. This also includes elements found in current policies, such as emphasizing telling China's story well and promoting Chinese cultural communication. I believe that these aspects all carry a certain political significance.)

Interviewee 7: 今年(2022 年) 特别 2021 年 531 讲话以后，事实上有很大的震动，就说对于这个跨文化传播这一块，有很多涉及的地方，就是其实各行各业都在讲一个问题，就是中国文化走出去的这个问题。(Since the speech on May 31, 2021, there has been significant impact, especially regarding intercultural communication. In various sectors, there is a widespread discussion on the issue of taking Chinese culture abroad.) 随着习政时期的整体的文化战略的这个确立，特别是讲好中国故

事的确立，我感觉我们的研究的重心和话语，或者说这个风向，都会有一个非常大的变化，所以我感觉就是这两年其实我们跨文化传播会讲的比较多一点。(With the establishment of Xi Jinping's overall cultural strategy, especially the emphasis on telling China's story well, I sense that there will be a significant shift in the focus and discourse of our research. In the past two years, there seems to be more emphasis on intercultural communication.)

According to the interviewees, they may hold different thoughts, but the identity of those Chinese school leaders produced by the assemblage of enactment is aligned with the leadership identity produced by the assemblage of leadership standards, even though the productions of the identities involve different ideologies, values, and policy agendas adopted and promoted by heterogeneous actors.

The government, employing intercultural education, actively endeavors to cultivate a public conviction in the paramount importance of intercultural competence. Emphasis is placed on accentuating the most pronounced cultural differences among nations and ethnicities. Through this process, a robust identification with Chinese culture is deliberately stimulated, thereby nurturing a profound connection among the masses. Consequently, this engenders a pervasive sense of identity, rendering it a supported and revered concept. As interviewee 3 mentioned, 我们更坚定了我们比如说我们对国家形象的维护,加强了这种民族情感，国家情感，(We have become more resolute in aspects such as the maintenance of our national image, reinforcing ethnic and national sentiments),比如说我们现在要讲好中国故事，我们也需要迫切的需要一些跨文化知识，那跨文化知识，这对学生来说获得的最简单的一个途径呢，就是有跨化课程。(For instance, as we endeavor to tell the Chinese story well, there is a pressing need for intercultural knowledge. The most straightforward way for students to acquire this intercultural knowledge is through intercultural courses).

The strategy involves accentuating the disparities between Chinese culture and that of other nations, aiming to evoke a heightened cultural identity among the populace. The

underlying rationale is that the collective sense of identity can be fortified only by presenting a unified front externally, thereby fostering an enhanced sense of security.

Furthermore, within the educational process, an implicit transmission of a sense of responsibility is encapsulated in the notion that "promoting Chinese traditional culture is the duty of every Chinese." This subtle messaging serves to instill in the public a profound sense of duty, thereby fostering a collective commitment among all Chinese individuals to actively engage in the mission of propagating Chinese culture. For example, 'Telling the Chinese story well' always showed up in the statement from the interviewees; like interviewee 3 mentioned,像我们这个行当来讲，这叫培养文化自信，要讲好中国故事，那么这个跨文化人才的培养，这种跨文化能力的培养，我觉得是非常重要。(Our profession is about fostering cultural confidence and telling the Chinese story well. Cultivating talents in intercultural abilities is crucial for effectively narrating the Chinese story. I believe it plays a vital role in telling the Chinese story well.)

By emphasizing the practical application of intercultural competence and aligning with cultural identity, national image, and other market benefits and individual needs, which align the actors' interests, a cohesive network of mutually beneficial relationships forms.

C. Enrolment

Enrolment, refers to the process by which an actor gains the support or cooperation of other actors within a network. It involves persuading or convincing other actors to align their interests with the focal actor's goals and objectives. To some extent, it requires more than one set of actors to impose their will on others for enrolment to be successful. In addition, it also requires others to yield. (Callon 1986).

In this case study, numerous activities, conferences, and training sessions have emerged as prevalent approaches for universities to enroll more participants,

including leaders, teachers, and students. This process involves providing policy guidance and ideological training for the leadership team, leading to these leaders' comprehension and application of policies. Consequently, universities host a range of activities, including lectures, cultural displays, and other events. In language-related majors, leaders are mandated to actively contribute to establishing diverse language and cultural bases or centers. The state and government financially support these initiatives to facilitate the development of an internationalized university. Beyond interviewees advocating for universities to establish research centers ubiquitously, offer financial support, and employ various measures to foster and incentivize the engagement of schools, teachers, and students, governmental bodies and universities also administer conferences and training programs for educational leaders. During conferences and training sessions for university leaders, one can observe the directives issued by the government concerning the education and training of these leaders. These initiatives aim to fortify their awareness and motivate them to adopt a proactive stance in school administration. For instance, Jiangsu Province organized a summer study and training session for university leaders in 2023. The leaders from the provincial government emphasized that universities should further strengthen the comprehensive leadership of the Party in ideological work, reinforce the value guidance, and tell the Chinese story well......[17]

Moreover, during the opening session of the Fifth Plenary Meeting of the Thirteenth National People's Congress, a national delegate who is also a professor at the university emphasized the importance of cultivating intercultural competence.[18] Additionally, universities orchestrate cultural events, seminars, and festivals to expose students to varied cultural traditions and customs. They are identified within schools as a strategy to engage school staff, teachers, and students. For example, East China Normal University will host the 17th International Cultural Festival in 2023. The festival features a convergence of international booths showcasing diverse cuisines,

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[17] The information comes from the website: https://jyt.jiangsu.gov.cn/art/2023/9/1/art_58426_11003477.htm
[18] The information comes from the website: https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1726347777036703714&wfr=spider&for=pc

exquisite crafts, and vibrant ethnic costumes, as well as performances reflecting the exotic charm of various countries.[19]

Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to engage in diverse outbound programs facilitated by the university, which offers various cultural exchange activities, such as Confucius Institute dispatched teachers, nationally sponsored visiting scholar programs, etc., funded by the government and universities. Additionally, both governmental and institutional entities extend cultural exchange scholarships to students. The scholarships provide financial assistance to students in cultural exchange initiatives, covering expenses like tuition, travel, and living costs throughout the exchange duration, such as CSC scholarships. In addition, universities also offer language training programs, explicitly allocating financial support to initiatives aimed at enhancing students' or teachers' proficiency in foreign languages, such as the Arabic and Korean language training program for international Chinese language education volunteers. This endeavor contributes to the development of practical communication skills. These funds are pivotal in supporting endeavors such as exchange programs, collaborative research initiatives, and scholarships for international students. Through the aforementioned description of financial support, various projects, training, and activities, various roles are enrolled, expanding the construction of the network.

D. Mobilization

Mobilization. This fourth stage is the point where enrolled actors are given the tools of communication and are able to themselves create an interest in the network or to create subnetworks. This is the final moment. Mobilization occurs as the proposed solution gains wider acceptance and an even larger network of absent entities is created through some actors acting as spokespersons for others (Tatnall, Burgess 2002, p. 185).

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[19] The information comes from the website: https://xcb.ecnu.edu.cn/72/ad/c35312a553645/page.htm

With the support of a series of policies and funding, more students and teachers are mobilized under the guidance of leadership, and leaders, acting as agents, play a more active role in promoting the implementation of policies. Elective or mandatory intercultural courses are gradually established and promoted more professionally. An increasing number of students recognize the importance of intercultural courses and actively participate, especially students majoring in language-related disciplines; the courses are implemented to consolidate the knowledge of intercultural competence and its significance. Then, teachers and students have emerged as the primary force in consolidating and disseminating intercultural competence, functioning as the human roles to fortify the construction and expansion of the network. At the same time, a series of intercultural courses and programs plays a crucial role in teaching the knowledge of intercultural competence and enhancing cognitive awareness. Some interviewees highlighted diverse professional approaches to enhance students' intercultural competence during the interview process. As an illustration, Interviewee 6 outlined diverse methods utilized, encompassing lectures during classes and workshops for students.

Additionally, exchange programs are implemented to give students a broad spectrum of opportunities for intercultural competence development. Furthermore, additional interviewees articulated that their college offers a range of initiatives, including courses, lectures, and organized activities such as International Culture Day and various exchange events or programs. Notably, graduate students may assume roles in teaching courses designed for international students, thereby gaining practical experience. These graduate students are also mandated to partake in internships, where the presence of international students further enhances the richness of these experiences. At the same time, the universities endeavor to instill a profound sense of internationalization and intercultural awareness into their students, nurturing skills that hold significance in both academic and professional spheres, such as an awareness among students that active participation in various intercultural projects and activities can substantially augment their competitiveness in the job market. The

school's leadership asserts that such engagement can effectively equip students to compete globally. Concurrently, the school aids students in cultivating an international perspective. Through providing a diverse array of courses and programs, the institution actively promotes the acquisition of intercultural skills among educators and students. These endeavors not only foster personal development but also equip individuals to navigate an ever-growing globalized and interconnected world. The emphasis on international experiences enriches students' resumes, rendering them more appealing to prospective employers who value a diverse and globally oriented workforce. By means of courses and a series of interconnected links related to participants' interests, the stability of the courses and the participants is established, thereby consolidating the construction of the entire network.

On the other hand, in terms of motivating teachers, specific approaches are employed. For example, universities claim that teachers can benefit significantly in career advancement if they possess overseas study and work experience. Furthermore, governmental bodies and educational institutions offer a variety of teacher training programs, overseas assignments, and activities to deepen teachers' appreciation of the significance of intercultural skills.

During the interviews, respondents highlighted the broadening of teachers' horizons as an outcome of these initiatives. This expansion involves various aspects, such as yearly teacher training from the National Education Commission. According to interviewee 3, career promotion is also the way to mobilize teachers: 我们原来是有规定，所有的专职老师都要外派，出国任教的，现在有些学校甚至把出国当成晋升教授,评职称的必要条件。现在因为新的这个职称政策出来以后，这一条不那么明显了，但是还是有的，可能就是说如果你有的话，会更多的考虑一下。(Originally, we had a regulation that required all full-time teachers to be dispatched and teach abroad. In some schools, going abroad became necessary for promotion to the professor position, meaning it was a prerequisite for academic promotion. With the introduction of the new academic title policy, this requirement has become less

explicit, but it still exists. Perhaps it can be said that if you have this experience, it will be considered more favorably.)

From the above steps, it can be seen that during the translation process, it becomes apparent that individual intentions of the leaders do not solely guide the practices for mapping intercultural competence. Instead, the conceptualization of intercultural competence is due to various combinations and interactions of relationships. Within these relational configurations, school leaders, the state, the universities, and other stakeholders are intertwined, exerting their influence within interconnected relationships. Policies and human leaders function as agents of national strategy, mirroring the directives of higher authorities, specifically the central and local governments. They establish the educational trajectory of universities, thereby shaping the network. Teachers and students, under the mobilization of various interests through knowledge impartation and learning, reinforce the construction of the network.

5. Discussion and Analysis

Based on the findings concerning leadership and the translation process, I will discuss two main questions. Firstly, what network has been constructed through translation, and secondly, what is produced by the network? These two issues are mutually constitutive; what is produced by the network also promotes the construction of the network itself.

Leadership plays a crucial role in the educational system, shaping academic institutions' direction, policies, and overall effectiveness. It is generally understood as a policy implementation and decision-making role, administration and management in education practice, etc. Traditional narratives often emphasize the importance of wise and capable educational leaders who contribute to advancing society and the state. By ANT, leadership is a nuanced power structure intricately constructed by various roles; for example, the state, the CPC, the Chinese government, educational policies, and

funding all play prominent roles in shaping leadership narratives in Chinese universities. Their relationship and dynamic connections tell the performances about leadership. According to the translation process, they have established an educational narrative network that prioritizes benevolent intentions over critiquing existing social and political hierarchies, demonstrating compliance and functionality. By avoiding questioning our own privileges and the disturbance of current socio-political orders, the network facilitates the celebration of diversity. In essence, the construction of the network serves as a means to affirm, support, and sustain the prevailing social order.

Intercultural competence as part of the established educational narrative, the fundamental and overarching premise or purpose entails a commitment to upholding the image and interests of the nation while preserving the existing social order. Whether manifested through policy directives, discussions rooted in mainstream theories, diverse cultural activities, or educational initiatives like scholarships, teacher preparation courses, and education plans, the actions are executed with commendable intentions. However, they frequently abstain from critically examining the more profound and extensive social, historical, and political backgrounds, intentions, or systemic oppressions. Culturing intercultural competence expends considerable efforts in addressing the symptoms of oppressive conditions, such as interpersonal conflicts, rather than confronting them. This oversight or intentional obscurity, as highlighted by Gorski (2008, p. 519), neglects the imperative task of scrutinizing the underlying social, historical, and political structures contributing to systemic oppression.

Consequently, the prevailing concept of intercultural competence aligns with the widely recognized educational objectives of promoting intercultural dialogue, fostering an appreciation for diversity, and encouraging cultural exchange. Based on the case study, China's intercultural research only focuses on individuals other than the state and power issues. Class issues are also excluded from intercultural research. This vision finds particular favor among those occupying positions of influence,

especially individuals and organizations with vested interests. Hence, individuals are indoctrinated to perceive intercultural communication as founded on principles of neutrality and equality. However, from what I found within this educational process, politics and ideology emerge as focal factors in the construction of networks, rendering culture a depoliticized strategy that amalgamates intricate elements such as politics and the economy.

If tracing the history of intercultural competence, it was not such a neutral and natural process starting from when it was first constructed. The foundations of intercultural communication were laid in the post-war period, predominantly in the United States, where the government allocated substantial subsidies to develop the field. Its development is almost synchronous with the communication and development or modernization paradigm that emerged at the beginning of the Cold War. It is also isomorphic within academic politics and responds to the communication and cultural hegemony needs of the United States' global expansion after the war. It was vitally important to define the character, behavior patterns, mentality, and culture of the nations that the US was coming into direct contact with at that time, and knowledge about allies was just as necessary as knowledge about enemies (Zhao, 2019, p. 117). The classic work in this field, *Silent Language* by American anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1959), is the author's experience training foreign officials for the United States. In short, intercultural research began at the beginning of the Cold War, and its original intention was an interpersonal communication strategy in the process of the United States as a superpower, extending its influence to the world. The political factor was dominant from the very beginning.

Intercultural competence has developed today, whether in China or the United States. They possess varying historical and political backgrounds, or in other words, they have different material, temporal, and spatial conditions. However, they could share similar conspiracies and power resonances, which means politics and ideology play crucial roles in the construction of the network. Culture is a depoliticized strategy

combining various complex factors, including politics and economics. In transforming intercultural policies, they turn their national strategic policies into a culture, as it is regarded as a neutral term and understood as wooden, apolitical, and universally fixed' rather than plastic, political, and contingent (Titley, 2010, p. 61). Cultural policy is a compromise approach. However, it cannot be separated from other forms of discrimination, particularly people's living conditions, and this has frequently been left out of the discussions of intercultural learning, and a policy shift towards culture runs the risk of over-emphasizing and simplifying culture. This simplistic focus on culture hides unequal power relations, including poverty, violence, structural inequalities such as racism, and the possibilities of multiple identities. It avoids a discussion of the broader structural forces of class, racism, religion, colonialism, sexism, etc. (May, 2009, p. 36). The intercultural concept has evolved into a solution for interpersonal communications involving individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. In the case of the United States, known as a country with immigration and racial diversity, it has attracted people from Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania, and other regions. The amalgamation of these immigrants and different races has resulted in a multicultural scenario within American society, thereby giving rise to the phenomenon of American multiculturalism. The discourse surrounding multiculturalism and its educational implications gained prominence in the United States in the 1970s. The discourse's focus was primarily on addressing issues arising between ethnic minorities and the mainstream culture.

Nonetheless, the events of September 11, 2001, brought to light the shortcomings of both multicultural education and anti-racist approaches. UNESCO, in response, acknowledged the inadequacy of multicultural education in the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2001) issued in the same year. Subsequently, the United States initiated a shift towards intercultural studies. Superficially, challenges such as immigration, race, religion, terrorism, and war were identified as urgent issues necessitating resolution.

The evolution of European intercultural policy is rooted in its historical trajectory, transitioning from immigrant education to multicultural education and subsequently progressing to intercultural education. Eventually, intercultural competence has emerged as the central discourse in European intercultural strategy. The economic crisis that swept across Europe in the 1970s, coupled with the prominent immigration issue, played a pivotal role in shaping this evolution. Consequently, the cultural structure within European society became increasingly intricate. It is undeniable that intercultural education in Europe is profoundly influenced by its specific historical backgrounds, traditions, and contemporary national socio-political and educational systems (Holm, Zilliacus, 2009, p. 17). Europe boasts a rich legacy of managing diverse populations from immigration and colonial histories. They have implemented intercultural policies designed to acknowledge and accommodate a range of cultural practices (see the Strategic framework for the EU's cultural policy, Intercultural policies in European cities from the European Commission, etc.) Each European country's approach to intercultural competence is often shaped by its distinctive historical context, resulting in policy variations across nations. Nevertheless, a common theme in intercultural policies is the potential intention to engage in decolonization processes, encompassing both colonial and postcolonial dimensions.

Furthermore, differences emerge when considering the education system's functioning. In the United States, where federal education policy is decisively influenced by corporate elites, notably the Business Roundtable, the public education system, alongside increasingly consolidated corporate media, is progressively transforming into a vehicle explicitly dedicated to socializing citizens towards compliance and complicity (Chomsky, 2003; Gabbard, 2003). In contrast, in most European countries, education is funded and overseen by the central or local government. They define curriculum standards, formulate educational policies, and supervise the functioning of schools and educational institutions. Nevertheless, variations in the specific education systems and management models may exist among these countries. For instance, Germany and Sweden embrace a relatively decentralized model wherein local

governments play a substantial role in education management. Conversely, the central government wields greater control over the education system in countries such as France and Italy.

In China, when compared to the US or Europe, its historical and social background and institutions significantly differ, resulting in variations in education and power relations. The adaptability of China's institutions is rooted in the interdependence of the party (CPC) and the state. The party primarily assumes a role in political and ideological control. At the same time, the state, represented by national government departments such as the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, establishes national policies. The policy regarding intercultural competence outlines the responsibilities of school leadership, emphasizing obedience to the leadership of the Communist Party, assurance of the authority of socialism, and adherence to national laws and policies. Through this way, the party and the state have reinforced their authority within the administrative bureaucracy of China.

Furthermore, as previously noted, China's intercultural theory was imported from abroad towards the conclusion of the last century. In contrast, the development and emphasis on intercultural competence in China gained prominence during this century's early years. This trajectory is closely tied to the timeline of China's accession to the World Trade Organization and its integration into the processes of globalization, aligning with its aspirations for modernization. Throughout this transformative journey, China has encountered a myriad of challenges both domestically and internationally. These challenges include managing societal stability to prevent unrest and asserting the right to speak globally. China must carefully weigh its economic and political interests in navigating these complex dynamics.

This is also one of the reasons why the development focus of intercultural competence in China is primarily on language education. China's integration into globalization and the demands of global free trade necessitate a more excellent pool of individuals

proficient in foreign languages. Considering political and diplomatic interests, nurturing a cadre of individuals skilled in foreign languages is a crucial foundation for enhancing international negotiation capabilities. From a pragmatic perspective, establishing foreign language majors in Chinese universities is closely linked to the economic and political significance between states. According to the official release of the "2023 Academic Ranking of Majors in Chinese Universities" by the higher education professional evaluation institution, the top ten foreign language major rankings for Chinese foreign language majors are as follows[20]:

1	English	6	Arabic
2	Russian	7	Japanese
3	German	8	Persian
4	French	9	Korean
5	Spanish	10	Filipino

English holds the highest international status and is the most widely used language among these languages. It also has the most significant academic programs offered in Chinese universities. According to statistics from the "2023 Ranking of the Number of Majors Offered by Chinese Universities", English language programs are the most prevalent among the top 100 universities in terms of the number of academic programs offered. Nine hundred fifty-four universities within the top 100 rankings offer English language majors[21]. Undoubtedly, English stands as the most widely spoken language globally. Its prevalence is intricately linked to the prevailing hegemony of English in global affairs, with significant implications for the economic and political landscapes.

Furthermore, externally, China wants to open up the international market and compete for the right to speak internationally. Chinese language promotion is considered

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[20] The ranking is based on a comprehensive assessment of a university's funding, faculty size, faculty structure, teaching conditions at the institutional level, and other factors related to the conditions for offering all majors at the university.
[21] The information comes from the website: https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/654340348

necessary. There is a strong emphasis on the development of international Chinese language teaching. This includes initiatives such as China integrating the Chinese language into the international education system through programs like Confucius Institutes, representing one of the state's critical strategies for external engagement. The goal is to enhance China's international influence, represent the state positively and harmoniously, and contribute to the improvement of China's image globally through compelling storytelling.

The historical and social conditions of Europe and the United States necessitate a focus on multilingualism. They view the evolution of diverse language policies as emblematic of cultural diversity. Much like Europe, they endeavor to integrate these languages within a unified European framework. An illustrative instance is the designation of the year 2001 by the European Commission as the European Year of Languages. Concurrently, the Common European Languages Framework of Reference and European Languages Profile Manual were introduced (Jiang, 2017, p. 161).

In contrast, China finds itself in a markedly distinct situation. China's intercultural policy primarily aims at national geopolitics and constitutes an integral part of China's proactive development of economic and diplomatic strategies. It corresponds to Xi's recent slogans of "strengthening strategic self-confidence" and "shaping the unique style of China's diplomacy"[22]. For example, the description frequently mentioned in the findings, "Tell China's stories well," is an idea to redirect the world's attention from China into an image of a country that is a global power and norm-setter. It represents a repositioning ideology. This ideology is rooted in Chinese history, which, with a China-centric perspective, generally implies a Confucian organic understanding of the world and society. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the traditional Confucian heritage has gained increased importance, and new ideas have

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[22] At the Central Foreign Affairs Conference Xi Jinping highlighted: under the framework of new era of socialism to create new chapter of China's great power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, Xinhua, 23 June 2018.

been built upon this tradition. The notion of a new China is promoted as inclusive rather than exclusive, based on moral values rather than solely on interests. Quotes ancient Chinese philosophers (Confucius and Mencius), who said that morality and justice (yi) should be considered first, and then interests and profits (li). Such an alternative narrative is China's rising assertiveness in imposing its narrative (Szczudlik, 2018, p. 8). One reason behind this approach is that China employs these narratives to shape its image as a mature and powerful nation and to be better understood by "Western" societies. The global narrative remains predominantly "Western", including notions of "Western centralism," which hold a dominant position in global cognition and discourse (Szczudlik, 2018, p. 2). The right to speak still needs to become clearer for China, which aims to assert its discourse internationally and hopes to gain a voice on the global stage. Indeed, the narrative it seeks to reshape is not only for external purposes but also for internal ones. China must instill the belief among its people, including the diaspora, that it is an open, reform-oriented, and responsible significant power contributing to the global economy and security.

Thus, although the theories used in China's intercultural research and training have a strong background of "Western cultural centrism", the purpose and positions for developing intercultural competence are based on the different situations and social conditions. Intercultural competence is constructed as a concept imbued with political and ideological attributes. Its implementation in China serves distinct purposes when juxtaposed with its utilization in the United States and Europe. To enhance comprehension, we also need to see what such a network produces.

A.The Network Ties Intercultural Competence to Language and Individuals
The network conceptualizes intercultural competence to language and individuals, reinforcing the belief that language and personal skills are prerequisites for intercultural competence. It also leads people to believe that educational institutions, as knowledge-dispensing entities, can provide the necessary knowledge to address

issues in intercultural communication. Teaching, training, and advising in intercultural contact and communication have generally focused on differences in relevant languages and cultural knowledge. Their business is to increase students' ability to translate these linguistic and cultural differences, hence intercultural competence. It is reasoned that lack of knowledge of such differences will cause misunderstandings or, otherwise, the more such knowledge one has, the more chances of understanding, and therefore, chances of success in intercultural communication and relation. Two aspects of this reasoning may be urged here. First, misunderstanding is seen as the imprecise or wrong translation of the speaker's intended meaning, usually due to one's native cultural and linguistic knowledge. In other words, it is a mismatch between separate cultural meanings. Second, intercultural communication problems are attributed to the individual rather than the broader social and historical factors and to the interaction and relation between these factors in which the communication occurs (Shi, 2001, p. 289).

It assumes that communication involves exchanging information or knowledge, and the knowledge conveyed and encompassed through language can be objectively represented and understood. Therefore, knowledge of the target language and culture, as well as translation knowledge between the target language and one's native language and culture, is crucial for the outcomes of intercultural interactions. Personal knowledge is considered paramount in communication and education (Shi, 2001, p. 280), a neutral requirement. The theories consistently emphasize knowledge of the working/target language and target culture and translation knowledge between the target language and one's native language and culture. Therefore, misunderstandings, communication barriers, or other issues are attributed to a lack of relevant language or cultural knowledge. Excellent language skills are believed to facilitate intercultural communication and minimize misunderstandings, ensuring success. In other words, mastering a wealth of language knowledge and having a good communication attitude makes it possible to carry out intercultural communication smoothly. This representational view has a significant impact on the understanding of intercultural

communication. Moreover, universities, as the place of imparting knowledge, are there to supply the needed information, thereby claiming to solve intercultural communication problems.

The role of education for intercultural competence is borrowed from a deeply rooted and widespread foreign theories of individual knowledge and rationality. Since the outcome of communication is considered a reflection of an individual's knowledge, the task of education is to supply knowledge to individuals so that they will become successful persons in society. The understanding of intercultural communication here largely derives from the positivist, semiotic/informational communication model. The beliefs and practices of intercultural teaching and training are consistent. Communication is thought to describe or report reality, i.e., giving information or messages, and its goal is mental understanding and translation of those descriptions. Meaning is carried and contained in the communication medium, usually language. People think that the premise of intercultural competence is language. Only by learning each other's language can we communicate and understand each other. With good personal behavior and attitude, intercultural success can be achieved. Intercultural competence makes people believe that if each individual possesses the so-called intercultural behaviors and attitudes and the language ability to communicate, the world will become more harmonious.

The cognition generated by the network, which is based on language and individuals, limits the development of intercultural competence. Although some scholars, like Habermas (1984), argue that language communication should be elevated to the ontological status because language communication, as a unique product of human beings, will inevitably reflect the essence of human beings, he did not realize that language communication is subordinate to ideas in the final analysis (Jia, 2022, p. 2). Linguistic anthropology has proposed that participants' consciousness of communicative forms mediates both of the relationships in question. Such mediating forces are what have come to be known as ideologies of language. Linguistic

anthropology added that between language and social structure, there is language ideology (Woolard, Schieffelin, 1994, p. 55). As McGroarty (2010, p. 4) explains that the more a linguistic ideology is taken up in any setting, the more likely it is to undergo normalization, a hegemonic pattern in which the ideological claims are perceived as standard ways of thinking and acting. Linguistic ideologies thus influence our understanding of what is usual; they shape a constellation of common-sense beliefs about language and language use. As these beliefs sway, they assume ever-greater force, regardless of their accuracy or correspondence to present reality (Blommaert, 1999). By the last quarter of the twentieth century, it was well established in linguistic anthropology and related disciplines that linguistic variability is socially patterned and related to the distribution of power and resources at both interpersonal and institutional scales. There is a social structure between language and speech. All individuals' experiences with language are necessarily interpreted through the lens of their language ideologies (Woolard, Schieffelin, 1994, p. 56). Powerful institutions and individuals use language as both a means to construct their power and as a way to maintain it. Language thus becomes necessary for the maintenance of power, and the power and effect of language rely on the power of individuals and institutions themselves.

Language and communication are a joint social activity that is embedded in broader cultural and historical and, by implication, unequal-power context and that, more particularly, current intercultural communication is itself part of the globalized competition, mass human migration, unending local conflict, and hostility, where social injustice and alienation are the order of the day. To continue to bank exclusively on knowledge and skills about exotic languages and cultures is to collude with that existing order (Shi, 2001, p. 280). The intercultural concept excludes people with nothing about foreign languages/language majors. Cultural issues cannot be reduced to language issues. Intercultural education that only focuses on interpersonal relationships and cultural awareness without questioning power levels is a

colonialization form. It is the dominant groups who benefit most from this education at the expense of marginalized groups whose interests are encroached upon.

Moreover, how institutions and individuals use language to consolidate and promote their ideological interests or preserve their authority over other institutions and individuals changes social relationships or practices. At the same time, through language, power makes itself known via state messaging and sets the tone for social interactions using predetermined wording and phrases (Subtirelu, 2014, p.123). Therefore, contrary to conventional wisdom, the availability of a common language is not a pre-condition for communication (Rajagopalan, 2001, p.18). In a way, languages are not only tools of nation-building but also means of political control. That is why ethnic minorities use language—for example, the demand for bilingualism—as a political strategy—to protest against political domination (Eriksen, 1993, p. 121.). Not all languages have the same impact or the same fate.

In some cases, such multilingualism tends to be a largely formal matter, which may or may not imply equality. In other cases, language pluralism may have real meaning, for example, in Belgium, Canada, Norway, South Africa, Spain, and Switzerland. However, even in these countries, equality is not absolute (Safran, 2004, p. 5). Furthermore, language itself is not neutral, and it is not a pure existence. For example, English is not exactly a cultural language for most of the world: it is the Interlingua for money and power, which people have to learn and use for practical rather than aesthetic purposes (Jameson, 2018, p. 82). In the case of our linguistic identities, the issue is further complicated by the fact that specific languages, such as English, are playing a hegemonic role, threatening the very survival of local and minority languages worldwide.

B. The Network Reinforces the Power Relations in Chinese Universities
Networking reinvents leadership as a practice on several dimensions. Leadership is not solely the domain of human actors but involves active hybrids composed of

networks of associations. In other words, instead of prioritizing a principal or other nominated human leader (Grint, 2004, p. 5), it sees power relations solidified by various roles, who and what are narrating the system. The involved in the network are rarely in an equal power relationship, and the unequal distribution of power relations has also led to the formation of internal networks within collectives. At the same time, the formation of the network consolidates the stability of power relations (Fenwick, Edwards, 2010).

In the network, there is a subtle hierarchy that is deeply ingrained in one's subconscious. It is typically the more efficient structure for exercising power. Hierarchy 'internalizes' in the subordinate the duty to comply, obviating the need to issue constant threats or rewards (Lake,2017,p.359). China's education system has a deep imprint of hierarchy, spanning from superior to subordinate, central to local, and collective to individual. Today, China remains a one-party state, with the Communist Party holding the highest authority but entrusting the responsibility of formulating and implementing policies to the government. The University is a state apparatus that serves power. As institutions representing and executing educational policies in practice, universities are primarily led by leaders who are the agents within this hierarchical structure, embodying a culture of compliance. They are profiled as mechanisms of the state ideological apparatus, functioning as a vital means to broadcast the ideology of the ruling class (Illich, 1973).

On the one hand, it provides the know-how—the epistêmê and the technê—required for the inclusion of the individual in the productive process. On the other hand, it subjects him to the rules of the social order, be it by imposing the dominant ideology upon him or by giving the agents of repression and exploitation the power and the ability to enforce such order, since the reproduction of the productive forces is not simply a matter of imparting knowledge or teaching skills, but also a question of ensuring the ideological subjection of the individual (Lopes, 2014, p. 36). For example, the *Notice on Further Strengthening the Ideological Work* (General Office

of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and State Council, 2015) has re-emphasized the importance of ideology training, emphasizing the cultivation of moral character and highlighting collective interests over individual interests.

In the universities, the leaders play a crucial role in implementing and executing educational policies, overseeing the development and review of textbooks, and controlling the network. The traditional hierarchical relationship between teachers and students in the classroom, where knowledge is imparted, subtly reinforces specific practices that solidify its power relations. It gradually makes people believe that power is allocated and exercised, imposed and subjected to, in a self-disciplining loop with the connivance of all (Bourdieu, 1993).

Foucault ascribed to the university the role of using 'directly or indirectly, State apparatuses to centralize knowledge' (Foucault, 2003, p. 183). This does not mean, however, that the university exists as a separate institution in relation to the system of State apparatuses. It may take advantage of other apparatuses to secure the conditions for the monopolistic appropriation of the truth, but it is not autonomous. The university, to use Althusser's (2005, p. 99) terminology, is already part of the ideological state apparatuses.

On the other hand, power relations in China are reflected in the Communist Party's control over the education system and the decentralization of power. Decentralization and centralization often co-exist in the Chinese higher education system. It monopolized the provision, financing, and governance of higher education. Firstly, there is control over finances, promoted by the state to strengthen its control over the Chinese higher educational system, the Ministry of Education, with a larger budget, has gained since then a more robust finance-based policy instrument(Cimino, 2016, p.57). Secondly, 'Deconcentration' includes a range of types of administrative decentralization, including administrative delegation or vertical specialization of administrative functions, as well as various forms of political devolution and fiscal

decentralization that accompany the delegation of local power and authority (Painter, Mok, 2008, p. 139). With fiscal reform, the central government diversifies the education providers and allows various institutions or individuals to participate in establishing or managing schools. The diversification of financial resources and decentralization policy exist in the blend of central and local governmental financial support with donations, fundraising, enterprise support, social contributions, and community participation (Hawkins, 2006, p.31).

Karlsen (2000, p.527), using Norway as an example, has identified four motivations for decentralization: strengthening democracy, promoting innovation and school-based development, responding to local needs, and improving efficiency. In contrast, China's decentralization is motivated primarily by improving efficiency, strengthening the role of the state, and utilitarian ideology. As such, decentralization does not necessarily mean that the state weakens its position and capacity or has genuinely reduced its control over the education sector. On the contrary, it can mean a process of re-centralization or re-regulation through adopting various governance strategies or policy instruments such as national standards, assessment and inspection, and international benchmarking. China's hierarchical and centralized political system still maintains the central government's considerable powers in constituting the institutional autonomy of higher education institutions. It exercised its agency through political and ideological control by ensuring the authority of socialism, as I observed through analysis. For example, preserving a socialist orientation in education and ensuring that the party entirely plays its political core role in schools are outlined in the policies as essential responsibilities of school leaders. In addition, policies are formulated and enacted at provincial and municipal levels. Nonetheless, national policies are overarching guidelines and provide instructions for developing sub-level policies.Therefore, the network constructed by the party and the state, policies, and leaders' leadership reinforce their authority or power relation in China's administrative bureaucracy.

C.The Network Strengthens National Identity through Cultural Symbols

In this case study, it is found that respondents generally have a foundation in their understanding of the intercultural concept, where culture is essentially distinguished by national boundaries, emphasizing a spatial description of culture with ethnicity and the state as dividing lines. The state and culture are always closely linked in China's intercultural concept.

In the concept of intercultural competence in China, a distinct ideological feature deeply rooted in ancient Chinese culture is observed: the concept of internal（内） and external（外） differentiation. In the Chinese perspective, the state is categorized as internal, while everything outside its borders is considered external. The delineation between "yi di 夷狄" (barbarians) and "nei 内" (China) entails a clear distinction between the internal and external realms, designating China as the "internal" and non-Chinese entities as the "external"(内诸夏外夷狄)[23]. This perspective is elucidated in passages such as those found in *The Book of Odes* within the *Spring and Autumn Annals* in the *15th year of Chengong*. It refers to its state as internal and the various states outside as Xia; within Xia, it refers to its states as internal and the barbarians outside as Yi Di. And embracing the status of the "internal" fosters a perception of unity without necessitating differentiation.

Intercultural competence is a practitioner in the transformation process of Chinese narrative mode. In the process, Chinese culture is a national symbol to a certain extent. How to use China's rich cultural resources to launch Chinese cultural symbols that can have universal cognitive value and gain psychological resonance from domestic and overseas audiences will help it build the right to speak on the international stage. Hence, it is of great practical significance to further promote the going-out strategy of Chinese culture and enhance China's national image. Constructing cultural identity and national image has become one of China's most important political issues.

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[23] "异内外" 则涉华夷之辨，是为中国、夷狄对举的内外，中国为 "内"，夷狄为 "外"（"内诸夏外夷狄"），出自《公羊传·成公十五年》:《春秋》内其国而外诸夏，内诸夏而外夷狄。

On the one hand, China goes global by participating actively in the international community, exchanging students and staff, seeking collaborative programs, and building international schools and international curricula. On the other hand, China pursues local by strengthening political and moral education and reviving traditional cultures. For example, modeled on Germany's Goethe Institute, France's Alliance Francaise, and the UK's British Council, the Confucius Institutes, launched in 2004 by Hanban (The Office of Chinese Language Council International), is a glocalized pilot project to promote glocal knowledge, intercultural communication and soft power (Paradise, 2009; Starr, 2009). In 2011, there were 358 Confucius Institutes and 503 Confucius Classrooms in 105 countries and regions worldwide (Lien, Co, 2013, p.566).

In the process, it strongly emphasizes using Chinese culture as a comprehensive symbol. Chinese culture has always been an essential part of cultivating intercultural competence in China. It is not only regarded as an integral part of the cultural identity of the Chinese people but also has values that rulers can promote or prize to facilitate their continued leadership and governance, such as personal morality emphasized in Confucianism, responsibility to society and the state, and social harmony and stability. Among these, the most commonly used method is to teach how to use cultural symbols in communication. It is dependent on the arrangement and display of a set of familiar symbolic expressions (signs) able to make up and convey distinctive ideas and conceptualization of the Chinese nation, of its appropriate role in the world of nations, of the kind of relationship that the people should have, and the association they have with the territory of China and the authority that govern it.

Cassirer (1962) discussed that all cultures, such as language, mythology, art, religion, etc., are created by people using symbols. Armand (2002) also pointed out that symbols are a way of social control, the definition of politics starts with language and culture. In the current international situation, ideas and meanings are mediated, symbolized, and informationized, quickly spread across cultures and worldwide.

Symbolic thinking and symbolic behavior are the most representative features of human life, and the entire development of human society depends on these conditions. The national image construction is the intercultural communication process of cultural symbols. Due to the metaphorical and metonymic nature of symbol encoding, as well as the expansion and value-added nature of meaning, in order for the information transmitted by cultural symbols in the construction of the national image to achieve meaning sharing, it is necessary to make the signifier and signified of a symbol, the corresponding relationship between referred to can be recognized by the outside world so that the meaning expressed by the symbol will eventually become the shared knowledge between the country and other countries. In this way, the practical construction of the national image by cultural symbols has practical significance. The information encoded by various cultural symbols and the awareness of information reception formed on this basis control society's words, actions, emotions, and even thoughts with extraordinary influence. Under the control of power, it has become an animal utterly subject to the hegemony of cultural symbols. The basis of image construction lies in symbolic interaction. Reasonably, cultural symbols have been widely used in the construction of national images of various countries and have become an important carrier for the discursive description and construction of national images in various countries (Meng,2014, p.226). The overall symbols of Chinese culture satisfy the needs of constructing individual and collective identities, defining self and others, the processes of inclusion and exclusion, and the processes of development and progress. Moreover, the idea that Chinese culture exists and, more importantly, that it can be represented has facilitated the precise incorporation of social, economic, and political backgrounds as essential elements constituting the Chinese nation. Through the conceptualization of intercultural competence, these elements have gained recognition.

Thus, an essential part of cultivating intercultural competence in China is the cultivation of cultural identity and the ability to promote cultural symbols. Borrowing imported words and using a so-called friendly and inclusive attitude to show the

charm of one's own culture. Various cultural symbols make them the spokespersons of China's image. The Chinese culture has become a symbolic system composed of Chinese characters, Kung Fu, Peking Opera, Confucius, calligraphy, the Great Wall, traditional Chinese medicine, the Forbidden City, Terra-cotta Warriors and Horses, pandas, tea, Chinese food, Peking Opera, and porcelain, etc. establishing or organizing major world, international, or regional events, manufacturing essential industrial products that are marketed globally, and exporting cultural and artistic products, literary works, dances, songs, paintings, movies, etc., that can be loved by people around the world. (Liang,2014, p.109-110). During the process, it also attempts to shape culture into a neutral concept through China's education system, language and cultural policies, technological infrastructure, media, and communication channels. The education of intercultural competence is one of the important ways I discuss in this study. It maximizes the representation of its characteristics, such as in Chinese culture classrooms where students learn about Chinese calligraphy, cuisine, tea art, and arts. It seeks to make symbolic power appear natural; for example, when we acknowledge that "deep down we are all the same", we continuously reinforce this symbolic order. It rationalizes the aforementioned power relations and ideologies, immersing people in traditional concepts of Chinese culture and promoting obedience to authority.

Consequently, the education of intercultural competence comes with a sense of mission, which means, in one's view, one must first understand one's own Chinese culture before one can communicate well with another culture; then, people from other parts of the world can understand China better. As a role of intercultural communication, learners bear the mission of the times, and one of the important abilities is knowing how to present compelling Chinese stories. The subjectivity of Chinese culture is quite intense in the education of intercultural competence in China. With the belief that interculturality forms the cognitive basis for cultural communication between different countries, people involved in the network have developed a stronger national cultural identity—particularly an admiration for their

own country's culture, namely Chinese culture. Additionally, the education of intercultural competence also emphasizes fostering cultural confidence, specifically Chinese cultural confidence. A confidence that is exquisitely modern and one of the pillars of the modern nation-state. They shared national feelings that led toward a national community in which the people as a collectivity think and act, and individual aspirations are promoted. This shared cultural identity is a kind of affection that all the people should have toward the nation, the country, and the party. Therefore, loving our culture and cultivating cultural confidence become expressions of patriotism. Utilizing this powerful expressive tool conveys the message that, to contribute to the nation, everyone's behavior must align with the demands of the new circumstances. Accepting the task of telling the Chinese story as a positive endeavor, embracing our Chinese traditions as part of our national history, serving both the cause of the nation and the exercise of power, thereby positioning oneself as a crucial component of the national institution—the Chinese nation (Cimino,2016, p. 50).

As a result, the education of intercultural competence in China has created an illusion of collectivism. Am I representing myself or my country? The Chinese people have a psychological suggestion: Every Chinese is supposed to be the spokesperson for China's national image. Moreover, as the cultural classification in intercultural concepts has always been divided by national boundaries, it essentially serves as competition between countries. This gives people who have received intercultural competence training the illusion that without such a prominent national cultural difference, the cultural differences between each other can be ignored, such as the students who joined the intercultural course thinking their classmates from very different provinces in China have no cultural differences. The main cultural differences that need to be understood are those with other countries.

On the contrary, it strengthens people's national identity and restricts the actual exchange and development of culture. It does not make people more open, inclusive, and integrated. Instead, it gives people a more focused understanding of self-identity,

national identity, or ethnic identity. To a certain extent, it makes people's identity more concentrated rather than open and accessible. Using countries to distinguish cultures emphasizes closure instead of openness.

6. Conclusion

Analyzing using the ANT method raises the attention of politics and ideology in the research. It provides a framework for analyzing the exercises of power by which social, economic and political is produced and reproduced (Edwards, 2002, p. 355), provokes questions about the politics that constrain, obscure, or enable certain enactments to be easier performed and recognized, and why(Fenwick,2010,p.119). Following ANT in this case study, leadership can be explained in Chinese universities as a nuanced power structure intricately constructed by forces (actors, mediators, intermediaries) and how the network establishes and maps intercultural competence. It also shows us that knowledge, for example, the intercultural competence we have discussed in the case study, is a product of power; it is a network composed of heterogeneous elements, which is a social result of various power relationships, the relationship between them is a power relationship and a mutually influential translation process, somehow carrying with it a sense of obedience and authority. Thus, if we want to understand how intercultural competence is mapped in China through an exploration of leadership, we need to realize that the actors are performative and generate realities. Realities are not immutable but shaped, enacted, and contested (Law,2009, p.151). At the same time, the performance incorporating entities, spaces, and materials is not static and separate but flows constantly in movement and relations in leadership.

To a large extent, mapping intercultural competence is first based on pragmatism. Chinese intercultural competence theory transforms the original colonial theory into an explanatory diagram of inter-subject communication, negotiation, and mutual assistance and re-positions the abstract theory, full of inner tension into daily interactions, which brought challenges to finding a genuine, consistent intellectual

context in contextual dislocation/fragmentation of academic research and practice. Therefore, we are accustomed to viewing Chinese intercultural competence studies as a result of academic accumulation but ignoring the social and political issues reflected when foreign intercultural communication theories and doctrines enter China. In explaining this, a critical point is that China's intercultural competence theory is borrowed from foreign countries. However, the theory is not entirely consistent with China's actual social situation, which causes conceptual, theoretical, and practical problems. The core problem is that it subtly tries to put its ideology into the imported theory and cover up the political elements when doing so. The range of terminologies used to define the area, from intercultural communication to intercultural competence, portrays a propensity to a soft-core approach underlying and underpinning the conceptual framework from an apolitical perspective. However, the claim of behavior neutrality is political; as Freire (2017) incisively argued, education is political. The same is true for the education of intercultural competence. Softening the socio-political context in the dominant intercultural education discourse is a strategy and political purpose to maintain the stability of this network.

Case Study Two

Opening The Blackbox: Teaching Practice of Intercultural Competence in Chinese Universities

1. Introduction

Teaching practice is the transmission and acquisition of knowledge within the school setting and has been considered the core of education. Viewed as the quintessential method of imparting knowledge, it is often inherent to teachers' identity (Fenwick, Edwards, 2010, p.12). Teachers are esteemed as the authoritative representative of knowledge in China, and the knowledge disseminated by teachers during the teaching process often assumes a taken-for-granted or naturalized status, where objectivity and naturalness characterize of knowledge. The central focus lies in the methodology employed by teachers to convey this "objective knowledge" to students. For instance, when addressing the subject of intercultural competence, inquiries rarely extend to the fundamental question of why intercultural competence is merely regarded as an individual proficiency (the address is normally focused on what intercultural competence is: individual knowledge encompassing language and culture, attitudes, and skills). Exploring historical and social factors for intercultural competence, except individual ability encompassing language and culture, attitudes, and skills, is frequently neglected. The origin and underpinnings of this knowledge are overshadowed by discussions centering on the instructional techniques teachers employ to teach intercultural competence and the subsequent assessment thereof.

The way serves to conceal the circumstances (discursive, material, institutional) underscoring this process, as well as reinforce the identity of teachers do every day perform in the classroom, and translate complex educational processes into static data, which is the issue we are encountering, like a blackbox, it appears naturalized, purified, immutable and inevitable, while concealing the negotiations that brought it into existence((Fenwick, Edwards, 2011,p. 5), to the point where it is simply taken for

granted that teaching and learning should take place in educational institutions (Fenwick, Edwards, 2010, p. 52), and the knowledge imparted in such institutions is often considered unquestioned. It has been taken as a fact. However, as Latour (1987, p.182) contends, facts are constructed by communities of scientists through a series of actions, and these acknowledged "facts" are essentially blackboxes. Perhaps, without much contemplation, one may readily accept and employ one or more "facts" (as indeed, we tend to do it), yet this does not facilitate a genuine understanding of the "facts". To comprehend it, one must open it up and delve into its intricacies.

Hence, it becomes imperative to open the blackbox and investigate how the courses in intercultural competence and teaching activities encapsulate the knowledge about intercultural competence. As Law(1992, p.381) described, knowledge is seen as a product or an effect of a network of heterogeneous materials. Thus, not only inquiring about what knowledge a teacher imparts on any given day, the focus should be also on what and whose knowledge counts and what is rendered invisible, illuminates the practices that become manifested in educational privilege and exclusion (Fenwick, Edwards, 2010, p.37). Furthermore, an examination of the power relations inherent in the teaching process becomes essential. How do these power dynamics shape the transmission of knowledge? How does teaching contribute to the naturalization of the knowledge being imparted? These critical inquiries are instrumental in unraveling the complexities of the educational landscape and in scrutinizing how the educational system engages with and perpetuates certain forms of knowledge and power.

This approach heralds a noteworthy and burgeoning ontological shift in teachers' instructional practices, emphasizing a focus on teaching processes rather than solely on outcomes (Strom, 2015, p. 331). It enables examining how elements converge, interact, and become ingrained or black-boxed. It challenges conventional, teacher-centric perspectives and prompts a reevaluation of this phenomenon as a manifestation of an intricate and dynamic network encompassing not only the teacher but also various other actors, such as the teaching aids, curriculum, classroom space,

students, and the texts they engage with, etc. (Rubin et al., 2021, p. 320). Moreover, it underscores that this is not merely a process in which individuals are entangled but simultaneously a material practice dispersed across a diverse array of materials, including textbooks, teaching materials, professional standards, tools, technologies specific to professional practice, and institutional contexts (Mulcahy, 2011, p. 220). This intricate network, albeit temporarily, is mobilized to fulfill a specific function, such as instructional delivery. Simultaneously, it provides the means to discern how assemblages may concretize specific power relations that persistently influence movements and identities. It prompts us to inquire: What elements are involved in the teaching process? Where does the teaching take place? How is teaching enacted? What connections and associations emerge among the various elements involved in teaching practice? What ends are served through the network? Eventually, it facilitates exploring how knowledge about intercultural competence[24] becomes ingrained as natural knowledge through teaching practices.

In this case study, I aim to explore how knowledge is blackboxed and the role of actors and networks in shaping teaching practices by the lens of ANT. It emphasizes the need to understand education as a social and political endeavor rather than a purely objective pursuit. It offers a critical examination of the teaching practice and highlights the importance of considering the social and political dimensions of knowledge. At the same time, It is also a process of telling 'stories about how relations assemble or do not' (Law, 2009a, p. 141). How they arrange themselves, and how the materials of the world (social, technical, documentary, natural, human) get themselves done' (Law, 2008, p. 632). It helps to create the realities they describe, including statements about reality and the realities themselves. Eventually, the network thus associated creates a collective knowledge via collective seeing(Roehl, 2012, p.115). Therefore, if practices enact realities; this implies that to comprehend the process of how realities are done, then we have to attend carefully to practices and ask how they

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[24] The knowledge about intercultural competence in this case study primarily refers to the knowledge within my observation of the textbooks used in the courses, the materials utilized and referenced by the teachers in class, and the content taught by the teachers.

work (Law, 2009b, p.1).

2. Practical Trace and Observation

The teaching practice is a process of network construction from the perspective of ANT. My primary task is tracking the roles of human and non-human actors and how they blackboxed the knowledge. Practically, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the teachers who teach *Intercultural Communication* courses[25] at Chinese universities, following their thoughts and observing their interactions with other roles. They are considered critical human factors for the network contribution. They actively construct and maintain the network of relationships between students, educational materials, technology, and the physical classroom environment. Besides, I also conducted a questionnaire to gain information on the current situation of education on intercultural competence in universities.

Additionally, I observed some courses related to intercultural competence, as well as teaching materials(such as textbooks, PowerPoint presentations, images, and videos teachers use)and relevant teacher training documents. They play a significant role as non-human actors and are active, dynamic participants in the educational network. They mediate and shape the flow of knowledge, influence classroom interactions, and connect various elements of the teaching environment. Moreover, I also observed the classrooms for teaching the course, the classroom is not merely a passive space in ANT but an active participant in shaping the educational experience; it mediates interactions and influences behavior.

By doing so, I seek to understand these relationships' dynamic and evolving nature, shedding light on how various roles come together and contribute to the assemblage process. I also discern how knowledge about intercultural competence is considered

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[25] According to the investigation, none of these universities offer a course specifically named Intercultural Competence. The courses available are generally called Intercultural Communication, but the content of these Intercultural Communication courses includes aspects of Intercultural Competence.

objective and reliable and is thus disseminated through teaching practice.

3. Procedure

This case study tracked and observed comprehensive data involving interviews, teaching and classroom observations, collection and analysis of textbooks and teaching materials, retrieval of relevant teaching training documents, and the administration of questionnaires.

3.1 Interviews

The seven interviewees for this study are teachers who teach *Intercultural Communication* courses at Chinese universities. They are mainly from the College of Foreign Languages, the College of International Chinese Culture, the School of Journalism and Communication, etc. (refer to Table 1 for detailed information). Notably, three also hold positions as college deans or heads of majors associated with intercultural communication. These interviewees were selected based on their roles as teachers of intercultural courses at Chinese universities, coupled with their expressed willingness to participate in the study. Due to the COVID-19 and anti-epidemic measures policy in China during that period, all the interviews for the seven interviewees were conducted online by video or voice call. Each interview session lasted approximately one hour.

The research employed semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions; semi-structured interviews provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on and explore issues they deem significant. While a list of predetermined questions (Appendix 2) was prepared before entering the field for data collection, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for adaptability. The discussions were conducted in Mandarin, recorded with the interviewees' consent, and transcribed by the researcher. To ensure the confidentiality of the interviewees, pseudonyms were employed in the research. Basic information about these seven interviewees as participants is provided below:

Table 1

Interviewee	Professional Background	Teaching Experience of Intercultural (跨文化) Course	Location of the University	Majors Offer Intercultural (跨文化) Course	Abroad Experience	Foreign Language Background	Schools Offer Intercultural (跨文化) Course
Interviewee 1	Communication Studies	2	Chongqing	Communication	Yes	Non	School of Journalism and Communication
Interviewee 2	English Literature	11	Jinan	English	Yes	Yes English	School of Foreign Languages
Interviewee 3	English Literature and Education	1	Hangzhou	English	Yes	Yes English	School of International Cultural Communication
Interviewee 4	Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature	6	Shanghai	International Chinese Language Education	Yes	Yes English	School of International Chinese Studies
Interviewee 5	Linguistics and Applied Linguistics	10	Yichang	International Chinese Language Education	Yes	Yes English	School of Literature and Media
Interviewee 6	Chinese Philosophy	8	Mianyang	International Chinese Language Education	Yes	Yes English	School of Literature and Arts
Interviewee 7	Comparative Literature	4	Xi'an	International Chinese Language Education	Yes	Yes English	School of Humanities

3.2 Teaching Observation

With the consent of certain teachers, one interviewee granted permission for me to observe her/his class. Given the prevailing epidemic control policies, courses in China and universities were conducted online during that period. Consequently, I observed the designated class through the online link provided by the teacher. Another interviewee permitted me to view several of her/his recorded lectures. Additionally, I accessed the official website of Chinese universities' Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC) platform, where I gathered information by observing introductions of various intercultural communication courses. The courses observed are outlined as follows:

Beijing Union University---Intercultural Communication

Suzhou University---Intercultural Communication

Jiangsu University---Intercultural Communication

Northwestern University---Intercultural Communication

3.3 Classroom Observation

I observed several universities with their spatial layout of classrooms, including the seating arrangement, the location of the podium, the classroom decorations, and the teaching equipment (such as whiteboards, markers, projectors, and smart boards) at the universities in China.

3.4 Questionnaire

I conducted a questionnaire survey (Appendix 4). A total of 527 valid responses were obtained from university students, randomly selected across both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The participants in the survey represented diverse academic disciplines and were sourced from various universities in distinct geographical regions.

According to statistics from the questionnaire survey, among those who have chosen to join intercultural courses, 81 people provided a valid answer to the textbooks used

in intercultural courses. The statistical breakdown is as follows:

Table 2

Textbook	Major	The Number of People Fill In This Information
Intercultural Communication by Hu (胡文仲《跨文化交际学概论》)	International Chinese Language Education	8
Intercultual Communication by Zu (祖晓梅《跨文化交际》)	International Chinese Language Education	28
Intercultural Communication Theory and Practice by Liu (刘凤霞《跨文化交际教程》)	International Chinese Language Education	2
Beyond Cultural Difference: Cases and Discussion of Intercultural Communication by Pan (潘一禾《超越文化差异: 跨文化交流的案例与探讨》)	International Chinese Language Education	1
Translation and Intercultural Communication by Chen (陈建平《翻译与跨文化交际》)	English	2
Intercultural Communication by Dong (董晓波《跨文化交际》)	Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics	1
Intercultural Communication by Sun （孙英春《跨文化传播学》）	Comparative Literature and Intercultural Communication	1
Intercultural Communication for English Course (Textbook for Undergraduate Students in English Major) （新编跨文化交际英语教程(新世	Translation	1

纪高等院校英语专业本科生教材》)		
Cross-cultural Communication by Larry A. Samovar(9th edition)	English and American Literature	1
Teacher's Self-made Teaching Materials	English/International Chinese Language Education/Linguistics and Applied Linguistics/ Marketing	6
No textbook	English/International Chinese Language Education/Chinese Language and Literature/Translation	26
Intercultural Communication by Du and Yao (杜平/姚连兵《跨文化交际教程第二版》)	International Chinese Language Education	1
Overview of Portuguese-speaking Countries and Regions(葡语国家与地区概况)	Portuguese	1
Lilian H. Chaney, Jeanette S. Martin, Intercultural Business Communication(6th edition)	Business English	1
Intercultural Communication for College English by Zhou (周小勇《大学英语跨文化交际》)	Chinese Language and Literature	1

In addition to the students who provided information about the textbooks used in intercultural courses (81 respondents), some students either chose not to remember or were unclear about the course materials. From the gathered information, it is evident that the most commonly used textbook is "Intercultural Communication" by Zu Xiaomei, closely followed by "Introduction to Intercultural Communication" by Hu Wenzhong, except for the two cases of no teaching material and self-compiled by the

teacher.

3.5 Teaching Materials and Relevant Teacher Training Documents

I undertook a comprehensive examination of the primary textbooks employed by teachers in their intercultural courses. The selected textbooks for research references primarily originated from those teachers who participated in interviews and the students who responded to questionnaires. This approach ensures the inclusion of the most authentic and practical information. Additionally, I curated relevant information on online teacher training notices and documents associated with intercultural communication courses.

According to the interviews, I identified the most common situations regarding the course textbooks adopted by interviewees for their *Intercultural Communication* courses.[26]:

Table 3

Interviewee	Textbooks
Interviewee 1	No teaching materials, but give reference books to students
Interviewee 2	Adapted by myself from various textbooks
Interviewee 3	Use the book Experiencing Intercultural Communication by Judith
Interviewee 4	No teaching materials, but give reference books to students
Interviewee 5	1.Intercultual Communication by Wu, Yan (吴为善/严慧仙《跨文化交际概论》) 2.Intercultual Communication by Zu

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[26] Here and below, I keep the original name of the intercultural course because there are several versions to say the word *intellectual* in English, for example, Intercultural, cross-cultural, and trans-cultural. In Chinese, it is usually translated to the same name, which is 跨文化, and most of the course names for these teachers are in Chinese. I would like to present the original way they used the words to describe the course without translating it into English.

	(祖晓梅《跨文化交际》)
Interviewee 6	1. Cross-cultural Communication by Larry A. Samovar(9th edition) 2.Intercultural Communication by Zu (祖晓梅《跨文化交际》)

Considering the popularity and representativeness of the identified textbooks, I have chosen the following six as references for my research,which are as follows:

Table 4

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1. Intercultural Communication by Hu （胡文仲《跨文化交际学概论》）

2. Intercultural Communication by Zu （祖晓梅《跨文化交际》）

3. Intercultural Communication Theory and Practice by Liu （刘凤霞《跨文化交际教程》）

4. Intercultural Communication by Larry A. Samovar(9th edition)

5. Intercultural Communication by Wu, Yan （吴为善/严慧仙《跨文化交际概论》）

6. Intercultural Communication by Zhang, Xu（张世涛/徐宵鹰《跨文化交际概论》）

In addition, I have observed the course where teachers utilize PowerPoint presentations, images, and videos during their lectures, which serve as valuable references for my research on teaching materials.

4. Actors as Networks

By tracing the teaching practice with the interaction of curriculum frameworks and course settings, textbooks and teaching materials, teachers, teaching and evaluation methods, and teaching space, I found that they play a pivotal role as primary agents to consolidate knowledge in teaching practice. Additionally, each actor operates as a network, establishing assemblages that reciprocally influence and contribute to forming a broader interconnected network as Law(1992, p. 384) stated that an actor is

a patterned network of heterogeneous relations or an effect produced by such a network. Hence, an actoris also, always, a network. This dynamic process serves to solidify knowledge to varying extents and at distinct developmental stages, and eventually contribute to the blackboxing of knowledge.

A. Curriculum Frameworks and Course Setting

Curriculum frameworks and the goal-setting process for *Intercultural Communication* courses closely align with the strategic objectives and policies of the state, political party, and government, thus indicating a profound connection between national and institutional policies and the formulation of curriculum development and teaching guidelines and execute by school leaders and teachers. They exhibit a pronounced ideological and political orientation, exerting a direct influence on the trajectory of intercultural education. To illustrate, strategic documents such as the 14th Five-Year Plan, Opinions on Implementing the Project for the Inheritance and Development of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture, and Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Work in Universities Under New Circumstances play a pivotal role in providing overarching guidance for curriculum design. These strategic plans distinctly articulate political intentions with regard to intercultural courses, thereby shaping the direction of their curriculum and educational objectives. Furthermore, it also indicates that certain narratives in policies and strategies are used to strengthen what is considered authoritative for teaching practice. For example, the background for opening the intercultural MOOC (Massive Open Online Course)at Jiangsu University is described as follows:

President Xi Jinping pointed out: tell the story of China well to the world, show a true, three-dimensional, and comprehensive China, and enhance the country's soft power (People's Daily,2021). **Telling Chinese stories well** *requires a large number of communicators who are familiar with Chinese culture, have mastered intercultural communication knowledge, and have the ability to teach Chinese to foreigners. International Chinese education meets the country's strategy.*

Moreover, one of the interviewees shared the syllabus for the *Intercultural Communication* course. She/he instructed the syllabus to articulate the course's overarching objective, which is the cultivation of students' awareness of intercultural communication and sensitivity to cultural differences. It emphasizes enhancing students' cultural confidence, fostering the capacity to respect and adapt to diverse cultures, employing effective communication strategies, and enhancing their intercultural communication skills. Notably, it also places a significant emphasis on cultivating the competence to accurately recognize the position and role of the essence of Chinese culture. It underscores the imperative for students to consciously uphold the dignity of Chinese culture and contribute to its promotion and eminence. Moreover, the syllabus requires students to respect the cultures of various nations globally and adapt to diverse cultural customs. It aims to disseminate excellent Chinese traditional culture, guiding students to comprehend the essence of China's outstanding traditional culture profoundly. It seeks to nurture students' affinity for their national language and culture, guiding them in establishing values aligned with socialist core values. In doing so, the course aims to foster students' cultural and institutional confidence in their nation, engendering a sense of love for the party and the country and aligning with broader national strategies and policies.

The MOOC at Jiangsu University also shows that it meets the national strategies and policies, explaining that the course cultivates learners' Chinese language teaching ability and intercultural communication competence in Chinese cultural communication. Based on effectively improving multicultural awareness, it tries to firmly establish the socialist core values and strengthen the four self-confidences, which are telling the story of China well, spreading the voice of China well, and making international contributions to promoting the Belt and Road Initiative and building a community with a shared future for mankind. Moreover, one of the course objectives in the syllabus of the intercultural courses of Suzhou University also clearly states that the core values of socialism should be promoted. This underscores a commitment to incorporating ideological and value-oriented dimensions into the

educational framework, aligning with broader national narratives and objectives.

The Framework of Reference for Intercultural Competence Teaching in Foreign Language Education (2023)[27] introduces three dimensions of knowledge to describe intercultural competence, which are cognitive understanding, emotional attitude, and behavioral skills. Moreover, it underscores the evaluation of intercultural competence across these dimensions, encompassing facets such as the adaption of foreign cultural knowledge, Chinese cultural knowledge, cultural awareness, national identity, global perspective, and intercultural recognition etc.

The frameworks standardize the scope and content for comprehending intercultural competence, primarily focusing on individual aspects that guide teachers to teach the "knowledge" they specified. Consequently, it establishes a structured learning environment where complex concepts are broken down into manageable components. It offers frameworks that categorize and organize various aspects of intercultural competence. These frameworks serve as instructive tools for teachers, delineating the requisite knowledge and teaching skills they should possess. The course teaching is primarily rooted in adherence to curriculum guidance and frameworks, but they do not simply describe "pre-existing realities", they are "significant participants in knowledge work" (Ewenstein, Whyte, 2009, p. 9).

Besides, the description of the course introduction conspicuously distinguishes cultural differences by comparing "Chinese and Western cultures," which strongly contains the ideological position of the institutions, and this affects the scope of teachers' and students' understanding of intercultural competence, particularly when comparing different cultures; for instance, Beijing Union University positions its MOOC as a general education elective within the University's English major. The course's objectives include cultivating students' awareness of intercultural

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[27] Foreign Language Education Intercultural Competence Teaching Reference Framework of China (2023) released by the Intercultural Research Center of Shanghai International Studies University, judging from the three aspects of cognitive understanding, emotional attitude, and behavioral skills, it is only benchmarking against the situation in China, and it is also distinguishes China from foreign countries, and add sections including foreign cultural knowledge, Chinese cultural knowledge, and national identity, etc.

communication and facilitating their understanding of distinctions between "Chinese and Western cultures." It aims to enhance students' social, linguistic, and intercultural communicative competencies. Similarly, Suzhou University elucidates that its intercultural course examines the profound cultural roots by displaying and analyzing similarities and differences between "Chinese and Western cultures."

These course frameworks and settings limited and solidified the knowledge within a specific framework. It facilitates the simplification and standardization of the teaching process, thereby contributing to the stabilization of knowledge. When certain practices become standardized, they are less likely to be questioned or re-evaluated within the network. Riding on the back of written representations, educational frameworks and settings have the power to determine what scope of knowledge constitutes teaching. The practices are performative. They bring things – teacher knowledge and identities – into being. They don't simply refer to or represent something somewhere else (Sorensen, 2007); they help shape and condition the education of intercultural competence.

B. Textbooks and Teaching Material

Textbooks and teaching materials are what Latour (1987, p. 91) called initially immutable mobiles. They can be silent, ignored, or overrode by other active objects. However, they have developed enough solidity to move about and still hold their relations in place. Firstly, textbooks and teaching materials must conform to the objectives outlined in a given course or curriculum，such as the cultivation of students' awareness of intercultural communication and sensitivity to cultural differences, the competence of telling Chinese stories well，the competence to accurately recognize the position and role of the essence of Chinese culture as I mentioned above. Therefore, writing and selecting knowledge for the textbook are crucial aspects of the textbook development process. They assume a crucial role in simplifying and encapsulating intercultural competence knowledge. For instance, in a survey of

widely used textbooks on intercultural Competence, the works of Zu Xiaomei[28] and Hu Wenzhong[29] emerging as widely regarded as authoritative within this domain, as per the perspectives shared by interviewees, Zu Xiaomei's textbook is acknowledged as a foundational core text in the field of international Chinese education. Taking these two textbooks as examples, it becomes evident that their narratives closely align. Both texts primarily concentrate on fundamental intercultural communication knowledge, introducing pertinent theoretical frameworks and concepts encompassing culture, communication, and their connection with language. Notably, the conceptual foundations of these textbooks are markedly chosen from Edward T. Hall's Context-Culture Theory and Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory. This influence is apparent in the incorporation of concepts such as high-context culture versus low-context culture, the collectivism-individualism dimension in Hofstede's cultural dimensions, verbal and nonverbal communication, as well as considerations of time, space, and communication, cultural values, culture shock, stereotypes, prejudice these concepts profoundly affect our understanding of intercultural communication. The textbooks predominantly cover key areas of knowledge such as intercultural adaptation or adjustment, intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural effectiveness, and verbal and non-verbal communication in intercultural contexts. Additionally, there is a section addressing the improvement of intercultural communication competence and the achievement of intercultural understanding, supplemented by illustrative cases of cultural adjustment. These textbooks contribute to standardizing knowledge by presenting a common set of content and modes that can be widely adopted in educational settings. This standardization simplifies the complexity of diverse perspectives on intercultural competence and presents a unified version of the subject matter.

Hall's Context-Culture Theory and Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory are early influential theories related to intercultural studies, utilizing nations as units for

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[28] 祖晓梅，跨文化交际，外语教学与研究出版社，2015.
[29] 胡文仲，跨文化交际学概论，外语教学与研究出版社，1999.

cultural comparison. The two theories simplify cultures into a set of dimensions, which makes learners easier to understand and use, and they tend to focus on national cultures and overlook intra-cultural variation (within any country, there can be significant differences in cultural practices and values among different regions, ethnic groups, or social classes). This approach aligns with China's method of cultural comparison, which emphasizes the division between "Chinese and Western cultures" and can be integrated with the goal of promoting national cultural identity.

However, cultures in these theories are taken as static and unchanging, which can lead to cultural stereotyping. The binary classification of cultures into high-context and low-context by Hall can oversimplify the complex and dynamic nature of cultural communication. Hofstede's theory assumes cultural homogeneity within countries that may not exist. Countries often contain diverse cultural groups with different values and practices, which the theory does not adequately address. Reducing complex cultural phenomena to a set of dimensions can lead to a simplified understanding of culture. In this way, culture's complexity and dynamic nature is encapsulated within these selective pieces of knowledge, which are then packaged into authoritative textbooks as long as they are strategically structured to align with specific educational goals, thereby offering a clearly delineated trajectory for both teachers and learners. This alignment reinforces the blackboxing of knowledge within the confines of a particular educational setting. Textbooks and teaching materials are meticulously curated and organized to present a body of knowledge about intercultural competence.

According to the interviewed teachers, they also emphasize that Hall and Hofstede's theories are popular in teaching, which align with those expounded in authoritative intercultural textbooks (such as the textbooks compiled by Hu Wenzhong, Zu Xiaomei,etc.) . This reciprocal reinforcement establishes a prevailing perception among many students that these theories hold the utmost authority and correctness in the field. Consequently, students develop a robust faith in these theories, considering

them as foundational and preeminent in the study of intercultural Competence. For instance, Interviewee 6 mentioned that Zu Xiaomei's textbook is the core textbook for the major of International Chinese Education. The main theoretical sources for his/her lectures are Edward Hall or Hofstede, as well as some theories from other American scholars in intercultural communication. When I asked Interviewee 7 about the terms usually used in the classroom related to intercultural concepts, he/she primarily mentioned high and low context, M-time culture, and P-time culture, all derived from Hall's cultural theories. Similarly, when I inquired about the main scholars whose theories were introduced, Interviewee 7 provided the same answer – mainly Hofstede and Hall. From this perspective, textbooks serve as stabilizing forces that delineate, represent, and convey specific facets of knowledge, actively contributing to the establishment of a taken-for-granted status for that knowledge. Through their role in shaping and presenting information, textbooks play a crucial part in solidifying certain theories or frameworks as fundamental and unquestionable within the educational context. This process reinforces a sense of authority and legitimacy, further ingraining the adopted knowledge into the collective understanding of the subject matter.

Additionally, the scrutiny of textbooks actually illustrates that knowledge is a black box, the scrutiny of textbooks can potentially limit or distort knowledge, creating a "black box" effect where certain information is restricted, omitted, or presented in a biased manner due to external influences, such as political considerations. This process may result in a limited and controlled perspective on various subjects, hindering the free flow of diverse ideas and viewpoints. Several interviewees highlighted the importance of reviewing teaching materials, including textbooks, within their universities. Notably, the teaching materials selected by teachers are typically published in China and considered safer for widespread use. This is attributed to the fact that materials published in China undergo censorship by publishing authorities. For instance, Interviewee 2 referenced the scrutiny of teaching materials during the interview:

我:这个课程的教材是由谁来指定的，任课老师自己可以指定吗？还是需要学校来指定或者是说审核？ (Me: Who determines the textbooks for this course? Can the instructor choose them, or is it decided or reviewed by the school?)

受访者 2:我们老师推荐教材，然后这个学校，他会有审核， 他会让整本书都上传，然后他每一页都挨着审核。(Interviewee 2: The teachers recommend textbooks for this course. The school conducts a review process; the entire book is uploaded, and each page is thoroughly examined.)

我:是学校教务处审核，还是就你们学院自己审核？ (Me: Is it the school's academic affairs office that conducts the review, or does your college handle it independently?)

受访者 2:学院先自查，然后上传到系统里，就是各种教育部门，他会一级一级的审核的，应该是。(Interviewee 2: The college conducts an initial self-check and then uploads the materials to the system. Various education departments will conduct a step-by-step review process, I believe.)

我:您是主要依据这个教材内容，还有它是否符合或者适合这个教学对象来考虑，对吧？ (Me: So, the main considerations are based on the textbook and whether it is suitable for the target audience, correct?)

受访者 2:就是说第一政治性要必须过硬，第二点，就是它的这个难度，最好能够适合目标群众 ......(Interviewee 2: Yes, the first consideration is its political correctness, and secondly, the difficulty level. It's preferable if it suits the target audience well......)

Interviewee 3 also mentioned: 我们学校它有几个原则，因为现在上面审核会比较严嘛，所以就是这个这个教材它必须是在国内出版过的，学校要审核的。(Our school has several principles because the upper-level reviews are quite strict now. Therefore, the textbooks must have been published domestically, and the school will conduct the necessary evaluations.)

Moreover, various concepts are simplified and abstracted in textbooks and teaching materials through the use of direct language and expressions without explaination. For example, I have compiled a list of vocabulary that frequently appear in the case

studies of educational textbooks and materials (please see Table 5). These terms are borrowed from foreign theories. Some of them even have different historical and political connotations within the Chinese context, and some expressions may need to be reconsidered due to social developments and changes, but they have been overlooked by the authors of textbooks and teachers.

Table 5

种族	Race
民族	Nation
多样化	Diversification
公民	Citizen
尊重	Respect
包容	Tolerance
身份认同	Identity
集体主义	Collectivism
个人主义	Individualism
中国文化和西方文化	Chinese culture and the Western culture

For example, I observed that teachers integrate these concepts into their teaching explanations and cases without engaging in critical reflection. In their PowerPoint presentations, as well as through the use of images or videos, these concepts are employed to elucidate examples rather than being subjected to critical examination. It contributes to the acceptance of the presented knowledge as fact. As an illustration, this was evident in the class taught by Interviewee 6, which I had the opportunity to observe. The teacher elucidates divergent perspectives on communication"Chinese and Western cultures" by employing distinct modes of expression. The accompanying visual representation in the PowerPoint presentation is both straightforward and intuitive. Please refer to the illustration below:

中西方不同的表达方式
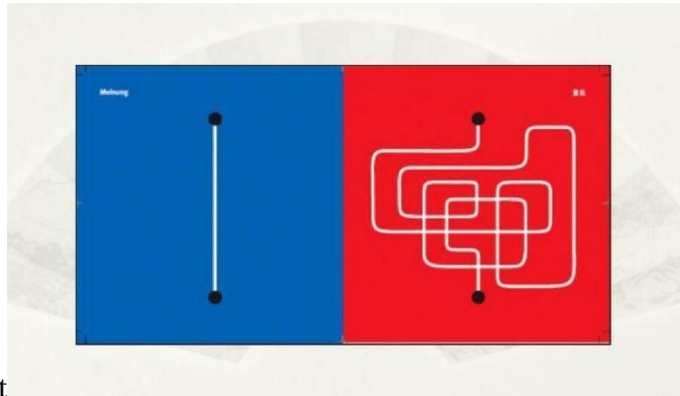
直接 Direct   间接、委婉 indirect

Western Culture   Chinese Culture

The teacher explains that the expression in Western culture is direct, whereas, in Chinese culture, it is indirect and euphemistic. This distinction arises because Western culture emphasizes the functional aspect of communication when conveying ideas. In contrast, Asian cultures prioritize the relationships between communicators. The underlying reason for this contrast lies in the geographical environment and lifestyle. China's closed continental geography has shaped a delicate, reserved, and implicit character, while the Western open maritime geography has fostered an extroverted, straightforward, and direct maritime cultural character.

Here are the notes I have taken:

Indirect culture	中国　大陆封闭型地理环境　内向型农耕文化性格　细腻含蓄　委婉表达
Direct culture	西方　海洋开放型地理环境　外向型海洋文化性格　直白坦率　直接表达

Isn't this way of a typical example of a stereotype for cultural comparison that can perpetuate misunderstandings and biases? Firstly, the description overgeneralizes the behaviors of entire cultures. The explanation attributes complex cultural behaviors to overly simplistic causes like geography and lifestyle. While these factors can influence cultural development, they are not communication styles' sole or primary

determinants. Historical, social, political, and economic factors also play significant roles. Furthermore, it is important to recognize the limitations of geographical determinism. The assertion that geographical environment (continental vs. maritime) directly shapes cultural character is an example of this outdated and overly deterministic view. Culture is influenced by a multitude of factors, and reducing it to geography is an oversimplification that hinders a more nuanced and contemporary approach to cultural analysis.

Teachers present such content without critical thinking or critique (to some extent, teachers endorse this knowledge) as objective knowledge imparted to students. Students may trust in the authority of their teachers, and absorb this knowledge as objective, and gradually develop an acceptance of similar cultural comparative methods.

In another instance, the teacher utilizes the cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism presented in the textbook to highlight the differences between Western and Chinese cultures. Specifically, the comparison is drawn to elucidate why Chinese and Western cultures diverge in their understanding of the concept of "old（老）" and their distinct statuses in China and the West. The teacher expounds on the notions of self-reliance and independence（自立）within Western individualism in contrast to collectivism.

This example underscores the inadvertent potential for textbooks and teaching materials to reinforce cultural narratives or stereotypes through the selection of specific examples or framing of certain practices. Furthermore, the teachers' application of knowledge derived from these materials can contribute to the blackboxing process, which formed "culture" as a simplified and operationalized notion (e.g., individualism/collectivism). "Culture," at this level, is most often defined as nationality, and the constructedness of this position and its intersection with other positions such as gender and social class is not considered. The outcome is that

diverse groups and individuals are treated as homogeneous, differences within national boundaries, ethnic groups, genders, and individuals are obscured, and hegemonic notions of "culture" are presented as "shared" by all cultural members. Moreover, intercultural communication of this sort is most often studied within dyads wherein two disembodied, ahistorical beings communicate across cultures (Moon,1996, p.76).

From above, textbooks and teaching materials are crucial actors in the black-boxing of knowledge about intercultural competence. Their role involves simplifying, organizing, and standardizing, making the complexities of intercultural competence accessible and manageable within the educational context in this case study.

C. The Role of Teachers

Teachers are involved in selecting and imparting knowledge for intercultural competence courses, this process encompasses the relational network of teachers with other actors, the imbrications of their vocational identities with teachers' social identities, and the articulation of teachers' agency through the social and material conditions of their lived experience (Sriprakash, Mukhopadhyay, 2015, p.241). For example, teachers' educational backgrounds and the training they receive influence their understanding of intercultural competence. From the basic information about the interviewees, it can be observed that they all have a background in linguistics (refer to Table 1), who emphasizing the role of language in culture. For example: Interviewee7 emphasized that intercultural Competence is based on language, the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately.（跨文化能力是以语言为基础，有效地、得体地交际的能力。）Interviewee3 believes language proficiency is the foremost ability in intercultural Competence.（把语言能力放在第一位。）

Some other teachers, on the other hand, interpret individual skills as intercultural competence. Interviewee2 believes that intercultural competence involves not only

effective and appropriate communicative behavior but also emotional aspects.（跨文化能力除了有效而得体的交际行为，情感方面也是理解跨文化能力的重要方面。）Interviewee6 considers attitude, emotions, and practical behavior as crucial aspects of possessing intercultural Competence.（态度，情感以及我们的实践行为是具备跨文化能力的重要方面。）Interviewee7 emphasized that intercultural Competence is based on language, the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately.（跨文化能力是以语言为基础，有效地、得体地交际的能力。）

There are also teachers whose understanding of intercultural communication is notably based on distinctions between national borders. For instance, Interviewee 5 primarily distinguishes intercultural understanding through the concepts of major cultural circles and subcultures. Interviewee 5 stated:

只要你跨出你的文化圈，你就开始进行跨文化，比如说从入境开始那个阶段开始，一下飞机从入境开始就已经开始跨文化。因为文化分为，这个大文化和亚文化，次文化圈，比如说我到日本，都是东亚的文化圈，或者说我在新加坡或者韩国，你说到新加坡百分之七十都是华人，日本都是很多用汉字，在韩国也不会感觉到心理距离特别远，但是你到欧美之后这个是跨大文化圈了。...... 跨文化交际是一个实践性的东西，如果你的学校里面没有这个是外国人，异域的人，那你可能的话就跟他们说这些东西，它是一个纸上谈兵的事。

(As long as you step off the plane and enter a new country, you are already embarking on an intercultural experience. This is because culture can be divided into major cultures and subcultures, such as the East Asian cultural sphere. For instance, when visiting Japan, you are within the East Asian cultural sphere, and even in Singapore or South Korea, where a significant portion of the population is Chinese or uses Chinese characters, you may not feel a significant psychological distance. However, when you venture into Europe or America, you are entering a different major cultural sphere............ Intercultural communication is a practical matter. If there are no foreigners or people from different regions in your school, discussing these concepts might be purely theoretical, as it involves engaging with individuals from diverse backgrounds.)

In addition, policy discourse may shape teachers' understanding of intercultural knowledge. The teacher training sessions exhibit discernible traces of ideology, policy guidance, and professional and functional guidance. A case in point is the training lectures offered by the Shanghai International Chinese Education Work Alliance, where specific lectures reveal a distinct guiding orientation; namely, the 10th lecture is the educational strategies for international students to tell the stories of China well; the 11th lecture is about overseas Chinese language teaching, crossing cultural barriers, and improving intercultural competence in cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries; the 15th is Improve international communication competence and tell the stories of China well to the world! Besides, judging from the lectures such as Exploring the Intercultural Communication Course: Telling Culture Story in the notice on the Teacher Training for the core course Intercultural Communication of Master Degree in International Chinese Language Education 2022, it emphasizes the narrative ability of cultural stories and the innovation and practice of telling Chinese stories well. It aligns with a series of policies, such as telling the Chinese story well in the 14th Five-Year Plan.

However, teachers may differ in their interpretation of the respective weights of the intent and the letter of the policy(Carroll, 2018, p.257). For instance, interviewee 3 highlighted the functional aspect of intercultural Competence because of the different standpoints in intercultural policies and education stances between China, Europe, and the United States; their function of intercultural Competence could be different. Additionally, he pointed out that intercultural Competence comes with certain risks:

我：什么样的风险性？(Me:What kind of risks?)

受访者 3：可能老师上课的过程当中可能会跑偏。(Interviewee3: It's possible that the teacher might deviate from the topic during the class.)

我：您是说可能会不会涉及到敏感话题？(Me： Are you suggesting that it might involve sensitive topics?)

受访者 3：对，文化之间因为是非常容易的，这个是非常容易会发生一件事情。(Interviewee3: Yes, because it's very easy to touch upon sensitive issues between

cultures, and this is something that can easily happen.)

Besides, Interviewee 6 expressed the view that culture knows no distinction between high and low（文化不分贵贱）. She mentioned that President Xi Jinping has also stated that culture encompasses a myriad of colors（文化只有姹紫嫣红）.

Therefore, teachers' instructional behavior always carries a political dimension, as it may involve prioritizing specific orders, perspectives, and practices over others. As the key human actors in the teaching practice of the black-boxing of knowledge in intercultural competence, their understanding is influenced by other actors and, in turn, affects how they translate knowledge during the teaching process. It determines which part they emphasize and what aspects they might overlook or intentionally avoid (potentially due to political sensitivity). Their choices influence the content, structure, and emphasis of the curriculum, contributing to the black-boxing process by determining what aspects of intercultural competence are included and how they are presented. Just like the authors and editors of textbooks make decisions about what content to include, how to structure it, and how to present it, influencing what aspects of intercultural competence are emphasized and what is left out. By highlighting specific theories, principles, or skills, teachers contribute to the blackboxing of knowledge by guiding learners toward a focused and coherent understanding of the subject matter. In other words, teachers are 'brokers' of knowledge in the sense that they are mediators in the teaching process. Teachers mediate between various elements in the educational network, including textbooks, teaching materials, and students. But they are also 'translators' in the sense that the salience of their mediations is contingent on the role and agency of other actors connected to the teaching network and on the negotiations of these interconnections. (Sriprakash, Mukhopadhyay, 2015, p.232). They contribute to the blackboxing process by managing interactions and guiding the learning experience in a way that simplifies and structures knowledge.

D. Teaching and Evaluation Activities

Teaching and evaluation activities are part of teaching practice. They are a combination of interactions among various actors, such as educational policies and school curriculum guidance, teaching materials influence, teachers 'training and classroom practice, and students' feedback and acceptance, etc., presented under their collective interactive actions.

According to my tracing and observation, it was discovered that teaching activities mainly include structured collaborative activities such as lectures, discussions, case studies, discussions, and experiential exercises. The teacher also might   introduced guest speakers. The class session would include engaging students in activities such as group work, student teaching demonstrations, and presentation of student reports.

Teachers in the interviews primarily use theoretical introductions and presentations as their main activities. Interviewee 6 explained that their approach involves the teacher presenting theories, followed by students doing presentations. Additionally, they incorporate role-playing. This method is similar to those of Interviewee3 and Interviewee7. Apart from conceptual theory instruction, they also include group discussions and situational performances. For example, sharing different eating habits from various places and role-playing scenarios when people from different countries meet each other.

Teaching activities in *Intercultural Communication* courses often focus on the integration of practical skills. Role-playing, intercultural simulations, and real-world applications especially help to the blackboxing process by emphasizing the application of knowledge in concrete situations. For example, interviewee 5 mentioned his main teaching method: Starting with practical examples and applying theoretical knowledge is an effective approach. The first step involves teaching basic theory, followed by a focus on real-life case studies. （从实践去实践的案例去入手，

第一个是讲授了基本理论，再一个就是从实际的案例入手。）He/she explained: 有时候我的课堂上会有外国的学生，基本上每年都会有一两个，然后的话他们跟中国学生之间本身就是有互动，相互之间就是在进行跨文化交际，比老师讲的效果好很多,比如班上一个马来西亚的学生介绍他们国家的民族乐器，让大家对不同乐器有了新的了解，就更直观。(Sometimes, there are foreign students in my classroom, typically one or two each year. They naturally interact with Chinese students, engaging in intercultural communication. The interaction among students often enhances the effectiveness of the class, such as when a Malaysian student introduces traditional musical instruments from their country. This kind of firsthand experience allows everyone to gain a new and more immediate understanding of different musical instruments.)

The teaching activities Interviewee 2 introduced has similarities: （我们把留学生，把他们请进教室里来，或者网上连线，与我们的学生分组进行座谈。 再一个就是案例分析,让学生找出现实中的一些案例。上外推广的中国跨文化能力大赛(SFLEP Cup National College Students'Intercultural Competence Contest)[30]，有对这个案例描述分析表演和问答，各个环节的规定和评价的标准，让学生参照，通过案例分析，把已经学的这种理论拿去用，感觉效果也不错，还有就是设计一些体验式的活动，比如模拟联合国大会。(We invite international students into the classroom or connect with them online, grouping them with our students for discussions. Another approach is case analysis, which encourages students to identify real-life scenarios. For instance, in the promotion of the SFLEP Cup National College Students' Intercultural Competence Contest organized by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, there are specific regulations and evaluation criteria for case description, analysis, performance, and Q&A sessions. Students can refer to these guidelines and apply the theoretical knowledge they have learned through case analysis, resulting in positive outcomes. Additionally, designing experiential activities,

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[30] 该大赛以党的十九大报告精神和习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想为指导，深入贯彻落实《中国教育现代化 2035》《国家中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要（2010-2020 年)》《高等学校英语专业本科教学质量国家标准》（2018）和《大学英语教学指南》（2020）文件精神，本着以赛促学、以赛促教、以赛促研的理念，专注打造高校学生语言文化类一流竞赛平台，助力高等学校人才培养模式探索，促进国际理解和交流合作，为推动构建人类命运共同体和促进"一带一路"国际合作培养能"讲好中国故事，传播好中国声音"的复合型、高素质国际化人才。
For more details please check：https://ict.sflep.com/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=lists&catid=49.

such as simulating a Model United Nations conference, contributes to a more immersive learning experience.)

These activities are all consistent with cultivating intercultural competence and the direction of the teaching materials.Simultaneously,the teaching methods further solidify cultural distinctions based on nationality. Students may perceive this as a natural way of differentiation without further thought. These approaches reinforce cultural boundaries as delineated by national borders, strengthening the belief among students that being with people from different countries constitutes intercultural communication. Consequently, this reinforces stereotypes. Take the Model UN Conference as an example, the teacher used a simulation of the United Nations to train intercultural competence between cultures from different countries. The concern is whether teachers and students have first clarified the nature of the United Nations and what each country aims to represent through this platform. Does intercultural competence solely encompass individual language proficiency, behavior, and attitudes toward culture in this scene? What other knowledge and background does this approach overlook? Chinese students and international students attend classes together, share cultural differences, and play a crucial role in the black-boxing of knowledge in intercultural competence. Their impact lies in solidifying knowledge and reinforcing stereotypes through a shift in such teaching methods.

On the other hand, assessment are another aspect which designed to measure students' understanding of intercultural competence. This design also in favor of the blackboxing process by providing a way to evaluate learning outcomes without necessarily revealing the intricacies of individual cognitive processes. For example, the well-known models such as INCA EU Intercultural Competence Evaluation Project[31]; ABC model[32]the Intercultural Communicative Competence Assessment

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[31] The framework divides intercultural Competence into three categories: tolerance, cognitive Competence, and adaptability. The development of each category is divided into three levels: basic Competence, intermediate Competence, and adequate Competence. The social and civic Competence mentioned in core competence is summarized into six characteristics of individuals with intercultural Competence:(1)tolerance of ambiguity; (2) behavioral flexibility; (3) communicative awareness; (4) Knowledge knowledge discovery; (5) respect for others; (6) empathy (Jiang, 2017).

Scale ICCAS for Chinese university students by Wu Weiping[33] and so on. Responds to the teaching content I mentioned above. Gudykunst (2004) compiled 38 scales in the monograph Bridging Differences: Effective Intergroup Communication, including assessment of individualism and collectivism values, self-understanding of independence and interdependence, cultural Scales of identity strength, ethnocentrism, prejudice, stereotypes, face concern, conflict management with strangers, and moral tolerance of strangers, etc.

Judging from the above evaluation models, the knowledge of intercultural competence is established based on a judgment of ability and social rule based on most people's social survival and communication patterns. It standardizes Intercultural Competence in an individualized way by providing a way to measure learning outcomes that focus on observable behaviors without necessarily revealing all the intricacies of individual cognitive processes. For example,全国跨文化能力考试 (Intercultural Competence Test，简称 ICT)[34]. The Center for Intercultural Competence Assessment introduced the purpose of the test to assess students' comprehensive skills in applying intercultural communication skills, intercultural cognitive skills, intercultural attitudes, intercultural awareness, knowledge of Chinese culture, and knowledge of foreign cultures. These skills are evaluated based on their ability to engage in effective and appropriate communication in intercultural communication scenarios（考查学生运用跨文化交流技能、跨文化认知技能、跨文化态度、跨文化意识、中国文化知识和外国文化知识等六个要素的综合技能在跨文化交际情境中进行有效而得体交流的能力）， and the test encompasses four dimensions:

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[32] ABC model or triangular model, namely the three factors of Affective, Behavioral, and Cognitive. Representative scholars include Chen and Starosta, Ward, Oatey, and Franklin, etc. Emotional factor means intercultural sensitivity, which refers to the subjective willingness of individuals to understand, appreciate, and accept cultural differences. The measurement tool is the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, which has 24 items and measures five dimensions: interactive engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. Behavioral factor means intercultural effectiveness, which refers to the ability to complete work tasks and communication goals in intercultural communication. The measurement tool is the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale, which has 20 items in total and measures six dimensions: behavioral flexibility, interaction relaxation, interactant respect, message skills, identity maintenance, and interaction management. Cognitive factors refer to intercultural awareness, which refers to understanding the salient features of one's culture and that of others (Zhao, 2015).

[33] Wu Weiping (2013) constructed the Intercultural Communicative Competence Assessment Scale ICCAS for Chinese university students. Its theoretical basis is the theoretical model of intercultural communication proposed by Byram (1997), covering four dimensions of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness. The scale also distinguishes China from foreign countries and examines ability from an individual perspective.

[34] For details, please refer to the website：https://ict.sflep.com/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=14&id=77

knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness, covering the aforementioned six elements（考试内容包括知识、态度、技能和意识四个维度，涵盖上述六个要素）.Moreover, it devided the participants into two different groups, which are Chinese student group（中国学生组） and international student group（国际学生组） for the competition.

The following is a sample question with an Intermediate Level of Communicative skills provided by the test center :

You are an employee in a branch of IVECO in China. Recently, a project was finished, and your manager asked you to prepare gifts for your Italian counterparts for their support. What would you do when preparing gifts for them?

A. Prepare gifts with purple wrapping.

B. Prepare gifs without price stickers.

C. Prepare knives or scissors as gifts.

D. Prepare bunches of chrysanthemums as gifts.

This test, which is in conjunction with cultural competence education, serves a distinct function. The homepage of the test website prominently displays the slogan "Understanding the World, Expressing China（理解世界，表达中国）."The consistent framework provided by such standardized testing reinforces the notion that one's intercultural Competence can be quantified as an individual capability.

Thus, teaching and assessment activities in intercultural competence influenced the process of blackboxing of knowledge by simplifying, structuring, and evaluating specific aspects of the subject matter. The learning norms established by the methods of teaching, the interactions they encourage, and the values they prioritize frame the learning environment in a particular way. The emphasis on practical application and discernible outcomes in these methods serves to consolidate students' comprehension of intercultural competence.

E. Teaching Space

Teaching space refers to the classroom. As a classical material space occupying physical dimensions, the classroom embodies the functional locus of cultural connotations such as education, discipline, and instructional activities. However, it is not a static object; rather, according to Latour (Latour, Yaneva, 2008, p. 80), it constitutes a "dynamic project," serving as the mechanism and locus of practical instructional activities. In the classroom space, the physical layout of a classroom, for example, the arrangement of furniture and teaching aids(blackboards/whiteboards, PowerPoint presentations, projectors, and other multimedia), the design and decoration of the classroom, and the use of technology, all interconnected with the actions of relevant stakeholders, thereby altering the meaning of the environment or "objects" themselves through these interactions, which influence how teaching and learning activities unfold. Teaching spaces are seen as performative, meaning they actively contribute to enacting teaching practices. For instance, in the Chinese university classrooms I have observed, the podium assumes a central and prominent position at the front. A serious and straightforward layout characterizes the typical arrangement. The physical organization of the classroom, encompassing desk placements and seating arrangements, exerts a discernible impact on power dynamics and communication(refer to the Picture 1 below). Conventional front-facing configurations may inadvertently reinforce an instructor-centric pedagogical approach, thereby constraining open dialogue and interaction. Such a teacher-centered spatial layout may unintentionally perpetuate power imbalances, impeding students' capacity to engage in open discussions concerning cultural differences. The physical space can black-box the influence of the classroom arrangement on power relations and communication dynamics.

Picture 1

Meanwhile, this reflects a power dynamic between the teacher and students, with the teacher's authority in imparting knowledge and the seriousness with which students are expected to receive that knowledge. Certain language styles or communication norms may be favored based on the dominant pattern within the learning environment. This can create power imbalances that are implicitly reinforced by the physical space, potentially black-boxing the impact of language on intercultural communication.

Secondly, the physical space's intentional design may lead to the normalization of certain cultural representations; for example, to create an international or culturally rich atmosphere, certain classrooms may be embellished with flags from diverse countries or adorned with elements symbolizing Chinese culture, such as Chinese knots, couplets, and other traditional symbols(refer to the Picture 2 below). However, this approach may inadvertently oversimplify and overlook the intricate and dynamic nature of cultural identities. Unconsciously, it reinforces a static perception of culture. Additionally, students might accept the curated cultural environment without critically questioning its construction.

Picture 2

Space, in terms of its physical dimensions, appears to exist independently of social values. However, every physical aspect of space—such as its dimensions, location, shape, structure, colors, access to light, and the objects within it—serves as a dynamic sign. Semiotics establishes connections among individuals, their identities, knowledge, life experiences, and perspectives.Therefore, place can be understood as a specific combination of physical landscapes, their social constructs and performances, and emotional ties that influence and shape the worldview of a person. Reading all these nuances of places is the task of place-based pedagogy where pedagogical places are not general places but are intentional, normative places, which are to serve the realization of the pedagogy of autonomy(Wieszaczewska, 2018, p.168). For this reason, a pedagogical place is synonymous with a pedagogical action(Puchert, Kurowska-Susdorf 2016, p. 33). Moreover, Lefebvre emphasizes representations of space are physical expressions of knowledge and power and of how space is portrayed by those in control—the leaders, planners, technocrats, bureaucrats, and scientists (Follman, 2015, p. 9). Thus, the consideration of the connection of teaching space, power, and local social practices is necessary.

On the other hand, teachers utilize emerging multimedia technologies with interactive features to engage students by presenting teaching content and monitoring students' learning progress through backend data surveillance in real-time. This fosters student engagement in classroom learning, facilitates connections among various actors, and

establishes networks of stakeholders. More than that, online platforms and virtual classrooms create digital spaces for the education of intercultural competence. With the development of science and technology, teaching platforms have expanded beyond traditional physical spaces, and online teaching platforms have gradually become a prevalent scene for education. Particularly during the pandemic, many schools adopted online teaching methods to continue educational practices. The shift to this type of teaching scenario not only highlights the changes in communication brought about by technology but also encapsulates knowledge within the blackbox of intercultural communication. The alteration of the technological space further reinforces the fact that with economic and technological advancements, people worldwide have more opportunities to communicate. Science and technology have eliminated physical distances, bringing individuals closer together. The possibility and opportunity for everyone to engage in communication have increased, leading to more frequent intercultural interactions.

As a result, intercultural competence is considered as an even more crucial quality in an era where such interactions are inevitable. For example, I found the common Online teaching Platforms used for intercultural course teaching are Video conferencing tools like Zoom andVooV Meeting（腾讯会议）during the lockdown of Covid-9 in China. These platforms provide opportunities for students to engage with peers from different cultural backgrounds. While these tools enhance the convenience of teaching, the technology may obscure the complexities of intercultural interactions. Students and teachers may focus on the convenience of online communication without critically examining the nuances of cultural sensitivity or the potential challenges associated with virtual exchanges. For instance, The use of virtual backgrounds in video conferencing can inadvertently convey cultural assumptions. For instance, backgrounds depicting certain landscapes or landmarks may favor specific cultural references, potentially reinforcing stereotypes or marginalizing individuals with different cultural backgrounds. This solidification of cultural knowledge itself tends to make people view culture from a more static perspective.

Students may focus on completing tasks rather than reflecting on the dynamic aspects of intercultural interactions during collaboration.

Furthermore, technology has disrupted traditional teaching spaces, seemingly making communication between individuals more equal, convenient, and closer. However, it often overlooks the resource allocation and control behind the technology, including the surveillance power and restrictions on space. Some platforms have rules that prohibit or limit discussions on sensitive topics. It will also be important if we truly understand the potential examination of the spaces of constant scrutiny, surveillance, and constraint that are being created in education at the present time. Access to technology and the digital divide can contribute to power imbalances, limiting the participation of certain groups. The power dynamics associated with online spaces, such as who controls the platform and sets the rules, affect the equitable inclusion of diverse voices.may be helped to black-boxcurrent specific knowledge. In the user agreement of Voov Meeting, distinctions are made for users from different countries, such as China, Germany, and Singapore[35] To comply with various legal regulations regarding security information and other aspects. For example, in the user code of conduct, certain behaviors prohibited by laws and regulations are listed, such as incitement of ethnic hatred, discrimination, and actions that undermine national unity. Additionally, it addresses violations of legal and regulatory boundaries, socialist system principles, and national interest boundaries[36].

Thus, for teaching intercultural competence, the intersection of physical and social spaces, along with power dynamics, can contribute to the blackboxing of knowledge.

5. Discussion and Analysis

5.1 Teaching is a Form of Social Practice Constructed Through Mutual Actions

Through tracking the process of teaching practice, I found it is an accomplishment of

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[35] For details, please refer to the website: https://voovmeeting.com/service-agreement.html
[36] For details, please refer to the website: https://rule.tencent.com/rule/ab9ea528-0bf1-47b3-a8c3-f001b98912e2

an assemblage (network) rather than an individual teacher; one starts from the resources mobilized to establish an object of knowledge: people, devices, texts, organizations, spaces, decisions, and power relations. This achievement, which is always provisional, is the effect of 'materially, socially, and conceptually hybrid performances. In these performances, different elements assemble and act in certain ways to produce specific consequences' (Law,Singleton, 2000, p. 774).Within the framework and guidance of the curriculum, teaching integrates various strategies and methods to facilitate the understanding, appreciation, and application of the knowledge of intercultural competence. As such processes occur repeatedly, they become routine, and the actors and networks involved in their creation go unnoticed. The situation turns into a 'black box' – a situation that is taken for granted, considered as 'truth'（Pfefferman, 2017, p. 383).

In other words, teaching is an unformed but generative flux of forces and relations that produce particular realities of teaching practices that acquire agency through advancing teachers, space, techniques, curriculum, textbooks, activities, etc. It is a multitude of interdependent assemblages and constitutes a set of dynamic, distributed, and more or less standardized practices. Teaching, like Latour and Woolgar's (1979) summation of laboratory practices, is condensed with other forms of materiality that dissolve or purify the complexity of relations: knowledge becomes an effect of material relations. Statements about reality are stabilized, and the cost of challenging these statements is impossibly high (Latour, Woolgar, 1979, p. 32), and this translates into teaching practices that enact a singular version of reality. However, reality does not precede practices; it is made through them.

At the same time, practices and reproduce the distribution of power relations and the inequalities that go with them (Nicolini et al., 2003, p. 24). The power relationship involves the legitimacy of authorization within pedagogical relationships. Referring to legitimacy as "authorization", Kelman and Hamilton (1989, p.16) argued that when an authority is legitimate, "the duty to obey superior orders" replaces personal morality,

with people allowing legitimate authorities to define the boundaries of appropriate behavior in a given situation. More simply, legitimacy is the perception that one "ought to obey" another (Hurd, 1999, p. 382). Hence, legitimacy is an additional form of power that enables authorities to shape the behavior of others distinct from their control over incentives or sanctions (Ford, Johnson, 1998; French, Raven, 1959). Therefore, the construction of educational process absorbed legitimate content, as expressed in the sociopolitical discourses. The role of the teacher assumes and reinforces the legitimacy of authorized power relations. Teachers in the Chinese educational context possess significant authority, and China is known for its traditional respect for teachers. In old China, teachers (usually tutors) were those who had succeeded in the most rigid and strict examinations administered by the king and other officials. They might not be very successful financially, but they definitely had the most tremendous respect from the public. "Become teachers so that you can become elders; become elders so that you can become kings" was a popular maxim (Tan et al., 1985, p.16). After the founding of the Republic of China in 1949, leaders of the Communist Party of China renewed the emphasis on teacher education by declaring it equal to industrial development. Teacher education developed rapidly. Teachers were hailed as "glorious engineers cultivating human souls". In 1985, The 9th session of the Standing Committee of the 6th National People's Congress of China passed a resolution regarding the establishment of Teacher's Day, as proposed by the State Council. It designated September 10th, 1985, as China's inaugural Teacher's Day. To this day, Schools and students express respect for teachers in various ways.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, there has been a more pronounced emphasis on teachers' unique status and role. In an article on the official website of the Ministry of Education of China, teachers are described as the primary resource in educational development, playing a vital role in disseminating knowledge, disseminating ideas, disseminating truths, as well as shaping souls, shaping lives, and shaping new individuals. The article further emphasizes the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core's stance on realizing the great

rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. It fully recognizes teachers' significant status and role in this era of spreading knowledge, ideas, and truths and shaping souls, lives, and new individuals. Teachers are regarded as the leading force in adhering to and developing the cause of socialist education with Chinese characteristics. The article underscores the importance of prioritizing the construction of the teacher workforce as foundational work and elevates the foundational, pioneering, and comprehensive role and status of teacher work to unprecedented heights[37]. The status and identity of teachers aid students in receiving the knowledge imparted by them complyingly. Meanwhile, power structures that establish the teacher as the authoritative knowledge holder and the student as a blank slate or "tabula rasa" serve to ignore or invalidate the knowledge and experience that the student already holds. This creates a dynamic wherein pupils remain subservient and compliant to their teachers.

In the restricted curriculum framework, teachers' understanding of intercultural competence and their pedagogical approaches significantly influence students. The teacher acts as a mediator, linking the values of that society with their values and engaging in new meanings, which leads to novel understandings. However, the problem is that this understanding is not confined to the positive and may lead to the reification of stereotypes and prejudices. Stereotypes and prejudices about such concepts are common in textbooks of intercultural courses and profoundly affect our understanding of intercultural communication. Teachers emphasized awareness and avoiding intercultural courses, but stereotypes often manifest in teachers' instructional content. For example, In intercultural classrooms, teachers frequently emphasize the distinctions between Chinese culture and other cultures when they mention Chinese culture, Chinese calligraphy, Chinese paper-cutting, Chinese food, Chinese customs, etc. This kind of cultural narrative focuses on different dietary customs, art forms, clothing, and habits, which easily leads to the formation of cultural stereotypes that using country as a proxy for grouping culture is the natural way and believing culture,

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[37]The information comes from the official website of the Ministry of Education of China：
http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/s5147/201909/t20190929_401557.html

in essence, comprises the content formed by symbols such as cuisine, calligraphy, and other emblematic expressions.

Meanwhile, they tend to practice international students as ambassadors for their country of origin, forcing them to represent a culture they may not know and understand to respect cultural differences or cultural diversity. In China, I still hear some teachers say that Chinese students go abroad to represent the image of China, or they think that international students who come to China to study represent the image of their countries, too. This kind of illusion statically takes culture and causes the individuals to face the risk of having their identity devalued or partially denied, which can easily lead to prejudice and discrimination. The teaching methods employed by teachers reinforce stereotypes and validate the correctness of existing knowledge, rendering knowledge a natural reality. Consequently, teaching becomes a process of blackboxing knowledge.

On the other hand, when it comes to the direction of education, particularly the curriculum and textbooks, there is also power and influence at play (Apple, 2000). There are vested interests in the curriculum being done in particular ways. Firstly, setting the curriculum standards requires value judgments and enactment of what is to be included and excluded – purification – and once this work is achieved, its common sense existence is naturalized or black-boxed. Naturalization means stripping away the contingencies of an object's creation and its situated nature. A naturalized object has lost its anthropological strangeness(Bowker, Star, 1999, p.299). Naturalization refers to the outcome of purification insofar as the thing becomes taken for granted rather than viewed as the result of contingent or premeditated enactments.

Moreover, the selection and exclusion of content in textbooks and materials, along with the narrative style employed, are intricately linked to political objectives and ideological considerations. To a certain extent, controversial or dissenting viewpoints could be excluded, while content aligning with the dominant ideology may be

emphasized. This process reflects a deliberate shaping of the educational narrative to align with specific ideological perspectives. The textbooks are considered to contain the knowledge of intercultural competence wishes to transmit to figure generations through teaching; as Kuhn says, they are "pedagogic vehicles" (1970, p.137). From the critical perspective, texts are seen as the social constructions of members of a particular scientific community embedded in a particular meaning-making system, that is, as an ideological inheritance. Textbooks are positioned in a web of other texts; in other words, they have political, historical, and social contexts (Gallagher, 1999, p.71).

In addition, the influence of space in the teaching process is often overlooked. Physical space such as campuses, buildings, areas designated for specific purposes/uses at specific times, classrooms, the regulation and control of students' bodies, restrictions on movement in space and time, etc., or abstract space, where control over how and when knowledge is endorsed, taught, delivered, and assessed; how power is established, exercised, and enabled in produced space; how the space itself may be used, etc. In such educative spaces, the who, where, what, when, how, and why of teaching and learning are controlled and directed by what Lefebvre calls "political power" (Lefebvre,1991,p. 152). Fortunately, ANT reflexively provides a theory of interconnectedness through which to re-imagine educational practices as spatialised knowledge-building practices' (Edwards,Clarke, 2002, p. 157). We see space is not simply a pre-existing container or backdrop for social action. Instead, it is a social construction, constantly produced through social practices, social imaginations, material artifacts, and day-to-day life experiences (Facer,2014,p.121). All human social action, as Henri Lefebvre (1991,p.43) asserted, occurs in space (either physical or abstract) and is therefore "socio-spatial." Acting in space (or nature) changes and shapes that space, is how humans interact and become social, and can thus be considered a "production of space" .

In this process, those in power shape, focus, and reproduce the social relations they seek and maintain their power. Schools and school systems have been called benevolent dictatorships; they are designed on a factory model to turn out students with the knowledge, skills, and habits of citizenship to become productive members of society (Geitz et al 1995; Rose, 2012). According to Lefebvre (1991), such productions of space and control of spatial practices serve power structures by eliminating difference, that is, everyone is taught the same things and the same ways to act and think. The physical and social spaces of the school are designed by political powers to serve and perpetuate their economic and other hegemony.

Thus, as Law and Singleton (2005, p.332) suggest that what passes for knowledge are boxes that each contain a network of ideas and histories that have been performed into place, while the teaching process I have discovered tends to simplify these complex networks of negotiation or effectively erase them.

5.2 Knowledge is An Effect of Connections Performed into Existence in Webs of Relations

The knowledge about intercultural competence, especially certain crucial concepts, is often utilized to interpret other knowledge. However, these concepts themselves are not critically examined. When employing them, explanations and reflections on these concepts are frequently neglected. If we trace the pedagogical network structure, ANT flags up what actors achieve by scaling, spacing, and contextualizing each other (Latour, 2005, p. 184), with knowledge itself being an actor-network, and with a view that ways of knowing including science cannot be, neutral, whatever that might (Law 2021, p.xvi).

Many seemingly definite knowledge concepts harbor social or political reasons/purposes behind them, which often go unnoticed and undiscussed. Knowledge is merely treated as a packaged commodity; we consume it without understanding the production process and how it reaches us. Therefore, opening the

BlackBox and finding out which aspects of intercultural knowledge are excluded or concealed and which aspects are firmly highlighted, as well as explaining why certain parts are utilized, ignored, or emphasized, will help us re-examine the knowledge we have been feeding. I will take the two most commonly used concepts, diversity and citizen in the knowledge of intercultural competence, as examples.

A. Diversity

One of the most frequently encountered concepts in intercultural courses is diversity; diversity has become a buzzword to explain intercultural status. Teachers believe that diversity is the basis of intercultural communication, diversity is a fact of the status of culture, and culture knows no hierarchy, only differences(For example, interviewee 5 mentioned cultural diversity is a universally acknowledged phenomenon 文化多样性 是一个普遍存在的事; interviewee 3 stated diversity is indeed a fact 多样性是一个 存在，是一个事实;interviewee2 believed diversity means difference 多样性就意味 着差异). Of all the rhetoric of our time, no word may be more prominent or ubiquitous than diversity. It is probably the most powerful and certainly the most pervasive one for intercultural concepts. The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, published by UNESCO in 2001, pointed out that cultures are expressed in various forms through time and space. This diversity reflects the uniqueness and diversity of the identities that constitute human groups and societies (Yang, Xie, 2015, p, 182). Chinese scholars also mention that without diversity, there would be no human civilization (Zhang, Yu, 2023, p. 98).

Diversity is a familiar concept to discuss culture, but how should we understand diversity? Through different races or ethnic groups? Different skin colors? Different languages? Or different commodities and symbols? Do multi-migrants mean diversity? Does multi-ethnic mean diversity? Whose diversity is this? Is diversity equal? Are people speaking the same language more similar than people speaking different languages? Does diversity represent various forms or homogeneous diversity? From the perspective of how we utilize diversity, diversity is rather a feast of differences;

people use it to divide differences into different groups, classify them, and create a hierarchy.; like the principles of equality and liberty, diversity is gigantic in its ambition. Diversity is our source of security (Sitomer, 1987, p.1).

However, constructed notions of difference can be the basis on which discrimination and oppression are visited on people not only at the interpersonal level but, more importantly, at the collective level. In the Council of Europe's publication Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters: Context, Concepts, and Theories, it is argued that the role of intercultural dialogue is considered fundamental in creating and maintaining social cohesion, and intercultural competence is the practical foundation (Council of Europe, 2009, p.4). Does this imply that teaching individual-level interpersonal skills on intercultural competence is sufficient for fighting oppression and discrimination rather than one tool that fits a set of policy instruments that combines legal and structural changes on anti-discrimination (Hoskins, Sallah, 2011, p.118)? Like Wood stated (2003,p.57), we are experiencing two kinds of diversity: the kind that is an inextricable part of the world in which we live and the kind that we create in artificial imitation of that world. The latter diversity has been given plastic surgery. It imagines the world as divided into neatly defined social groups, each with its thriving cultural traditions.

In this sense, we are seemed to get a fresh perspective on the world and a means of breaking away from outdated biases. Diversity encourages us to be tolerant, open-minded, supportive, and fair, and many people embrace this call sincerely. The concept suggests that when individuals from different backgrounds come together, a shift in attitudes will take place—especially among those who were previously part of an exclusive group, as they come to appreciate the richness of the newcomers' cultures. Diversity fosters tolerance and respect, and by expanding the range of skills, it improves the performance of work teams and contributes to economic growth, fosters goodwill and promotes social improvement in all aspects. Diversity today in higher education stands mainly for the narrow goal of racially/ethnically balancing the

nation's colleges and universities. Racial or ethnic preferences in admissions are a key element of this manufactured diversity, and they form the foundation of the entire movement. This focus on racial preferences forces faculty, students, and administrators into a position of hypocrisy. Supporting this artificial version of diversity is neither virtuous nor just—it is both arrogant and prejudiced. It compromises the quality of education for all in order to sustain a temporary illusion of fairness. In fact, it does not truly demonstrate genuine fairness, as evidenced by certain preferential policies or phenomena in China regarding education for international students or ethnic minorities.

However, diversity is also seen as a symbol of kindness, inclusivity, and generosity in colleges, workplaces, and various organizations associated with privileged groups. Advocating for it is viewed as aligning with a welcoming attitude toward the world, while opposing it is considered narrow-minded. A university that admits more minority or international students, a company that hires more minority or international employees, and an activity that includes more minority or international participants can each be said to have taken the first step toward diversity, which creates a harmonious and united environment. Supporting diversity suggests a sense of inclusiveness and righteousness tempered with humility, implying a readiness to accept those who differ from oneself, whether as individuals or nations.

From this perspective, making judgments is seen as ethnocentric, while being indifferent to one's ethnocentrism permits bigotry. Claiming that a difference is a cultural difference might suggest that there is no need to evaluate its merits. After all, cultural differences require mutual tolerance from both parties. Calling something "my culture" or " our culture" can work as a **Keep Off** sign, thus, in today's era of "all diversity is good diversity," a new guiding principle has emerged: refrain from judgment. This modern embrace of diversity derives its ethical imperative from a claimed open-mindedness that resists the urge to critique other cultures. But as Wood(2003, p.59) believed, the greatest danger comes from this artificial

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diversity—its false assurances and what it robs us of. The diversity that is achieved by racial, ethnic, or any other quotas in college admissions; a diversity that consists of syllabi in which books have been included or excluded because of the race, nationality, gender, or gender preference of the authors; Diversity that takes the form of hiring or not hiring faculty members because of the social category they are alleged to inhabit; a diversity that prompts one to praise or blame in the spirit of demonstrating his openness to "other cultures"—these are, every one of them, pernicious forms of diversity. This kind of artificial diversity has just that kind of grip on campuses, and not just on campuses.

Individually, the knowledge of intercultural competence aims to train people to have the ability and attitude to understand and tolerate people from different cultural backgrounds so that they can live together peacefully. In practice, however, it has been found that the main risks lie in the tendency to see "other cultures" as static and rigid. Moreover, the risk of seeing other cultures as socially stratified is placing individuals or groups of people in a class system. By respecting the inoperability of all diversity, such education has become a method of assimilating minority groups (Nieke, 1995, p. 51) and a way to strengthen group identity. The other word that Peter Wood (2003) has used over and over to characterize diversity is ideology. The word is not neutral; rather, it registers that diversity creates a self-contained cycle of thought and experience.

B. Citizenship

Influenced by theories on intercultural competence proposed by foreign scholars, cultivating intercultural competence in China, including teacher training, often incorporates the term "citizen." Typically, the term "国民" is more commonly used in China. However, to align with theories on intercultural competence from abroad, some scholars and teachers have incorporated the concept of cultivating intercultural citizens into the knowledge of intercultural competence(For example, Byram and Han (2011, 2014) proposed that mechanisms should be established to implement the

cultivation of intercultural communicative competence, which is the fundamental concept of intercultural citizenship education. Li (2010, p.110) suggested that ideological and political education needs to adopt intercultural citizenship as one of its cultivation objectives in the era of globalization. Min (2013, p. 6) also highlighted that a critical component of intercultural communicative competence cultivation in foreign language teaching is intercultural citizenship education. However, citizenship carries different historical backgrounds and connotations in China.

Modern civic education in the contemporary sense began after the French Revolution. The United States also has a history of over 100 years in civic education, primarily involving practical activities such as community volunteering, mock trials, debates, elections, and organizing student groups to participate in school governance. The term "citizen" is also an imported concept from abroad for China. China's efforts to balance education's economic and socio-political tasks in its modern nation-building can be traced to the late Qing dynasty's struggles, under threat of foreign aggression, for modernization and national survival during the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. This dilemma persisted following the establishment of the Republic of China (1912–1949), the People's Republic of China (PRC) under Mao Zedong's leadership (1949–1976), and then that of his successors. During these periods, the Chinese state sought to revive and modernize the nation, define its national identity, and create a modern citizenry (Law, 2013, p. 597).

Western learning spread eastward（西学东渐） at the beginning of the 20th century, and citizens were introduced to China. As a concept of the citizen in the modern sense emphasizing rights and obligations, ancient China did not have it. However, as a citizen in the sense of the relationship between the individual and the state, it has existed since ancient times. Therefore, civic education in China can be traced back to the beginning of the last century. According to Zhou Yanling's textual research, American Civics, translated and published by the Shanghai Qunyi Publishing House in 1913, was the first civics book introduced in China. Afterward, in 1923, the

Commercial Press published Civic Education, edited by Xiong Zirong, which became the earliest civics textbook compiled by China itself. In the new educational practice after the May 4th Movement, China has offered civic education courses for a long while. (Yang, 2006). Civic education in China continued until 1948. Later, it gradually withdrew from the curriculum system and was replaced by political education.

In the 1980s, moral education was promoted to fight the negative impacts of market-oriented economic reform, such as moral decline and extreme individualism (Communist Party of China Central Committee, 1988)[38]. As Lee (1996, p. 8) observed, moral education also emphasizes students' psychological health and development. In the early 1990s, patriotic education was stressed as a means to boost patriotism among students and guard against attempts by hostile foreign forces to overthrow China's socialist system (Communist Party of China Central Committee, 1994)[39]. In particular, in the early 2000s, after the promulgation of the Implementation Outline on Ethic Building for Citizens, the concepts of citizens'qualities and citizenship education were used to foster Chinese people's ethical qualities and to fight against the moral decline seen among its people and officials (Communist Party of China Central Committee, 2001)[40]. Despite differences in terminology, these projects were all interrelated. An analysis of relevant CPC documents, as Law (2006, p. 602) demonstrated, shows that the relations and contents of these projects were interwoven and almost inseparable and served a single purpose: to socialize people (including students)into the norms, values, and ideologies deemed acceptable to and prescribed by the theCPC-led state. People's Education (2001)[41], an official journal of the Ministry of Education (MoE), admitted these complicated relations, noting that patriotism is an essential theme in

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[38] Communist Party of China Central Committee. (1988).关于改革和加强中小学德育工作的通知[A notice concerning the reform and strengthening of moral education in primary and secondary schools]. In C. M. Gao, C. Z. Zhao, K. R. Bai,C. L. Zuo (Eds.), 学校德育全书 [A complete work on moral education in schools] (541–547). 北京：九洲出版社与人民日报出版社(Beijing: Jiuzhou Press and People's Daily Press).
[39] Communist Party of China Central Committee. (1994).爱国主义教育实施纲要[A notice concerning the reform and strengthening of moral education in primary and secondary schools]. In C. M. Gao, C. Z. Zhao, K. R. Bai,C. L. Zuo (Eds.), 学校德育全书(A complete work on moral education in schools] (602-610). 北京：九洲出版社与人民日报出版社 [Beijing: Jiuzhou Press and People's Daily Press).
[40] Communist Party of China Central Committee. (2001). 公民道德建设实施纲要(Implementation outline on ethic building for citizens). 北京：人民出版社(Beijing: People's Press).
[41] People's Education Commentator. (2001). 加强公民道德教育是学校德育的重要内容(Strengthening education in citizens' ethics is an integral part of moral education in schools).人民教育, (12), 1.

the construction of ethics among citizens and that the primary goal of moral education is to strengthen citizens' ethical qualities.

The MoE infused the 2011 basic education curriculum with socialist values, continuing a practice that has been a part of Chinese curricula since 1949, particularly citizenship curricula. Interestingly, more emphasis was placed on cultivating in students a national identity oriented towards traditional Chinese culture, a change from past practice and one informed by China's new policy of exploring and utilizing Chinese culture for national development and revival purposes. Specifically, China's trajectory reveals that its citizenship education has been nation-specific. It is an integral component of Chinese identity. It values that Chinese leaders can promote or co-opt to facilitate their continued leadership and governance, such as personal ethics, responsibility to society and the country, and social harmony and stability. First, Chinese citizenship education is state-led rather than society-led. The state is the principal definer of citizenship education, which embeds the will of rulers or leaders and is used to consolidate and sustain their leadership. Second, the political orientation of Chinese citizenship education tends to be exclusive.

On the one hand, it favorably transmits a particular set of beliefs and ideologies for state governance and nation-building strongly supported or advocated by national leaders (e.g., Confucianism, different versions of socialism adapted to the Chinese context at different stages in the PRC). On the other, it discourages those views or positions deemed (by national leaders) unacceptable or threatening political and social stability (Law, 2013, p. 617). In other words, citizenship education is often used by the state and other stakeholders as an instrument of political socialization to foster among students a sense of collective membership, promote rights and responsibilities, and equip them with relevant political and civic literacy, skills, and attitudes to help them become functioning and responsible citizens in a given polity (Banks, 2004, p.32).

Therefore, the concepts like diversity, citizen in intercultural studies carries different historical backgrounds and social and political implications. However, in the classroom of intercultural knowledge, it is black-boxed into an international representation of modern unified vocabulary. It can be seen that they are treated as "natural phenomena" as a result of the construction process rather than being facts in themselves. Knowledge is revealed to be not a body or an authority but an effect of connections performed into existence in webs of relations that are constantly worked at, around, and against (Fenwick, Edwards, 2014, p.48). Knowledge is not something people 'have' but a part of what people do and who they are (Cook, Brown, 1999, p.392).

5.3 Narratives on the Process of Modernization Supported by Knowledge of Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence, combined with citizenship, and diversity (and other modern concepts) that frequently appear in intercultural knowledge, serving as narrative modes of modern society, with deeper historical and social factors at play. The development of intercultural competence is closely related to the historical development of China's modernization path. China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) symbolically represents China's engagement in global competition and a new era of modernization, dramatically influencing and accelerating the development of the Chinese higher education system. At this time, intercultural competence also began to receive attention.

The development height of higher education is regarded as representing and determining the height of national development. China's higher education plays an irreplaceable and decisive strategic role in realizing Chinese-style modernization (Xi, 2022; Wu, 2022). As an important part of Chinese modernization, the modernization of Chinese education is significant to realize the socialist modernization in an all-round way (Xi, 2022; Wu, 2022; Hu, Wang, 2023; Ma et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023; Tian,Zhao, 2018). The modernization of Chinese education is a process in

which a series of modern elements and their combination modes are transformed from low to high. It is also a process in which modern elements of education gradually occupy a dominant and dominant position. The constant pursuit of modernization since the mid-nineteenth century has been particularly intensified in 2013, half a century after the proposal of "Four Modernizations" (四个现代化)[42], when Chairman Xi Jinping breathed new life into this political conceptual system by bringing forward the "Fifth Modernization"— "governance modernization." In 2020, the 14th five-year plan further established the overall goal of basically achieving "socialist modernization"(社会主义现代化) by 2035.

Tracing back to 1983, Deng Xiaoping's call for education to "face modernization, face the world, and face the future" ("three faces", 三个面向) reaffirmed the role of education in modernizing the nation after the turmoil of the cultural revolution (1966–1976). In 1985, "education for modernization" appeared in the landmark policy document *The Decision on the Structural Reform of China's Education System.* In 1993, another critical policy document, *The Outline for China's Education Reform and Development*, proposed the idea of "modernizing education itself," with the expectation that modern education could better serve to nurture modern talent. While these documents prioritized education in the modernization agenda, they did not clarify these ideas' meanings, leaving ample space for academic interpretations of education modernization. Since then, the "modernization" banner has been held high in most (if not all) education policy documents to gain legitimacy (Yang, You, 2021, p.141). A milestone was reached in 2019 with the issue of the policy document *Chinese Education Modernization 2035*. It was China's most recent strategic plan for education development and the first one titled "modernization".

Education was seen as facilitating modernization and development, especially in a new stage of modernization; China also used education to equip students with

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[42] The former Premier Zhou Enlai first proposed "Four Modernizations" in 1964, namely, industry modernization, agriculture modernization, national defense modernization, and science and technology modernization.

globalization skills (e.g., a broad knowledge base, IT skills, language proficiency, and cooperation，intercultural competence) to facilitate lifelong learning and survival in a competitive, globalized world in 21 century (Marginson, 1999, p. 21). Intercultural competence is regarded as an indispensable component of global skills in the era of globalization. In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, curricula as social constructions no longer serve only to prepare students to meet the needs of society and the domestic market; they also help nations compete globally while maintaining their national distinctiveness in an increasingly interconnected world.

UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education (2006) and *UNESCO Intercultural Competence: Conceptual and Operational Framework* (2013) both promote intercultural. The Handbook for Developing Intercultural Competence: Story Circles(2020), written by Deardorff as a UNESCO project, is quite popular for Chinese teachers to learn and reference in class. The introduction part of the book states that a lack of intercultural competence leads to conflict, war, and dangers of all kinds...The future depends on the actions taken today, and building a future that respects human rights and preserves cultural diversity depends on whether people today can acquire and demonstrate intercultural competence.

In order to maintain consistency with the world, China has reformed its school curriculum to accommodate global education imperatives and has used school curricula, including citizenship education, to transmit CPC-prescribed socialist values to students and to link Chinese traditions to contemporary China under the CPC's leadership. In this sense, the state functions as a principal selector of school curricula, choosing knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes from a multicultural and multileveled world (including individual, local, national, and global levels) to be passed to future generations in response to societal and global changes, based on national conditions and needs.

The government injects its purposes into the education of intercultural competence,

Intercultural competence, as key educational content endorsed by international institutions such as UNESCO aids in narrating its modern path. Theories/knowledge that align with its modernization goals while preserving its cultural values and traditions. For example, cultural hybridity and intercultural communication bridge Chinese cultural values with modernization efforts.

The knowledge of intercultural competence taught in Chinese universities emphasizes the necessity for individuals to transcend cultural boundaries and interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds in an increasingly globalized environment. On the one hand, it emphasizes the cultivation of individual abilities, while on the other hand, it highlights cultural boundaries between nations, offering a static description of cultures. It emphasizes the distinctions between Chinese culture and other cultures to strengthen the connection between intercultural education and Chinese values; it also opens the supporting course to include Chinese-Western cultural comparisons(中西文化比较) and Chinese culture and communication 中华文化与传播）. Intercultural courses cultivate the ability to "tell China's story well" (讲好中国的故事) on the global stage, the kind of story that reflects national power and the international status of China in the era of "great rejuvenation". This nationalist thinking has reinforced the "China–West" dichotomization by benchmarking the development of China against that of its Western counterparts, which has rendered the political discourses that justify state invention in education, pushing for changes or reforms that policymakers have desired and that may serve various political ends.

On the one hand, China's style of modernization is based on the premise of universal historical exchanges (Zhang,Yu, 2023, p.99) by using strategic communication techniques informed by intercultural theories, presenting itself as a culturally inclusive and adaptable nation, framing narratives in a way that resonates with audiences, and trying to build bridges between Chinese and other values. On the other hand, in addition to following the universal narrative of modernization, it also tries to establish a narrative paradigm with Chinese characteristics, internalize the specific

characteristics of Chinese-style modernization as the universal essence of world history, and incorporate it into the narrative of globalization-driven modernization. (Zhang, Yu, 2023, p.93).

For constructing such a dialectical narrative that unifies "common characteristics" with "Chinese characteristics." culture is a pivotal aspect of China's modernization strategy. Given the weakened influence of Marxism–Leninism, the increased exposure to "Western culture", and growing public discontent about socioeconomic inequalities, the CPC constructed an image of distinct Chinese modernization to obtain its ruling legitimacy by integrating cultural nationalism with Marxism–Leninism (Wu, 2014). Therefore, in the education of intercultural competence, while encouraging students to remain globally competitive, the state sought to reinforce their Chinese cultural identity within a socialist framework. The CPC Central Committee and State Council (2010, July 30) repeatedly emphasized "moral education as priority" and the urgency of making Chinese students "qualified socialist citizens". To that end, the MoE infused the 2011 basic education curriculum with socialist values, continuing a practice that has been a part of Chinese curricula since 1949, particularly citizenship curricula. Interestingly, more emphasis was placed on cultivating in students a national identity oriented towards traditional Chinese culture, a change from past practice and one informed by China's new policy of exploring and utilizing Chinese culture for nation development and revival purposes. In the early 2010s, the development of Chinese culture became an official national strategy with the Communist Party of China Central Committee's (2011, October 26) decision to promote cultural development, strengthen China's cultural systems and industries, and build a "socialist core value system." The decision acknowledged the Chinese cultural value of prosperity as being of overriding importance to development, the priority of governance, and integral to China's revival. Chinese culture within the socialist framework is an essential strategic "soft power" for domestic development and global rejuvenation. On the one hand, it recognizes the increasing importance of Chinese culture in four key domestic areas: ethnic solidarity and innovation,

comprehensive national competition strength, socioeconomic development, and cultivating the cultural dimension of people's "spiritual life" in a prosperous society (a national development goal to be achieved by 2020). On the other hand, the state wanted to use Chinese culture to defend China's "cultural security", resist cultural aggression by other countries, increase its international cultural influence, and showcase the Chinese people's spirit and China's achievements in reform and opening to the world. To spread the Chinese language, culture, and history globally, China established Confucius Institutes (similar to the UK's British Council, France's Alliance Française, and Germany's Goethe-Institut) at overseas higher education institutes, and Confucius classrooms in primary and secondary schools in over 100 countries and regions (Wen et al., 2012, p. 22).

Indeed, as time passes, it opens itself to the world, and the more it develops, the more China relies on its traditional culture rather than socialist doctrines and principles to promote itself to the world and address domestic social issues and problems. While using education to prepare its students for the challenges of globalization in the 21st century, it reminds them that their historical and cultural roots are an integral part of their national identity rather than something to renounce and that they should take pride in the achievements of both contemporary and ancient China. The reinstatement of Chinese culture in the school curriculum is expected to provide opportunities for students to understand and develop their national Chinese identity and their relations with people of other cultures worldwide. The knowledge of Intercultural competence is increasingly recognized as a crucial role in supporting this path.

6. Conclusion

Teaching is often conceived in terms of methods and skills. When teaching is discussed, the focus is commonly on teaching techniques, which are believed to be most effective in enabling students to learn because they believe that the knowledge taught by teachers is unquestionable. Teaching is merely a neutral process of imparting knowledge. Considerable resources are devoted to researching and

implementing schemes to produce better methods and better teaching instead of asking what teaching practice is and where knowledge is from. However, as Freire(1972, 1985, 1996, 1998) pointed out, teaching is never merely about skills and methods, and teaching and learning are always non-neutral, political, and ethical processes.

Indeed, tracing and observing the teaching process, just like Star (1991, p.291) mentioned, 'to do a sociology of the invisible means to take on the erasing process as the central human behavior of concern, and then to track that comparatively across domains'. In the end, this is a profoundly political process since so many forms of social control rely on erasing or silencing various processes and deleting them from representations of the practice. We need to see the constructive nature of knowledge in the narrative of the teaching process.

As Fox (2005, p. 98) explains in analyzing teaching and learning processes in higher education, knowledge from an ANT perspective is not a latent attribute of any one element or individual but a series of actions as a network becomes enacted into being. The enactment process, this interplay of force relations among technology, objects, and changes in knowledge at every point in the network, is a continuing struggle. In hindsight, all established knowledge results from the interaction among various constituent elements within a system. That is to say, knowledge of intercultural competence is also not bequeathed or given but constructed through reflective, dialogical practice. At the same time, whether or not a statement of knowledge is believed depends far less on its veracity than on the conditions of its construction: who is making it, to whom it is being addressed, and from which institutions it emerges and is made visible.

Therefore, if teaching fails to initiate broader discussions and reflections on the knowledge, we will only delve deeper into the process of knowledge black boxing. Consequently, teaching will become just a way limit to shape student behavior in

accordance with the prevailing mainstream value system rather than encouraging it to develop the freedom to raise critical points. Only when teaching starts to lead learners to ask what knowledge is, who produces it, and how it becomes generated and circulated does the knowledge on textbooks and teachers' PowerPoint start to have a meaning.

Case Study Three

Beyond the Classroom: The Impact of Chinese Social Media on Shaping the Perceptions of Intercultural Competence

1. Introduction

According to the 53rd Statistical Report on Internet Development in China released by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC)[43] as of December 2023, the number of Internet users in China reached 1.092 billion, an increase of 24.8 million from December 2022, with an internet penetration rate of 77.5%. This indicates that the usage of the internet is continually increasing. The development of the internet, driven by digital communication technologies, is transforming human lifestyles. The widespread use of social media worldwide today is a powerful testament to this change. With the utilization of big data and algorithms, social media provides a multifunctional platform that facilitates communication, entertainment, commerce, and information acquisition. Moreover, it also considered as a new channel for knowledge sharing and learning. At the universities of mainland China, social media has also become a popular tool among students for having connection with others from the world and acquiring knowledge about intercultural competence. Highly popular among higher education students are Wechat, Douyin, Weibo, etc., which have become the core domain of their internet actions, and such actions are considered an intercultural practice in broader social scenarios.

To some extent, the classical knowledge acquisition methods (such as books reading or classes) have been mediatized, Social media not only offers more prosperous, convenient, and diverse learning opportunities and resources, but also a platform to receive information, post comments, participate in group discussions, and share knowledge. Social media not only serves as a tool for disseminating knowledge, but it

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[43] The China Internet Network Information Center is an administrative agency responsible for Internet affairs under the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology of China. Established on June 3, 1997, CNNIC manages, maintains, and develops the infrastructure of domain names and conducts research and statistics on the internet industry in China. One of its most well-known responsibilities is managing the ".cn" country code top-level domain and Chinese Domain Name system, as well as operating the national IP address registry in China. Additionally, CNNIC regularly publishes statistical reports on the internet development in China, providing valuable data and insights into the trends and growth of the internet within the country.

also forms an integral part of the new networks that produce collective knowledge.

According to ANT, non-human actors are essential part of the interaction which establish their own meaning to participate in the process of forming the network. As Latour (2005, p. 63) states, "objects too have agency" to stabilize or disrupt their particular networks, which emphasizes the active role that non-human entities play in the network of social and technical relations. In other words, human and non-human actors (including social media) are part of networks that collectively produce knowledge and reshape reality, which influences our recognition. Therefore, this case study explores the connections between humans and non-humans through the material practice of social media. Social media is viewed as a mediator of material, space, and time and plays a crucial role in constructing actor networks. It is not merely an instrumental entity that is acted upon by human actors but also actively changes and shapes human actors themselves. This perspective underscores the bidirectional influence between humans and social media, illustrating how social media platforms and technologies, as material objects, both influence and are influenced by human activities.

From Latour's point of view, the social is always already technical, just as technical is always already social. We are never faced with objects or social relations; we are faced with chains which are associations of humans . . . and non-humans. . . . No one has ever seen a social relation by itself . . . nor a technical relation (Latour, 1991, p. 110). All entities, whether social, natural, or technological, are relational in character, and they derive their nature from relations, relations between humans and non-humans are informed by processes of association and translation that can be material as well as social, physical as well as semiotic (Michael, 2017, p. 41). For instance, social media allow users to form ties or connections among themselves while sharing images, texts, videos, and other digital artifacts. The research on social media, from a ANT perspective, shifts the focus from individual traits to relational ties between social entities (Bruns, Stieglitz, 2013, p. 95).

ANT provides a theoretical approach for analyzing socio-material relations, offering a framework to understand how social media shape and are shaped by the network structures in which they are embedded through their interrelations and actions with other actors. The focus is on exploring the material practices through which students and social media engage in the collective production of knowledge about intercultural competence and the power relations inherent in this process. It aims to understand the impact of social media engagement on knowledge production, the spatializing force of materiality, and the construction of intercultural realities.

I examined the network that includes human participants (including video providers and users of social media such as students) and non-human actors (including mobile smartphones that connect users to social media, related government policies, network operators, internet service providers, and the videos present on social media platforms etc.), as well as the translation processes involved in the configuration of actor-networks composed of mediating technologies as well as how these media technologies design the distribution, filtering, manipulation, and presentation within media spaces.

I discovered that the material practice on social media can be regarded as a mediated process of knowledge production, as well as a narrating process to construct culture in and through the things, facts, and symbols, stories of which it is continuously made up. In the process, ANT reflexively provides a theory of interconnectedness through which such material practices are reimagined as spatialized practices of knowledge/cultural construction (Edwards, Clarke, 2002, p. 157); they do not merely represent reality but enact it.

2. Practical Trace and Observation

For tracing the process of building the networks through investigating the "links and knots" within the network in this case study, I initially examined the actors' work and

interactions, including the non-human actors (China's most popular social media platforms, such as WeChat and Douyin, as well as the technology and government policies and censorship, etc.) and human actors (such as students as the social media users). Through observing them, I explore how they work together to form and shape the perceptions of intercultural competence.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the students who take *Intercultural Communication* courses at Chinese universities and the conditions in which they use social media to obtain "knowledge", following their thoughts and observing their interactions with other roles. I also conducted a questionnaire to gain information from Chinese university students on the current education on intercultural competence and the cognition for intercultural competence at universities. They are considered critical human factors for the network contribution. They actively construct and maintain a network of relationships with social media platforms, technology, government policies, censorship, etc. At the same time, I observe the operation of the social media platform to see how "knowledge" is formed by the interactions of the social media platform, users, technology, government policies, and censorships. Through it, I identify the connections between these elements.

3. Procedure

3.1 Social media Observation

According to the latest data provided by Statista[44], the primary way for groups in China before the age of 59 to obtain information is via social media, especially those between 18 and 29 years old, which is usually the age of the group who study in universities[45]. In addition, WeChat and Douyin (TikTok Chinese version) are China's most commonly used social media[46]. The blocking of global networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in Mainland China also led to the opportunity for

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[44] Statista is a German online platform that specializes in data gathering and visualization. In addition to publicly available third-party data, Statista also provides exclusive data via the platform, which is collected through its team's surveys and analysis (information is from Wikipedia).
[45] The link for the data:https://www.statista.com/statistics/1409120/china-sources-of-information-about-global-affairs-by-age/
[46] The link for the data:https://www.statista.com/statistics/250546/leading-social-network-sites-in-china/

the flourishing of those domestic social media platforms.

Firstly, WeChat is owned and operated by Tencent, one of China's largest technology companies. According to Wechat Revenue and Usage Statistics (2024)[47], Wechat has 1.33 billion users, almost all of whom are based in China. As a mega all-in-one application, WeChat integrates essential online functions, instant messaging (e.g., one-to-one private chat, group chat of voice messages, videos, images, and text via smartphones, tablets, or web interfaces), WeChat Moments (functionality that resembles Facebook's Timeline where users can share text-based updates, online gaming, e-payment, and the Public Accounts platform (a blogging-like platform that allows individual writers as well as businesses to use it to broadcast media and engage with their target users; users receive push notices when the public accounts they follow post new messages, articles, pictures, or videos) and other official accounts, service accounts, and Mini Programs.

These functionalities provide users convenient and personalized ways to receive information and disseminate knowledge. For instance, WeChat includes various official accounts linked to online courses, such as foreign language and history, significantly facilitating personal knowledge acquisition.

Similarly, douyin, as the social media platform with the most users creating short videos, boasts a vast user base; according to QuestMobile data, as of September 2023, Douyin had 743 million monthly active users. Douyin's technological features facilitate the production of creative content and communication with a broad audience. Video creators can record original videos, forward media, or remix content from other creators. They need to creatively convey critical information, engage the audience within a limited time frame, and consider how to present content multimodally (e.g., audio, visual, text) and with accessibility features (such as text transcripts and in-video text explanations). Creators can also invite viewers to share experiences and

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[47] More details refer to the link: https://www.businessofapps.com/data/wechat-statistics/

provide suggestions in video comments. There is also abundant educational content, such as knowledge learning on Doyin, for users, except for entertainment, and the comments can also serve as venues for knowledge construction (Dubovi, Tabak, 2020, p. 4).

Based on the data above, I primarily focused on tracking the knots or links with actors for WeChat and Douyin, the two most popular social media platforms in mainland China, in this case study. Firstly, the process for making "knowledge" which can eventually present on Douyin or Wechat (it is a actually a process of blackboxing) is essential to follow, for example, making a video about intercultural competence, the user who make the video, the content choosing, the way and perspective to edit, the video making tools such as the recording programme, camera,etc., the policies and marketing and political elements, social media platform and technology all are actors to interact the process and form the video, and then it is about the uplade process, how a video through uploading to the platform to show to other users. For uploading, you need to have a smartphone, and download and install the Douyin App, then you'll need to sign up for a new account if you haven't yet. If you already have an account, simply log in to proceed. After that you can tap on the plus (+) icon at the bottom center of the screen, Douyin allows you to add descriptions and hashtags to your videos. Descriptions can provide additional context or explanations about your video. Hashtags allow your videos to be discovered by other users who are interested in similar topics. Use relevant and popular hashtags to increase the visibility of your videos. Before you upload your video, Douyin allows you to select a cover image or thumbnail that will be displayed to users on the platform. Choose a captivating image that will encourage users to click and watch your video. Whenever you are ready, tap on the "Upload" or "Post" button to share your video with Douyin. Your video will be available for others to view, like, comment on, and share. After this entire process is completed, the video presented to everyone is like a product that has undergone multiple stages of processing, ultimately becoming what we consider to be

"knowledge". So the "knowledge" about intercultural competence on social media platforms is actually also a product of the network.

Next, I need to trace and observe the "knowledge" about intercultural competence which present on two social media, how it is presented and how to find through the platform, and what it is include. For example, firstly, I use my smartphone to open the search page on Douyin and directly search for the keyword "跨文化能力" (I also searched it in English as "intercultural competence", it displays similar content, but with a greater prevalence of content related to English language learning), there is an autocomplete feature with keywords may appear such as:

After clicking on the search button, the top is divided into several categories, including Comprehensive（综合）, Videos（视频）, Entire Network（全网）, Users （用户）, AI Search（AI 搜）, Products（商品）, Live（直播）, Music（音乐）, Group Purchase（团购）, Topics（话题）, and Experience（经验）. For example,my search across these different categories reveals content as follows:
Category Comprehensive（综合）:
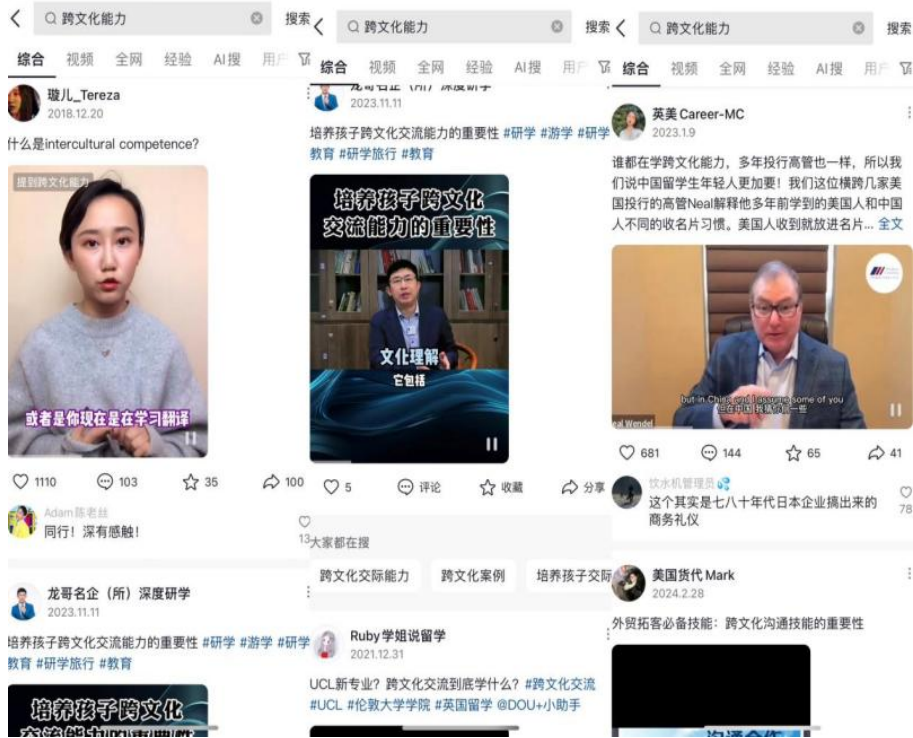
Category Videos（视频）:

Category Entire Network（全网）:

Category Users（用户）：　　　　　　　Category Topics（话题）：
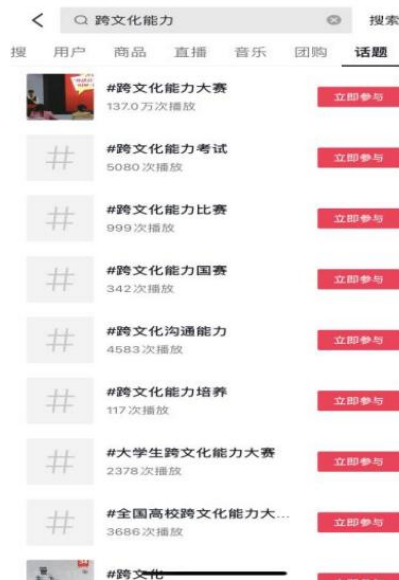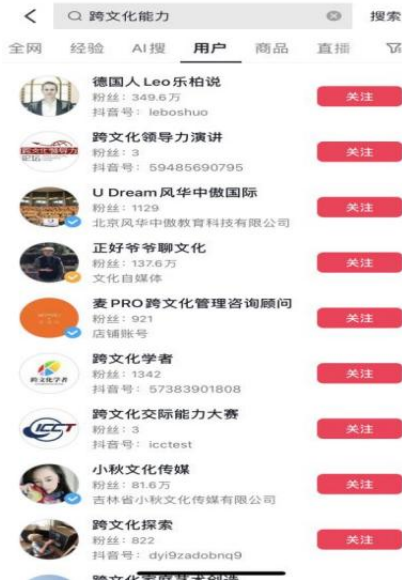
Based on the system recommendations of the social media platform, I collect and display the videos related to intercultural competence that appear at the forefront (this content is based on the search from my Douyin account).

Similarly, when I search for the keyword "跨文化能力" (intercultural competence) directly on WeChat Official Accounts（微信公众号）, WeChat Video Channels（微信视频号）, and WeChat Subscription Accounts（微信订阅号）, there is also an autocomplete feature, where keywords might appear such as:

(WeChat Official Accounts)　　　　　(WeChat Video Channels)

If I search for videos related to intercultural competence on WeChat Video Channels (where the search is divided into "All" and "Accounts"), in that case, the following list of videos appears in the "All"（全部） column:
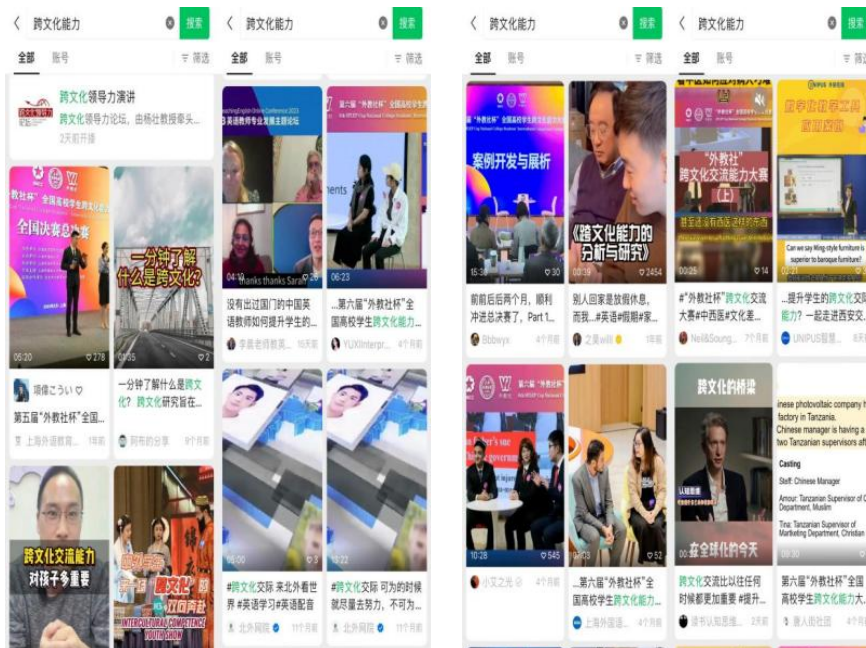
In the "Accounts" column, the following accounts appear:
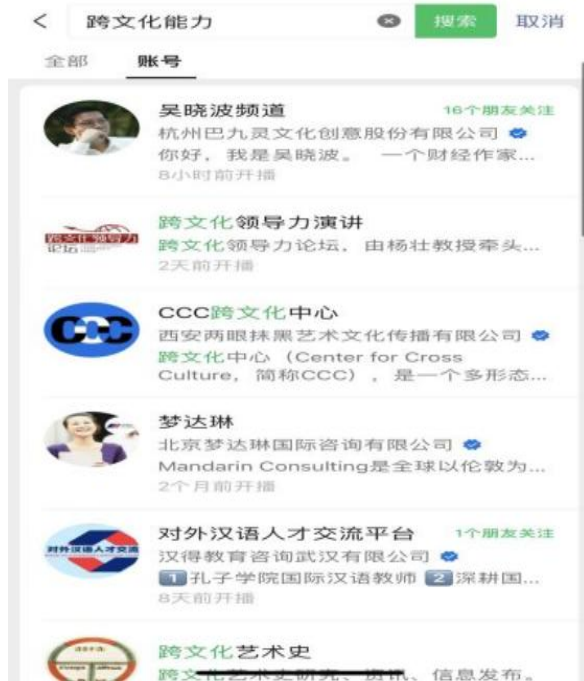
Additionally, a search for Official Accounts and articles in the Subscription Account messages section is available. After searching, it is divided into "All"（全部） and "Official Accounts"（公众号）. The "All" column primarily displays articles or information related to the search keyword ("intercultural competence") as follows:

In the "Official Accounts" column, the following accounts primarily appear:
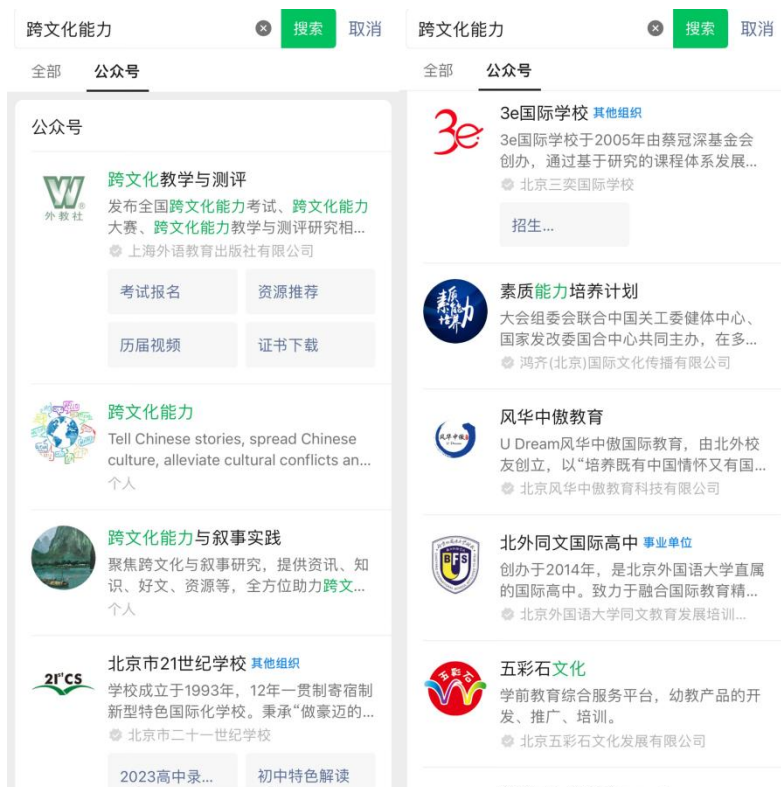
By collecting articles, information, and videos related to intercultural competence, I select the top ten samples from each category to analyze the intercultural competence knowledge presented on these two social media platforms. Since some users have accounts on both platforms and post identical content on their accounts, the same content may be found on both platforms simultaneously.

In addition to directly collecting videos using the keyword "跨文化能力" (intercultural competence), I also gather videos related to "culture" recommended by these two platforms, such as videos created and shared by users on WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin that reflects their understanding of cultural traditions, customs, and practices. The displayed content includes user-shared photos, videos, articles, and personal anecdotes about cultural events, festivals, holidays, and ceremonies. For example, users might post photos from traditional Chinese New Year celebrations,

share recipes for holiday dishes, or discuss the symbolic meanings behind cultural customs.

Furthermore, I observed the modes of presenting on these two social media platforms and analyze how these modes impact users' knowledge acquisition. Additionally, I investigate the technological methods (which is mainly Algorithms and big data) used by these social media platforms to distribute knowledge information, and the rules setting from the social media companies, for example, I traced Douyin guidelines, Douyin Privacy Policy, Douyin's Community Self-Disciplinary Regulations,Wechat's users guidelines, WeChat Privacy Policy, WeChat Personal Account Usage Specifications. I also observed the policies and censorship models of the national government regarding telecommunications networks. For instance, The Provisional Regulations of the People's Republic of China on the Administration of International Networking of Computer Information Networks(2024); the Regulations on the Management of Internet User Account Information(2022); the Regulations on the Ecological Governance of Online Information Content (2020); the Regulations on the Management of Online Short Video Platforms and the Detailed Rules for the Content Review Standards of Online Short Videos(2019); the Notice of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology on Cleaning up and Standardising the Internet Network Access Service Market(2017); the Cybersecurity Law (2017); the Security Protection of International Connections of Computer Information Networks (1997).

3.2 Interviews and Questionnaire

The research for human actors (mainly focus on students in this case study) consists of questionnaires and interviews. I will interview eight students taking intercultural courses at Chinese universities. At the same time, I will conduct a questionnaire survey with hundreds of randomly enrolled university students, some of whom are language or cultural communication majors and some of whom are other majors, including science and technology, both undergraduate and postgraduate. Due to the

different nature of the disciplines, students will have different approaches to understanding intercultural competence.

Interviews

The eight interviewees for this study are students who took intercultural courses at Chinese universities and majored in English, International Chinese Language Education, and Communication (refer to Table 1 for detailed information). These interviewees were selected based on their roles as students who participated in intercultural courses at Chinese universities and their willingness to participate in the study. Due to the COVID-19 and anti-epidemic measures policy in China during that period, all the interviews for the eight interviewees were conducted online by video or voice call. Each interview session lasted approximately one hour.

The research employed a semi-structured, one-on-one interview approach with open-ended questions. This method allows participants to reflect on and explore issues they deem significant. While a list of predetermined questions (Appendix 3) was prepared before entering the field for data collection, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for adaptability. The discussions were conducted in Mandarin, recorded with the interviewees' consent, and transcribed by the researcher. To ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the interviewees, pseudonyms were used in the research. Basic information about these eight interviewees as participants is provided below:

Table 1

Interviewee	Major	College	Location of the University	The Year of Study	Abroad Experience	Foreign Language Background
Interviewee1	Communication	School of Journalism and Communication	Chongqing	The Second Year of Master' Programme	Non	English German

Interviewee2	International Chinese Language Education	School of International Chinese Studies	Shanghai	The Fourth Year of Undergraduate	Yes	English
Interviewee3	International Chinese Language Education	School of International Chinese Studies	Shanghai	The Fourth Year of Undergraduate	Yes	English
Interviewee4	International Chinese Language Education	School of International Chinese Studies	Shanghai	The Fourth Year of Undergraduate	Yes	English
Interviewee5	International Chinese Language Education	School of Literature and Media	Yichang	The second year of Master' Programme	Non	English
Interviewee6	International Chinese Language Education	School of Literature and Media	Yichang	The Second Year of Master' Programme	Non	English
Interviewee7	International Chinese Language Education	School of Literature and Media	Yichang	The Second Year of Master' Programme	Non	English
Interviewee8	English Interpretation	School of Foreign Languages	Jinan	The Third Year of Master' Programme	Yes	English

Questionnaire

A. The questionnaire used in this study consists of three parts: basic personal information, the situation of intercultural courses, and the understanding of concepts related to intercultural competence, mainly including the understanding of intercultural communication, intercultural competence, and the connection between globalization and intercultural competence, etc. The questions can be found in the appendix 4.

B. The participants of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was filled in randomly by the students among Undergraduate, Master's, and Ph.D. students.

C. The number of samples in the questionnaire

Table 2

Total Number of Sample	Number of University	Number of College/ Department	Number of Major
527	48	60	68

D.Data collection

The participants come from various universities with different majors. A total of 527 people participated in the questionnaire survey, covering almost all of China's basic southeast and northwest areas. An online platform for conducting question surveys called So Jump on mainland China was used for this data collection, which provides functions equivalent to Surveyswap or type form this kind of questionnaire-creating platform. The questionnaire was sent to the participants directly using the online link provided by *So Jump* （*问卷星*）.

4. The Consistency of the＂Knowledge＂on Social Media and the Cognition of Students

From investigating the operation of social media, I found that the material practice is a critical part of the network construction process, including the technology, social media platform, policies, etc. Outside of the classroom, students prefer to use social media as their primary way to learn and enhance "intercultural competence" beyond the classroom. In my interviews, most students admitted using social media to learn and improve "intercultural competence." On the one hand, social media provides opportunities for acquiring "knowledge" beyond traditional classroom learning. On the other hand, students view the development of intercultural competence based on language and communication as a practical process; in the interview, I found that the students strongly emphasize practice. They think that practice is the best way to gain intercultural competence. They expressed their desire for more practical experience and believed that intercultural competence is a practical skill. For example:

Interviewee 2: 我的建议是开设另一门应该开设的相关课程，比如实践课程(*My suggestion is to offer another relevant course which should be provided, such as a practical course*).

Interviewee 3: 我希望能有更多的实践课程。现在我们有了理论部分，但是如果可以的话老师可以进行案例研究，在具体的实践中考虑如何去做是比较合适的。不知道在课堂上能不能实现,毕竟沟通还是需要落实在实践中(*I wish there were more practical classes. Now, we have the theoretical part, but the teacher can conduct case studies if possible; it is more appropriate to consider how to do it in a specific practice. I do not know if it can be realized in the classroom. After all, communication still needs to be implemented in practice*).

Interviewee 4: 我认为实践是最重要的，我最大的收获就是通过学习和实践，通过积累经验(*I think practice is the most important thing, the most I can gain is from my study and practice, through gathering experience*).

Interviewee 6: 现在的课堂好像缺乏跨文化交流的场景，到目前为止课堂还停留在理论知识的层面。我希望有更多关于实践、互动、与不同国家和地区的人们交流的内容 ……(*The current class seems to lack a scene of intercultural communication. So far, the class has stayed at the level of theoretical knowledge. I hope to have more content about practice, interaction, and communication with people from different countries and regions.*)

They hope teachers can provide more classroom opportunities to interact with foreigners, enhancing their intercultural competence through these practical interactions. However, the classroom has limited conditions, so they seek other practical learning opportunities outside the classroom. Social media is one of their main choices, for example:

Interviewee 1: 我觉得看外国影视节目或者文学小说可以帮助我们更好地了解一些跨文化知识……另外，你可以在社交媒体上看一些人的演讲，在社交应用上与外国人交流。 ……我们在网上也能看到一些现象，比如我们的老师在课堂上给我们播放了一段音频，还有一个博主去哈佛交流，然后告诉我们他受到了歧视当他在那里说英语的时候......(*I think watching foreign films and television programs or literary novels can help us better understand some intercultural knowledge...... Also, you can watch some people's speeches on social media and communicate with foreigners on social apps. ...... We can also see some phenomena on the Internet; for example, our teacher played us audio in class, and a blogger went to Harvard for an exchange and then told us that he was discriminated against when he spoke English over there......*)

Interviewee2: 我还使用国外媒体（通过 VPN），例如 YouTube、Facebook、论坛和新闻来了解其他人的想法。此外，我还与来自不同国家的人交流，出国。 ..... 这些方式可以锻炼我对不同文化的包容性......参加学校中外学生的活动，参观旅游景点...... (*I also use foreign media(by VPN), such as YouTube, Facebook, forums, and news, to understand other people's ideas. Besides, I communicate with people*

from different countries by going abroad. These ways can practice my tolerance for different cultures, such as participating in school activities for Chinese and foreign students and visiting tourist attractions.)

Interviewee 6: 应该是多学习其他国家的语言，也就是通过抖音、微信、bilbil 等社交媒体的一些 app 和视频。我从书籍、社交平台、自媒体中学到了很多社交礼仪、饮食习惯(*It should be to learn more languages from other countries, that is, through some apps and videos from social media like Douyin, Wechat, Xiao Hongshu, etc. I have learned much about social etiquette and eating habits from books, social platforms, and self-media*).

Interviewee 7: 我认为最重要的途径之一就是从互联网上获取信息和知识(*I think one of the most important ways is to obtain information and knowledge from the Internet*).

It is evident that beyond the classroom, the internet is their common means for accessing information and engaging in intercultural communication practices, especially through social media platforms. For instance, they use WeChat, TikTok, and Bilibili to search for intercultural competence, interact with foreigners, and learn about communicating skills in foreign situations. Additionally, some use VPNs (although this is an unstable and safe method) to access foreign social media, such as YouTube and Facebook, to get to know people's lives and thoughts abroad.

Apart from it, the "knowledge" concerning intercultural competence I found mainly covers the following aspects: The introduction of intercultural competence, Guidance on intercultural competence tests and competitions；The importance of intercultural competence in an international environmen；How to develop intercultural competence. Precisely, They encompass intercultural communication phenomena and experience between individuals and groups from different countries, primarily based on foreign language skills. The main focus is on intercultural scenes or stories involving students

studying abroad, individuals working overseas, or travelers visiting foreign countries, etc. For instance, on Douyin, I searched "intercultural competence" and found a popular blogger, named 璇儿-Tereza, with 263,000 followers. In one of her 58-second videos, she introduces intercultural competence, citing the definition from Wikipedia: "Intercultural competence is a range of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills that lead to effective and appropriate communication with people of other cultures." Additionally, she emphasizes the importance of intercultural competence in learning foreign languages/translation or for those wishing to work in foreign companies. She also highlights that intercultural competence is one of the skills required by the American ISO 17100 translation service requirement for translators. Finally, she believes intercultural competence, sensitivity, and tolerance towards different cultures are essential for people living or working in bilingual or bicultural environments.

Firstly, from the introduction of the blogger, it can be discerned that she used to study in the United States for ten years. Her educational background in the U.S. seemingly lends credibility to her discussions on intercultural competence. In the video, she endorsed the definition of intercultural competence from Wikipedia, which appears to lend persuasiveness to her presentation. However, she does not offer any personal understanding or raise any questions about intercultural competence, indicating her agreement with the provided explanation. Furthermore, she repeatedly emphasizes the importance of intercultural competence throughout the video, particularly highlighting its significance within a bilingual or bicultural context.

Another example involves an article published by an official institutional account, WExpress on Wechat, regarding the 7th "SFLEP Cup" National College Student S' Intercultural Competence Contest. The article states that the competition is dedicated to nurturing a new generation of individuals who know, love, and can articulate China's values. It aims to guide young people to establish firm cultural self-confidence, broaden their international perspectives, enhance their intercultural competence, and develop high-quality international talents with global

competitiveness. Additionally, it seeks to support the building of international communication capabilities, foster exchanges between Chinese and foreign civilizations, continuously create new cultural masterpieces that embody the beauty of shared cultures, and make fresh contributions to constructing a more open and inclusive world. The competition is organized into two groups: one for Chinese students and another for international students. It includes segments such as knowledge quizzes, situational reviews, and Chinese storytelling. Video clips from previous editions of the competition can also be found on various video platforms. They feature discussions on dining table etiquette and comparing Chinese and American wedding cultures, among other topics. This competition represents an extension of intercultural competence education within social media and it tries to emphasize the importance of intercultural competence.

If searching according to social media prompts, such as "typical examples of intercultural communication（跨文化交流典型案例）" on platforms like Douyin, the first video that appears on the search interface features is a scene with several university students acted as foreigners from South Korea, Japan, France and German dining together. This scene is presented as a so-called intercultural communication theater to showcase differences in dining etiquette across various cultures. Through the portrayal of students as foreigners, the following cultural points are introduced: when sending off guests and visiting customers, the Japanese bow is tilted at an angle of 30 degrees; South Koreans will take off their shoes when they visit their guests' homes; the French have a poor sense of time, etc.

Another video discusses "differences between Chinese and Western cultures." The story compares giving and receiving gifts among Chinese and Western individuals and the differences in how Chinese and Western people handle paying the bill during meals. This video highlights and illustrates specific cultural practices and norms that differ significantly between the East and the West, thus providing a practical example of intercultural communication and understanding. Additionally, a blogger shares a

story about a Chinese person dining in an American restaurant to illustrate the differences between Chinese and American dining cultures.

This kind of "knowledge" seems to perpetuate the stereotypes the teachers taught in the classroom (they reinforce each other). Observing the comments section, I see that some audiences endorse these videos. If this is the case, such portrayals could only reinforce and amplify people's stereotypical views about individuals and groups from these countries. This phenomenon underscores a critical issue in using social media for educational purposes. While it can spread information rapidly and engage a broad audience, the accuracy and impact of the shared knowledge can sometimes propagate misunderstandings or biased perceptions rather than fostering genuine intercultural understanding and appreciation.

Besides, it should not be overlooked that teachers and students could transform the "knowledge" acquired from social media into specific "knowledge" for cultivating intercultural competence, which they may use as material to be presented in classrooms as case presentations. This involves re-showcasing "their own culture" as it appears in the social media space back into the classroom setting, which is, in fact, a mutually enhancing process where teachers leverage examples from social media to strengthen the arguments for the knowledge they impart. These videos' content externally validates the educational content's correctness, establishing an interconnected relationship. We must not forget that teachers are also users and influencers of media. During this process, students become more convinced of the validity of the content taught by teachers in classrooms and that presented on social media.

This consistency can be seen in the students' understanding of intercultural communication and competence from my interviews. The students from the interviews also hold similar cognition of intercultural competence as the video presented, for example:

Interviewee1: 成功的跨文化交流就是要尽量减少误解和冲突。全球化使我们能够认识和理解一些不同的文化，并使不同文化的人之间的交流成为现实......我接触的更多的还是国别的跨文化，因为受媒介或外界的影响，下意识就会用国家去区分，比如我在寝室里跟我来自别的区域的同学交流的时候，我不会有这种意识认为这是跨文化.....

(Successful intercultural communication is to minimize misunderstandings and conflicts. Globalization allows us to know and understand different cultures and can make communication with people of different cultures a reality...In my experience, I have primarily been exposed to intercultural interactions between countries; the media or external influences subconsciously influence me to distinguish between cultures by country. For example, when I communicate with classmates from different regions in my dormitory, I do not consciously perceive these interactions as intercultural...).

Interviewee2: 跨文化能力最常见的定义是与不同文化顺利沟通的能力(The most common definition of intercultural competence is the ability to communicate smoothly with different cultures).

Interviewee3: 我觉得就是建立一种比较良好、稳定的关系，然后在我们交流的过程中，我们对彼此的文化有了更全面、深刻的了解，并在一定程度上瓦解了彼此之间的刻板印象和偏见，包容差异也很重要(I think it is to establish a relatively good and stable relationship, and then in the process of our communication, we have a more comprehensive and profound understanding of each other's culture, and to a certain extent disintegrate the stereotypes and prejudices against each other. Being tolerant of differences is also essential).

Moreover, platforms like WeChat and Douyin also yield numerous videos focused on foreign language learning, with English learning videos being the most common. These educational contents highlight the diverse ways social media can be utilized for cultural education and language acquisition, reflecting the connection between

language skills and intercultural competence in such a global environment. Like interviewee 8 explained: 我觉得跨文化肯定要以一种语言为基础，因为任何事情都是要借助语言的，不管是这国家之间的社交，还是说经济之间的交流，都是需要有一个桥梁，这个桥梁就是语言，语言其实就相当于两种文化之间的桥梁。(I believe that intercultural communication must be based on a common language because everything relies on language. Whether it's social interactions between countries or economic exchanges, a bridge is needed, and the bridge is language. Language essentially serves as the bridge between two cultures.)

Besides, in my tracking process, the students who participated in the questionnaire survey came from 68 majors, including arts and sciences, at 48 universities in China. Of these participants, 53.13% had not enrolled in any intercultural courses. From the results of the questionnaire, I found that majors offering intercultural courses were primarily concentrated in fields related to foreign languages, international Chinese education, and communication studies. Aside from the students in majors that offered intercultural courses but chose not to participate, the primary reasons other students did not participate in intercultural courses were that such courses were not available in their majors, or they were unaware of these courses, or they believed the courses were irrelevant to their fields of study. However, there is a certain similarity in their understanding of intercultural competence. For instance, among the 527 participants, 82.73% agreed that intercultural interaction in China predominantly involves cultural exchanges between different countries, and 91.46% approved that intercultural competence is the ability to communicate well with people from different national backgrounds.

Likewise, 81.02% believe that intercultural competence involves the ability to understand language and cultural differences, while 95.45% think that it includes foreign language skills. Additionally, the stronger a person's foreign language skills and the richer their knowledge of foreign cultures, the more they are considered to possess strong intercultural competence. This corresponds with the views of the

interviewees; for example, interviewee 8 also holds a view as she described: 我认为跨文化交流必须以语言为基础，语言是媒介。经济交流和全球化也导致越来越多的人学习外语(*I think intercultural communication must be based on a language, language is a medium. Economic exchanges and globalization have also led to more and more people learning foreign languages*). Moreover, the majority of respondents and participants in the questionnaire survey believe that intercultural competence can be assessed. Promoting intercultural competence competitions and examinations on social media has reinforced their firm belief that intercultural skills can be quantitatively evaluated.

Indeed, it is evident that the "knowledge" of intercultural competence presented on social media has the same voice with the "knowledge" taught by teachers in the classroom and the understanding of intercultural competence by most interviewees and survey participants. This might also explain why individuals who have not participated in intercultural courses or are not from related fields still possess similar understanding. The "knowledge" produced by social media does not exceed what is traditionally included in the educational system. It is not more extensive than what is found in textbooks, nor is there a more diverse and profound discussion, nor are there voices that differ. It is even a reproduction of "knowledge" from classroom and textbook.The videos I watched on the social media platforms have been filtered through the process of translation, and what is ultimately presented reinforces and complements the content taught in the educational system. It may even represent a digital transfer of textbook. The social media itself has become a part of educational practice. I suppose social media provides us with much more homogeneous production (knowledge) to support our imagination; it did in a way, but not in a natural way. Therefore, considering the consistency of the content presented on social media and students' cognition, the material practices of both non-human and human actors in this process exhibit the same direction.

5. "Chinese Culture" is described by Cultural Symbols and Stories Telling

Interestingly, the data provided by the questionnaire show that most participants have no experience of going abroad, but they have a strong sense of cultural boundaries with states. They believe that in China, intercultural means more cultural exchanges between different countries; using country as a proxy for culture is shown from the students' descriptions in the questionnaire and interview. As Brewer and Venaik (2012, p. 681) pointed out, Equating cultures with countries and using Country of origin and individual culture interchangeably became common practice.

Not only that, the "knowledge" presented in videos on Douyin and WeChat mainly uses countries for intercultural comparisons. For instance, the examples mentioned earlier often draw boundaries using "China and foreign countries" or "China and the West." Here, the cultural comparison between China and other countries mainly refers to "Chinese culture." it shows that "culture" in the videos interacted with and made by the actors was defined in terms of the nation-state; at the same time, the narrative about Chinese culture in the video on WeChat and Douyin interprets it through various cultural symbols and stories telling. When searching for "Chinese culture" on Douyin or WeChat videos, the results involve cultural representations, such as opera performances, musical instruments, clothing, calligraphy, martial arts, and stunning landscapes. These videos are frequently accompanied by explanations or titles praising the "charm of the national essence left to us by our ancestors," showcasing the blogger's profound admiration and national pride towards Chinese culture, which they perceive as awe-inspiring through foreign eyes. Similar videos are continually cropping up on Chinese social media platforms.

As an illustration, a highly popular video, ranking at the top spot, emerged when I searched for "中国文化" (Chinese culture) on Douyin. This video, titled "这些都是中国的" (These are all China's), is a brief glimpse into Chinese traditional culture. It was released by the widely followed account "央视频" (Central Video), boasting a staggering 20 billion followers. In this video, it was a Chinese girl as the host and other participants who were foreigners listened to the host introduce the Han costumes

and the food people ate in the Tang dynasty and Chabai Opera（茶白戏）, as well as "Chinese traditional flower arrangement"（中国传统插花）, calligraphy, etc. The end of the video has a calligraphy work written "中国欢迎你" (China welcomes you), and at the same time, the host said, "传统文化是老祖宗留给我们的珍贵宝藏,值得你和我共同去守护" (Traditional culture is a precious treasure left to us by our ancestors, and it deserves to be protected by you and me), and then those foreign participants said the experience was great, which can understand Chinese culture better...I want to learn how to cook Chinese cuisine..."

The following video is about a young man singing Beijing opera in South Korea. The Video narration was saying "这才是任何国家都偷不走的文化底蕴，男子在韩国课堂上展示戏腔，开口惊艳众人..." (This is the cultural heritage that no country can steal. A man showcased traditional Chinese opera singing in a South Korean classroom, astonishing everyone with his performance.)

Another video, "在国外杀疯的中国文化" (The Chinese culture which stormed abroad), released by the account"显微镜小娱" with an impressive almost 60,0000 followers, showcases the widespread popularity of Chinese cultural elements. Chinese lion dancing, a vibrant and energetic tradition, is a global sensation during the Spring Festival, creating a festive atmosphere that feels like the whole world is celebrating the Chinese New Year. The Sichuan opera face-changing performances, a mesmerizing art form, never fail to captivate foreign audiences. Mahjong, the famous Chinese dance "Subject Three（科目三）", traditional Hanfu clothing, and traditional Chinese medicine are all part of the global fascination with Chinese culture.

And some other videos similar on Wechat are about the beautiful natural views in China; stories about some tried to play as ancient Chinese, wear ancient costumes to experience ancient life, and so on. These videos have the effect of making Chinese people feel very proud, thinking that their culture (Chinese culture) is fantastic and that the whole world should come to understand and appreciate it. And it is evident

that through the content on social media, intercultural competence is based on country's traditional cultural notions centered on "celebrations/festivals, cuisine and costume, etiquette, and scenic beauty."

Furthermore, various user accounts on Douyin hosts a variety of cultural challenge competitions, encouraging individual users to create videos and compete. Some accounts even share videos of cultural competitions that take place offline. These challenges encompass a diverse range of activities, from dance competitions to cooking tutorials and storytelling, all of which are inspired by various cultural traditions, anticipating in these challenges is considered an opportunity for Chinese users to share Chinese culture and tell Chinese cultural stories, as well as gain exposure to cultural practices from other countries and regions and develop a sense of cultural appreciation and curiosity. For instance, the Douyin account of the Dunhuang Cultural Tourism Bureau released a video contest to introduce Dunhuang. Participants post relevant videos showcasing experiences, stories, natural environments, and cultural landmarks in various locations. The account "Dou 来奏乐吧" launched the "华彩传承计划(Chinese Color Heritage Project)," encouraging people to upload and share short videos related to Chinese opera, folk songs, traditional musical instruments, and Chinese dance to participate and win rewards. Moreover, a famous influencer on Doyin launched a "东北大花" (The Northern East Flower)challenge. It is considered as a traditional floral pattern cloth from northeast China. He wore these floral pattern pajamas traveling around the world. The challenge is to wear clothes with this Chinese floral pattern and walk on the street to show its beauty and see people's reactions. Loads of other influencers joined the challenge. The Heilongjiang University account posted videos about their "Inherit Chinese Culture, Tell Chinese Stories" competition on traditional Chinese cultural knowledge. Many similar videos exist. These videos, equipped with text, cover images, and music, create an immersive experience.

In these numerous videos, as well as in images and word descriptions, the concept of Chinese culture is constructed through a series of symbols and stories. These videos use various cultural symbols to fill out the concept of "Chinese culture" and use it as a basis for comparing with foreign cultures. At the same time, they build an intercultural reality by sharing these cultural symbols, stories, and "knowledge of culture".

These videos conceptualize the knowledge about "culture" as an interaction of individuals with cultural artifacts like tools, symbols, and language as the central mode of learning, which tends to treat culture as fixed, static representations and symbols delineated by national boundaries. Additionally, the production and dissemination of this kind of "knowledge" cater to the notion that Chinese culture is a great culture; as Chinese people, we are responsible for letting the world understand Chinese culture, appreciate Chinese culture, and thereby identify with China and the Chinese people. Moreover, intercultural competence has become more critical than ever before in a world experiencing rapid changes and unprecedented frequency of global exchanges. It helps address communication conflicts between national and cultural contexts, such as misunderstandings among nations, societies, and groups. Furthermore, in such a global environment, intercultural competence plays a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and peaceful coexistence (Huber, 2012, p. 15).

6. The Impact on Users by Ways of Presenting and Distributing "Knowledge"

With the ubiquity of smartphones, big data, and algorithms that regulate online activities, our world of life has already become inseparable from media technology (Cheney-Lippold, 2011; Wilson, Graham, 2013). Social media is an important part of our lives. Through social media, people have the opportunity to express their opinions to the public and participate in conversations and dialogue through a common virtual medium, which also means that every person can be a publisher and a critic in cyberspace (Sawyer, Chen, 2012). In the social media era, the knowledge production threshold is lowered, information dissemination is accelerated, and the boundaries

between producers and consumers are increasingly blurred. The channels for knowledge dissemination have become more diversified, allowing virtually anyone to become a "knowledge disseminator" within a certain field. However, the identities of these knowledge disseminators often go unexamined, and the entities conveying this "knowledge" lack proper vetting processes. This issue is particularly acute regarding the opinions of some "experts" and "scholars" who, despite merely being embellished, are presented as credible sources of knowledge in the dissemination process.

Additionally, social media has its specific mode for video relsease, which can significantly affect users. For example, WeChat and Douyin have time limits for their videos. Initially, Douyin only allowed videos that were no longer than 15 seconds, and only users with more than 1,000 followers could post videos that were longer than 15 seconds. Subsequently, this limit was extended to 1 minute, 3 minutes, 5 minutes, and 10 minutes in 2022. Currently, new options for uploading 15 to 30 minutes videos are being tested in the app's beta version. From what I have observed, most videos with intercultural competence or culture currently range from 15 seconds to 10 minutes.

This mode has led to a bite-sized information. Videos presented through storytelling needs to convey its message within a few minutes, undergoing editing, filtering, and refining processes. Decisions about what to emphasize and what to omit require careful post-production work. This results in a lack of connection and thought regarding systematic knowledge, as viewers are presented with only snippets rather than a comprehensive understanding. Indeed, while the convenience and condensed nature of knowledge in the form of images and videos also results in the fragmentation of time and space, where there is a strong sense of immediacy to users. It is not about linear progression but the moment's immediacy. In such a non-distanced space, people tend not to consider conventional relationships. It effectively reinforces the viewpoints people identify with: In today's globalized world, intercultural interactions occur anytime and anywhere. Swept up in such

tremendous convenience, there is a formation of trust in abstract systems and a decline in reflective capabilities. This environment discourages deep thinking and reduces the inclination to question or critically assess the information presented.

Secondly, the presentation of the platform interface also influences the effectiveness with which users receive knowledge. For instance, the common homepage interface styles on short video platforms include single-column and double-column feed streams. These formats differ significantly from the browsing styles used for image and text. Such configurations have been proven through extensive data comparison experiments to be the most effective at driving viewer engagement metrics and thus have gradually become mainstream (Chen, Sha, 2022, p.33). At the same time, different interface designs, to some extent, determine the platform's ability to control the efficiency of content reach. This impact on how content is accessed and consumed can profoundly influence user interaction with the platform and the overall dissemination of knowledge. Generally speaking, platforms that use a single-column feed design (such as Douyin and WeChat) are more likely to create echo chambers[48] and trending topics compared to those that employ a double-column feed design (such as Bilibili, Xiaohongshu, and Kuaishou)(Chen, Sha, 2022,p. 33). This is because, with a single-column feed, users are presented with only two choices: continue watching or swipe away. This means that through intentional interface design, social media platforms can control the quantity or depth of content consumption by increasing the certainty of user action guidance. This strategic manipulation of user interactions emphasizes the significant influence of design on the behavioral patterns of users on these platforms.

Furthermore, although social media offers a free and vast space providing users with more knowledge, how social media presents knowledge, or distributes knowledge affects users' cognition. Taking WeChat and Douyin as examples, I have observed

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[48] Echo chamber is also called echo chamber effect, echo chamber is an environment where a person only encounters information or opinions that reflect and reinforce their own.On social media, it is thought that echo chambers limit exposure to diverse perspectives, and favor and reinforce presupposed narratives and ideologies.

that if I consistently search for a topic, such as intercultural competence, my account will frequently receive recommendations for related videos, leading to my exposure to similar content. This phenomenon occurs because these platforms employ algorithmic technology based on big data analytics. The algorithm is designed to learn and predict user preferences based on search behaviors, interactions, and viewing histories, thereby personalizing the content feed. While this can enhance user engagement by providing more relevant and exciting content, it can also create a filter bubble[49], limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints and information, thus potentially narrowing the user's perspective rather than broadening it.

On the one hand, Douyin's distribution mechanism is primarily algorithm-driven, establishing a robust data analytics system that pushes appropriate content and advertisements to users. One feature of this system is that the content or keywords from a video a user is watching will immediately appear in the "Suggested Search" section of the search screen. For example, if you are watching a trailer for a movie, related information such as the main character, actors, or the movie name will directly appear on the search home page. Similarly, if I watch a video about intercultural competence, a prompt related to this topic, such as "intercultural competence competition," will appear at the bottom of the screen. This design is considered to save users time, encouraging them to explore more related or similar content.

On the other hand, for Douyin users, the common sentiment of "cannot stop once I start" speaks volumes about the addictive nature of short video platforms. To some extent, platforms like Douyin can be addictive because they rely on algorithmic technology to filter information based on user data (Wang, Zhang, 2022, p. 53). Information filtering refers to the personalized recommendation systems of short video platforms that block content disliked by the user or marked as undesirable,

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[49] A filter bubble is a state of intellectual isolation that can result from personalized searches, recommendation systems, and algorithmic curation. The search results are based on information about the user, such as their location, past click-behavior, and search history. Consequently, users become separated from information that disagrees with their viewpoints, effectively isolating them in their own cultural or ideological bubbles, resulting in a limited and customized view of the world.

ensuring that similar content does not appear in the user's feed for a certain period. These platforms help users filter their information stream for preferred content through personalized recommendation algorithms. The platform can retain or filter out similar content that aligns with the user's interests or dislikes by filtering information. Similar content can amplify emotional identification. When users spend extended periods watching content of the same type and similar values on short video platforms, their cognition undergoes a certain degree of change.

That is to say, the personalized customization of content delivery, combined with an infinite scrolling design, allows viewers to engage continuously, fulfilling their needs and achieving significant dissemination effects. This design keeps users engaged and significantly impacts their perception and understanding, reinforcing certain viewpoints or knowledge through repetitive exposure to similar content.

In terms of WeChat, the sources of "knowledge" primarily come from three aspects: moments posted by friends, a wide variety of official accounts, and video channels. The acquisition of knowledge through these forms depends on the users' selective exposure. WeChat facilitates bidirectional operations such as adding and deleting friends, and over time, people tend to cluster around friends with similar interests and viewpoints. On the other hand, official accounts are subscribed to by the users themselves and can be unsubscribed at any time. To maintain user engagement, these accounts increasingly utilize big data to tailor content precisely according to different users' interests, thereby ensuring more targeted content delivery.

The WeChat Video Channel, launched in early 2020, is a new short video platform within WeChat. Users can share short videos with text or images with text to the WeChat channel. Like Douyin, the platform relies on a personalized recommendation algorithm to deliver content precisely, creating a "Video Daily" for each user. This allows users to select and watch programs they like, effectively catering to user preferences and achieving a high match between user needs and personalized

information.

As we can see, user-generated content (UGC) on social media platforms has significantly influenced how people receive and perceive knowledge. In the process, algorithmic logic is considered 'the central tenet of platformization' (Bishop, 2020, p.3). It is interpreted as a codified process' in promoting or restraining content visibility via platform infrastructure or a recommendation system powered by computational abilities (Bishop, 2020, p.2). However, the inner workings of algorithms are hidden from users (Bishop, 2020; Meng, 2021; Watson, Conner, 2019), and the algorithms that power many digital platforms and technologies are not neutral but manipulated and shaped by other powerful actors, such as governments or corporations out of their political and commercial interests, to shape public opinion and control narratives. By leveraging algorithmic technology, social media can reinforce existing power dynamics by privileging certain voices, perspectives, and narratives over others. For example, mainstream media may prioritize the perspectives of dominant social groups while marginalizing or silencing marginalized voices. Similarly, technological infrastructures may reflect and perpetuate inequalities related to access, representation, and participation in the digital realm. Thus, algorithmic bias can influence the information we are exposed to, the recommended products, and the content in our social media feeds.

In other words, algorithmic recommendations enact a new regime of visibility, orchestrating the allocation of attention through intricate networks of actors including technologies, thereby progressively shaping a distinct technological framework of visibility. Consequently, the algorithms dictate what we should "pay attention to and actively engage with, rather than what not to." This targeted feeding approach places users in what is referred to as filter bubbles or echo chambers, where diverse voices are suppressed and the breadth of information received narrows. While social networks appear to offer open and free information exchange and dissemination, they are increasingly moving towards a more homogeneous, closed, and narrowed content

convergence, leading to a circulation of information that is insular rather than open. This restricts individual perspectives, solidifies collective biases, and reinforces their certain values, potentially also leading to ideological isolation and, over time, keeping users within a homogenized information world. This creates "information isolated islands" or leads to the formation of an "information cocoon effect" (Sunstein, 2008, p.41), where it becomes difficult for users to interact with groups that hold different values. At the same time, an individual's understanding of the objective world becomes increasingly one-sided, affecting their cognitive abilities to think about the world and weakening their initiative to know it. Eventually, it results in a limited, biased information set shaping people's perception of reality.

When individuals are confined within an information environment constructed by algorithms, their lives inevitably become programmed and formulaic. Under the influence of recommendation algorithms, different groups deepen their prejudices against each other. Despite the potential of social media practices, the content about intercultural competence or culture does not lead to increased tolerance for different cultures as expected. Instead, these platforms often reinforce existing cultural biases and prevent broadening understanding across different cultural boundaries.

7. Political Censorship for Social Media

China has an expansive system of censorship that initiates restrictions on the Internet, especially in the political sphere. This includes blocking or regulating various websites, social media, apps, and video games, inspiring the policy's nickname, the "Great Firewall of China". In the process of censorship practices, the Chinese government (both the central and local authorities are engaged in censorship) holds the primary authority for designing and enforcing censorship policies and regulations. Policies and regulations are one of their agents to enact their interests. Its interests lie in maintaining political stability and controlling the flow of information to align with its ideological narrative. Technical experts and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) these kinds of entities play a crucial role in implementing censorship measures

by filtering and blocking access to certain websites, keywords, or content deemed sensitive by the government. Companies operating within China, such as social media platforms (e.g., WeChat, Douyin) and search engines (e.g., Baidu), adhere to government censorship directives and policies. Moreover, the officials and censors, moderators, and whistleblowers acted as agents to monitor online content and issue or implement directives for censorship measures. They constitute a comprehensive censorship system. In recent years, censorship has been regarded as an ordinary governmental policy regulating political speech and non-political content such as entertainment, culture, and advertising to increase people's exposure to censorship activities, further facilitating normalization. In other words, this shift in perception refers to the normalization of the censorship regime (Yang, 2024, p. 2).

Firstly, the Chinese government blocks access to websites and social media platforms deemed sensitive or politically threatening, such as Wikipedia, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and numerous foreign news websites. And it is creating its own domestic websites, search engines, and versions of social media. These resources are set up to serve a large Chinese population with distinctively Chinese platforms. This limits exposure to diverse viewpoints and information sources. As Aguilar argues, what is hidden behind social media is government; no one is not visible. To be aware of this reality, social media is not neutral (Aguilar, 2009, 2012).

Although it is generally challenging for local people to directly access foreign social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube through conventional means, some utilize circumvention tools such as proxy servers and virtual private networks (VPNs)[50] to access blocked content and alternative platforms. Consequently, the Chinese government also promulgated policies and regulations to restrict the use of VPNs (Virtual Private Networks). In January 2017, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) issued the Notice of the Ministry of Industry and

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[50] A virtual private network (VPN) is a mechanism for creating a secure connection between a computing device and a computer network, or between two networks, using an insecure communication medium such as the public Internet.

Information Technology on Cleaning up and Standardising the Internet Network Access Service Market. The notice clarifies that no enterprise shall set up or rent dedicated lines or other channels (including a VPN) to operate cross-border business without the approval of the MIIT.

Thus, when leasing international dedicated lines to users, basic telecommunications enterprises are required to establish user profiles centrally and make it clear to users that such international dedicated lines are for their internal office work use only. Such lines shall not be used to connect to domestic or foreign data centers or business platforms to operate telecommunications businesses. Currently, only VPN services provided by authorized basic telecommunications business operators are legal in China, while those provided by other enterprises or overseas companies are not. In 2024, the State Council updated *The Provisional Regulations of the People's Republic of China on the Administration of International Networking of Computer Information Networks*. The sixth provision stipulates that computer information networks directly engaging in international networking must use the international entry and exit channels provided by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications' national public telecommunications network. Therefore, even though some students use VPNs to bypass internet restrictions and access foreign social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, their activities are still restricted. If the content involves what the government deems sensitive information, it is also subject to surveillance. In other words, these methods carry risks, and users must navigate constant surveillance and potential penalties.

In China dominate domestic platforms such as WeChat, Douyin, Sina Weibo, etc. For these domestic social media platforms, the state primarily employs several methods of regulation: First, there are national regulations, official announcements regarding state-led internet cleanup activities, and official notices about prohibited materials that have been reported to the authorities. Chinese government legislation and regulations include specific provisions on the types of prohibited online content. These

documents encompass the Administrative Measures for the Security Protection of International Connections of Computer Information Networks (1997), the Cybersecurity Law (2017), the Regulations on the Management of Online Short Video Platforms and the Detailed Rules for the Content Review Standards of Online Short Videos (2019), as well as the Regulations on the Ecological Governance of Online Information Content (2020). These four documents share many prohibited categories, including pornographic content and content that attacks the Chinese political system. It is also evident that more recent documents, particularly the *Regulations on the Management of Online Short Video Platforms* from 2019 and the *Regulations on the Ecological Governance of Online Information Content* from 2020, specify new categories of prohibited content. These include "damaging the image of revolutionary leaders, heroes, and martyrs" and, more vaguely, content that is "vulgar, trivial, or pandering." Moreover, in 2022, China's Cyberspace Administration issued the "Regulations on the Management of Internet User Account Information," encompassing account information registration and usage, account management, supervision and inspection, and legal responsibilities. Compared to the draft soliciting opinions released the previous year, the "Regulations" refined rules regarding the public disclosure of IP address locations and real-name registration systems. Subsequently, Chinese social media platforms, including Zhihu, Douyin, and WeChat, quickly implemented a feature that displays user locations based on IP addresses, a functionality that users cannot turn off.

Secondly, the government operates online platforms where users can report such prohibited materials. For example, the Cyberspace Administration of China encourages domestic netizens to report "undesirable information content" and "harmful information" through a reporting center, either by identifying themselves or anonymously. The Cyberspace Administration of China has launched a free reporting hotline, 12377, and the website *https://www.12377.cn/.51.* It is classified into nine

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[51] Their primary responsibilities include receiving and handling reports from the public regarding illegal and harmful information on the internet; guiding websites across the country on reporting mechanisms; guiding nationally qualified websites with news publishing capabilities in industry self-discipline; and engaging in international exchanges to report harmful information violating Chinese laws and

different categories, including the political category. Individuals identified as spreading dissenting views or sensitive information face severe and immediate repercussions, including arrest, imprisonment, etc. Due to the very real fear of reprisal and these severe penalties, many Chinese social media users self-censor their content, avoiding discussions on sensitive topics altogether. This leads to a significant narrowing of discourse and inhibits the exchange of diverse ideas and perspectives.

Besides multiple government sections, including the Cyberspace Administration of China[52] and the Ministry of Public Security[53], monitor social media platforms for violations or investigate cybercrime activities, and demanding that companies be accountable for the content on their platforms. Companies are required to allocate resources to ensure that all content complies with legal, political, or ideological requirements. This characteristic of China's information control system, known as intermediary liability or "self-censorship" allows the government to delegate the responsibility of information control to the private sector.

All Internet platforms operating in China must follow local laws and regulations regarding content controls. The companies that provide these services are held liable for content on their platforms and risk fines or losing their business license if they do not follow content regulations. Consequently, each social media platform also censors and develops its platform management rules. For example, *Douyin's Community Self-Disciplinary Regulations*(抖音社区自律公约) state that Douyin "adheres to and promotes" the "traditional culture and virtues of the Chinese nation" and "the core values of socialism," encourages a positive lifestyle, and constantly transmits positive energy. It also bans content that "damages the national image or interests" of the PRC, "subverts state power," or encourages people to protest:

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regulations to overseas websites. The resource link: https://www.12377.cn/jgjj.html?tab=5.

[52] The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC; 国家互联网信息办公室) is the national internet regulator and censor of the People's Republic of China.

[53] The Ministry of Public Security (MPS, 公安部) is a government ministry of the People's Republic of China responsible for public and political security. It oversees more than 1.9 million of the country's law enforcement officers and as such the vast majority of the People's Police. While the MPS is a nationwide police force, conducting counterintelligence and maintaining the political security of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) remain its core functions.

1) oppose the basic principles established by the Constitution 反对宪法所确定的基本原则

2) endanger national security, leak state secrets, subvert state power, and undermine national unity 危害国家安全，泄露国家秘密，颠覆国家政权，破坏国家

3) damage the national image, damage national honor and interests 损害国家形象，损害国家荣誉和利益

4) inciting illegal assemblies, associations, and demonstrations, gathering crowds to disrupt social order, undermine social stability and public safety 动非法集会、结社、游行、示威、聚众扰乱社会秩序，破坏社会稳定与公共安全

Should any posted video violate the regulations above, it could not be uploaded to the platform; even if it did, it will be subject to blocking or deletion, or the account may be banned, and the uploader could face corresponding penalties.

Similarly, the *WeChat Personal Account Usage Specifications*（微信个人账号使用规范）also state that WeChat is committed to ensuring the safety of both the platform and its users. WeChat strictly adheres to relevant national laws and regulations, as well as Tencent's platform rules, to ensure that the content on the platform is legal and compliant. WeChat does not allow the posting of terroristic content that threatens national security, among other illegal and non-compliant content.

In *WeChat Surveillance Explained* by Miles Kenyon (2020)[54], who said, on WeChat, an article must pass through preliminary censorship barriers such as 'keyword blocking' and the 'Great Firewall of China' before it can be published online. WeChat censors are content server-side, meaning that all the censorship rules are on a remote server. When a message is sent from one WeChat user to another, it passes through a server managed by Tencent (WeChat's parent company) that detects if the message includes blocked keywords before a message is sent to the recipient. For example, if

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[54] The link for more information to reference: https://citizenlab.ca/2020/05/wechat-surveillance-explained/

a message is censored there is no notification given to the user sending or receiving the message.

Moreover, automated keyword filters are employed to censor posts containing sensitive topics, including political dissent, human rights issues, and criticism of the government. Users often find their posts deleted or accounts suspended if they discuss such topics. From his explanation, WeChat enables keyword and image censorship for users with accounts registered to mainland China phone numbers. He shows that WeChat often broadly censors content during critical periods such as the 19th National Communist Party Congress and, most recently, the coronavirus pandemic. WeChat users are under surveillance because of the type of content monitored — specifically, politically sensitive content in China. This includes content critical to the Chinese government or its policies, etc. WeChat's content monitoring differs from other platforms regarding what content is monitored and how the monitoring system is trained and selectively applied. Kenyon's research demonstrates that content sent by non-China-registered accounts is under political surveillance and used invisibly to build up WeChat's censorship system for China-registered accounts. Among the monitoring systems employed by social media companies, WeChat's surveillance system is the only system that monitors content sent by one set of users to enhance the surveillance and censorship of another set.

From the preceding, the Chinese government through its agents remains vigilant against any technology that might allow unrestricted communication among its people. The rules on social media platforms, such as Douyin and WeChat, are structured according to the government's desires, which limits communities' growth in the virtual world. This is also one of the major reasons that the content for discussing culture on these Chinese social media is generally associated with specific cultural representations and symbols, deliberately steering clear topics such as politics and economics. This approach appears to be an attempt to maintain the neutrality of culture and avoid controversy. Therefore, videos about intercultural competence on

social platforms resemble the transposition of classroom or textbook into virtual spaces without engaging in more extensive discussions. For the sake of passing censorship, ensuring their safety, or avoiding sensitive discussions, the presentation of culture remains representational and symbolic. Under the guidance of mainstream ideology, the Chinese culture we perceive encompasses social media: the beauty of calligraphy, the richness of cuisine, the stunningness of costume, and the sense of national pride we reclaim from the virtual space.

To this extent, the political censorship of social media in China contributes to building and maintaining networks that define and regulate the boundaries of culture and create the intercultural reality in China. Social media, educational institutions, cultural organizations, and digital platforms collaborate to produce and distribute content that aligns with official narratives, policies, and priorities related to intercultural education, intercultural communication, and national identity. This network-building process reinforces certain discourses(intercultural competence is essential in such a global world) and excludes alternative perspectives that challenge dominant narratives or disrupt established power relations. It also plays a role in black-boxing knowledge about intercultural competence by stabilizing and concealing the processes through which this knowledge is produced, circulated, and enacted on social media. Through repetition, normalization, and routinization, media representations of intercultural competence may become taken-for-granted assumptions or unquestioned truths in Chinese society. As a result, the complex network of actors, interests, and power dynamics involved in shaping intercultural competence may become obscured or black-boxed from public scrutiny and critical inquiry.

8. Discussion and Analysis

8.1 The Production and Dissemination of "Knowledge" Through Material Practices on Social Media Remain a Product of Power Relations

The Internet has opened up a world full of opportunities for various social media channels. Over the past decade, we have witnessed explosive growth on these social

media platforms. Like Cimino(2016, p. 191) mentioned, people are now acquainted with a *media culture* whose main feature is that of (naturally) implying the use of media technologies as the primary sources for accessing knowledge, that is, culture and society.

As described above, we are involved in social media activities in various ways, such as making videos and writing articles, reading and commenting on entries in others' blogs, searching for culturally relevant videos on Douyin, collectively tagging digital resources, and exchanging information in WeChat groups, etc. Social media provides the technology that supports interaction and collaboration among users, enabling us to establish networked communities and exchange content. It also influences the way we learn, share information, and construct knowledge. Users may actively participate in communication with others and be involved in the creation of content (e.g., by publishing personal profiles, participating in forum discussions, writing blogs, and tagging resources). The distinction between consumers and producers of content ceases to exist (Bruns, 2006, p. 276), as everyone can use social media to publish easily and cheaply. Consequently, social media enables collaboration among large numbers of heterogeneous users (Tapscott, Williams, 2006).

Therefore, we should notice that information and knowledge from social media is not meta-information/meta-knowledge but rather information/knowledge that has been refined, adjusted, and incorporated with biases and viewpoints. Substantial information/knowledge may not necessarily be provided, and the actual situation may not necessarily be understood. Social media become an essential source of information/knowledge for influencing people's cognition, right and wrong judgment, and the cultivation of values. In this sense, Chinese social media has also become a tool for guiding social opinion and core values, just as it has strengthened ideological and political education through reviewing books, movies, etc.

In China, all social media platforms operate under government regulation. Moreover, the information and knowledge accessible to users are restricted (many foreign social media platforms are unavailable domestically). The media's stance may reflect the dominant political forces within society, offering services that other participants (either officials themselves or broader societal forces behind them) wish to provide to the audience.

That is to say, from the perspective of ANT, social media produces black-boxed "knowledge" through collaborative processes. Black-boxing becomes the process of making a joint production of action, facts, or artifacts entirely opaque (Latour, 1999). We trust and use it without "unpacking" it, that is, without questioning the multitude of actors that have been aligned and associated with it during its "making." We should have questions about how this blackbox is established, what becomes opaque and indifferent in video-making, content creating, what heterogeneous actors get together, and how their associations are made and maintained. For Latour, things can exist and be truthful (be black-boxed) scientifically, religiously, legally, politically, and in many other ways.

The same is true of knowledge on social media, making blackboxing in social media and its reality emerge from the (laborious) establishment of media chains made of heterogeneous materials and associations. In the context of ANT, knowledge is not just a set of truths waiting to be discovered but is constructed through the interactions and relationships within the network. The production and circulation of knowledge on social media involve various actors—both human (like users, content creators, moderators) and non-human (algorithms, social platform architecture)—which coalesce to determine what is recognized and disseminated as "knowledge." This results in a kind of knowledge that, while seemingly straightforward and universally acceptable, is actually the outcome of intricate and often opaque interactions and negotiations within the network. To capture how heterogeneous entities are progressively associated together and aligned to create a solid blackbox, like Latour

said (1999, p. 58), everything hinges on the question of the correspondence between the world (a phenomenon) and statements about the world (a published article about the phenomenon), we firstly need to realize that these contents, including intercultural facts that end up in videos or texts, are a blackbox. They are real, collective, and discursive performances, and they are rather achieved (not only given or transported) by the establishment of social media chains made of heterogeneous material through which they can emerge and reach their audiences. In Latour's words (2013, p. 64), they are not pure objects or subjects, nature or culture; they are the actions of speaking well to one's interlocutors about what they are doing—what they are going through, what they are, and what they care about.

Once actions are adopted by the actor-network, they become difficult to reverse. Hence, users become locked into the network and its standards. In a stable network, the shift to using mobile communications on social media is irreversible. Technology and communication standards have also become a blackbox whose contents and operation no longer need to be considered. The technology is then treated as part of everyday life, embedded in social activity, and taken for granted. Only input and output matters. The technology and the social network are sealed, regular, and stable. Social media and its technology are accepted without questioning whether it works or represents the best way to organize self-expression and communication. It is no longer exciting or new; it is just an extension of the self, part of the geographic environment embedded in the social and physical fabric (McBride, 2003, p. 272). In other words, while social media is often considered a digital and virtual space, material practice highlights the physical and embodied aspects of users' engagement with these platforms, including the power relations and the narrative of symbols.

Firstly, technologies should be examined in terms of their influence on these individual and collective processes rather than as means and ends in themselves. Although control over technology endows social media platforms with great power, technology is regarded as a tool for productivity; it is neither a

determiner nor completely neutral and value-free. Hecht and Allen (2001, p.1) begin their essay with the statement that 'we have understood for centuries that technology is an instrument of power … statements about the nature of technology were thus themselves political or cultural strategies'. Similarly, we can only gain a deeper understanding of the underlying operational principles by considering the power relations embedded within social media.

There is a hypothesis that the development of media technology leads people to believe that the advancement of social media has resulted in a more personalized and customized fashion of creating "profiles" and, thus, a more accurate depiction of one's "true self."(Bonanno, 2014, p. 3). But the fact is, technology acts as an agent for a set of practices and standards required for the actualization and implementation of specific modes of communication (including social media), and the Chinese state/government, that is, the political rules, directives, and laws that Chinese media institutions have to abide by（Cimino, 2016, p. 178).   This is primarily manifested as a form of symbolic power, which is highly intangible; symbolic power is an order of life diffused and exercised by all. It is a way of structuring reality, classifying, controlling, and disciplining knowledge (Kramsch, 2016, p. 524).

From the application of social media, we often overlook the media's capabilities (with the power behind it) in managing and exercising authority as channels and platforms. In addition to owning social media outlets, these owners have the power to structure and design the outlet the way they choose. This ultimately constrains users to specific options and a predefined format they must work with. For example, These are frameworks pre-designed by the media. As users of the medium, individuals can only selectively arrange and combine within this framework to form the display and exchange of content. Even more concealed are the restrictions of policy and ideology, such as censorship on social media. Users may be reported or banned once so-called sensitive areas are triggered and face more significant risks. These realities effectively confine knowledge within a controllable range/framework.

Of course, some social media users aspire to circumvent the censorship system so that they can communicate with each other to, for instance, facilitate public discussions, form opinions regarding social issues, or even mobilize social actions. In this content regulation mechanism, censors preferentially restrict sharing common knowledge by, for instance, removing "focal points" addressed in media content created by social media users. Since sensitive topics or keywords cannot be directly published in China, censors and social media users tend to read media texts beyond literal meaning. They are then inclined to explore "hidden meaning" in (social) media content or actively read "between the lines" (Tai, Fu, 2020, p. 18). For the censors, such cues in texts or other social media content may be seen as heuristic tricks that are more likely to persuade social media readers to think in undesirable directions, resulting in their deletion or blocking.

At the same time, precise technological presentation modes and network norms, such as the real-name system for every user, mobile number registration and log-in under real names, and the mandatory visibility of IP addresses, make surveillance more accessible and more accurate. However, this compresses personal space while expanding centralized space. In such a monitored rather than scenic modern society, the power elite is dedicated to constructing surveillance systems, placing individuals under extensive one-way, all-encompassing monitoring, where individuals cannot know from which direction the watchful eye is observing them. There is no window for voicing opinions or escaping. Under such societal power, surveillance structures are imposed within the media space, and the meta-narrative of power permeates society. Even in places where actual surveillance cannot reach, individuals may imagine a watching eye, ensuring their behavior's legality, ultimately leading them to fall into silence or obedience. From this, it can be seen that the regulatory modes of social media and the supervisory bodies behind them (censorship institutions and practices) largely determine the extent of ideological freedom permitted by the media. In China, as elsewhere, the increasing penetration of media and media technologies into the lives of individuals is reshaping the ways in which people relate to each other,

to society in general, and to the government (Sun, 2014, p. 89), as well as the reality construction.

In social media, not all content is distributed equally; allocating communicative resources under the influence of algorithms often demonstrates an apparent Matthew effect[55]. Within a social media platform, the type of content and the manner in which it is distributed are largely determined by algorithms. Controlling the distribution of information by recommendation algorithm technologies can determine whether your content is seen. The process of homogenizing individuals' thoughts and values via selective distribution is viewed as a strategic endeavor within a network of interconnected human (technical experts, policy makers and executors, users) and non-human actors (technology, social media platform, policies). By leveraging recommendation algorithm technologies, social media platforms, or any entities that control these platforms have gained the power to allocate communicative resources. Algorithmic recommendations significantly reduce the cost of users accessing information. However, control over these algorithms also means that social media platforms further strengthen their control over the rules for distributing communicative resources. Big data endows algorithms with considerable power. Indeed, for the institutions and individuals who hold control over social media, data generated from the use of digital technologies such as computers, smartphones, and social networks are thought to be the new oil since they generate significant profits for the companies that extract, store, and analyze them (Zuboff, 2019). They also gain a greater capacity for precise monitoring and manipulation of individuals, even as they further compress individual spaces.

Algorithms initially categorize content based on the blogger's activity level and content quality, allocating a certain amount of initial traffic. Bloggers with a better

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[55] The term Matthew Effect was proposed by Merton (1968) and initially used to explain why scientists who have already achieved a certain degree of eminence will likely get more credit and recognition for their work than those who are less known among the scientific community. More generally, the Matthew Effect describes a general mechanism of cumulative advantage with advantageous (relative) positions becoming a resource that produces further (relative) gains. The "Matthew effect" on social media refers to the phenomenon of unequal distribution of resources.

performance receive more initial traffic. Subsequently, through algorithmic competition, content may gain access to broader and higher-traffic distribution channels. Different platforms construct their algorithmic strategies based on their specific needs, designing recommendation rules incorporating creator rankings, content keyword vectors, and popularity. The circulation and consumption of content operate within an information environment shaped by algorithms. (Chen, Sha, 2022, p.34).

In such a process, Influencers or Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) leverage their social media "authority" to validate the knowledge they impart. This represents a potential source of power for individuals on social media, whose influence can enable them to become nationally recognized spokespersons for specific knowledge or ideologies, thus promoting these views to a broader audience and exerting influence over them. For example, content labeled "intercultural(跨文化)" created by influencers on platforms like WeChat and Douyin can impact or enhance their audience/fans' understanding of intercultural competence. For instance, a travel blogger with tens of millions of followers might share tips on respecting and immersing in different cultures during visits to various countries, incorporating diverse cultural perspectives, traditions, and values into their content to promote intercultural understanding. Some bloggers, for example, might wear traditional Chinese Hanfu at iconic international landmarks during their travels, viewing this as a way to bring Chinese beauty abroad and engage in cultural exchange. This act could draw admiration and emulation from other bloggers and audiences. Simultaneously, this also brings significant web views/publicity(流量) to the bloggers, with the snowball effect[56] of more web traffic, which means more influence and power the bloggers get. Of course, larger economic or political entities behind them driving and manipulating their actions will form a more complex network.

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[56] The snowball effect is a process that starts from an initial state of small significance and builds upon itself (an exacerbating feedback), becoming larger (graver, more serious), though it might be beneficial instead (a virtuous circle).

It can be said that producers of media content, from governments and corporations to non-profits, and colleges, have vested interests in particular social goals, often promoting or refuting particular viewpoints and values with their actions. With the government, it is propaganda persuading its audience for ideological, political or commercial purposes, which can distort the truth or selectively present facts. Especially with the development of showing short videos with vertical screens and the specialization and refinement of video content manufacturing, short videos have become an important communication channel for government agencies and other media and an important tool for political propaganda (Xing, 2021, p. 1). It's crucial to recognize that information sources always have an evident political element (Lule, 2016). As O'Neil (2016) observes it's a rigged system, a system based on surveillance and on asymmetry of information where the people who have the power have much more information about you than you have about them.

Similarly, knowledge is tailored for the receiver, creating a more myopic perspective. Social media merely keeps people within their preferred cultural networks, potentially leading to a homogenization of ideas and perspectives. Individualization separates people, and the invisibility of these bubbles prevents them from seeing their biases and the fact that they cannot find a way out if they do not choose to enter. The diminished capacity for serendipitous encounters fails to bring diverse insights and learning, thereby stifling creativity that could arise from the collision of different ideas. As Pariser (2011, p.48) satirically pointed out, a world constructed from the familiar is one in which there is nothing to learn. This should raise concerns about the potential negative effects of social media on our ability to think critically and creatively.

People live within their own echo chambers, and social media algorithms trap them in bubbles. In a social media environment dominated by echo chambers, people's capacity for change or innovation is diminished or weakened because algorithms reinforce the beliefs they are fed. This is particularly problematic as many individuals

are unaware that they are, or that algorithms have created, echo chambers that confine their growth and perspectives, thereby limiting their cultural breadth. The stories and symbols (Johnson et al.,2008) people are exposed to are determined by the content they see today, primarily through social media. Therefore, this situation does not facilitate the possibility of intercultural understanding; instead, it isolates different groups. They do not genuinely encounter "another culture". Just as Chinese social media users can only interact with other Chinese users through dedicated Chinese social media networks, people are becoming trapped within their "own culture" in an echo chamber, losing the potential to be exposed to the actual diversity that social media could bring.

Thus, informatization, digitalization, and intellectualization have increased the colonization of the lifeworld and the colonization of knowledge. It is the result of the concentration of media ownership, technological change, participation in the system (Storey, 2015), and the underlying logic is the organizational structure, power structure, and control system of culture (Johnson et al., 2008) which determine how social media is used. According to the Frankfurt School's theory, media achieve the standardization of thought and the homogenization of social consciousness by controlling communication content, constraining and standardizing media language, and modeling the transmission process. This results in people's thoughts and behaviors conforming to the ideological authority portrayed by the media, thereby achieving control (Shao, Li, 2001, p. 104).

For Foucault (1990, p. 93), power is an everyday, socialized phenomenon. It is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society, in this case, social media. Understanding social media through Foucault's notion of modern power, social media could be considered institutions whereby individuals are shaped and constrained to specific structures, ultimately limiting their ability to "freely" represent themselves. Power operates in processing information, which results in something being labeled as fact. Moreover, for something to be considered a

fact, it must be subjected to a thorough process of ratification by those in positions of authority (Mills, 2003, p. 72). This means that there are indeed power relations operating amidst the division between those who own and those who utilize social media outlets, and where there are imbalances of power relations between groups of people, there will be a production of knowledge.

Additionally, social media is embedded and utilized through the Internet and mobile media, which in China is typically controlled and established by telecommunications operators or mobile service providers (China Telecom, China Unicom, and China Mobile), with the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) responsible for regulating the media services provided online and on mobile platforms. To a certain extent, social media is a fundamental social institution and social space for/interactions (through microblogs, instant messaging, information databases, and online games) constituted by the Internet and (especially, but not only) the mobile media that make use of the Internet（Cimino, 2016, p. 199)—the social space by media for providing connectivity possibilities but also imposing limitations. By reinforcing existing culture through familiar cultural symbols, preconceived notions, and simplified stereotypes rather than liberating people towards a broader and more diverse understanding of culture, the space is becoming standardized and stifling, moreover, the mainstream uses of cyberspace, which reject diversity and difference and reflect standardized values. In the view of Lefebvre (2015, p. 30), such social spaces are not purely neutral entities; they are occupied and managed, serving as tools for the technocratic bureaucracy.

It remains an institution of "total domestication" still imbued with strong political overtones, viewing social space as the site of a powerful, large-scale disciplinary machine (Wang, 2016, p. 14). Such discipline is manifested through cultural symbols (which are considered to have great power in shaping human behavior—even if the cultural symbols themselves are proven to originate from the interests of powerful social groups) in the form of text, images, videos, etc., presented narratively, for

people on social media, symbols are materialized: landscapes, costumes, cuisine, music, martial arts, etc. They are embedded and embodied in social media videos; for example, symbols representing Chinese culture are the ones they can touch and share. The existence of these symbols is inseparable from how they are conveyed, and our participation as users in constructing them with political, ideological, economic interests, builds their power and meaning, these meanings are reinforced through narrative storytelling. That means, the symbols from which we live and communicate, the enclosure of communication in the space of flexible media and the media become the essential space of politics (Kramer, Ludes, 2010, p. 12). In other words, certain privileged or marginalized content selection, construction, and interpretation with political, economic, or ideological considerations under media censorship and state control remain significant factors in the mediated social space and social media constructs specific spaces, narratives, and discourses, shaping realities.

8.2 Culture is a Form of Spatialization of Power

In the media space, the contents presented essentially are narratives and interpretations—by focusing on one aspect of an event and presenting it to an audience, media outlets construct reality. This construction operates by making certain aspects of stories more salient than others (Carter, 2013, p.1).For instance, within this space, users selectively attempt to present their perceived cultural realities using cultural symbols in various forms. For instance, on platforms like Douyin and WeChat, users frequently share photos, videos, and text, showcasing their experiences in different locations, as well as the physical environment and cultural landscapes. This is especially true for content related to travel, where documenting journeys, adventures, and explorations highlights the spatial connections facilitated by social media. The cultural expressions here often involve transnational flows, local traditions, and customs, comparisons of values, folk performances, unique lifestyle concepts, and various linguistic interactions. In terms of presentation, it emphasizes

close-up views, creating a sense of familiarity with distant people and places; the live event coverage gives viewers a sense of participation.

Moreover, the participatory feature of social media makes storytelling an effective means to make the audience's storytelling mode dynamic (De Fina, 2016, p.481). Bloggers essentially tell stories about events that have occurred, framing these narratives within a specific context. These narratives subjectively, rather than objectively, represent reality. From this perspective, a framework represents a cultural storyline or an unfolding narrative. Through their narratives, texts, pictures, and videos on social media, they create a perception that the world is interconnected and closely linked, making intercultural competence appear more crucial. We can gain insights into the realities of different cultures in various places through social media. As Berger and Luckmann stated (1966, p. 12), the act of making videos is the act of constructing reality itself rather than a picture of reality. These representative symbols are often constructed in specific ways that highlight certain aspects of reality while downplaying or ignoring others. In other words, they conceal a complex knitting of concrete social relations and social reproduction that regulate how people make sense of social space, both physically and on social media.

At the same time, storytelling through social media enhanced the intimacy between audiences, gathered them together, and recreated a collective consciousness (Gupta-Carlson, 2016, p. 72). For example, through storytelling, Chinese culture relies on the arrangement and display of a set of familiar symbols that can articulate and convey conceptualized aspects of excellent Chinese culture, which ought to be appreciated and admired worldwide. Short videos with pictures and texts convey information and tell Chinese stories through audiovisual language symbols. Using user-generated content (UGC) and a bottom-up storytelling approach, Douyin enables users to show creative cases, share perspectives, and build social networks. All these activities can further promote within the short video platform the spectacular beauty of the country's natural landscapes, the allure of diverse cuisines, experiences

encountered during travels, etc. Such content helps to shape an exemplary and advanced Chinese culture, enhancing patriotism and national pride. For instance, the Palace Museum in Beijing uses its Douyin account to share photos and videos of historical artifacts and architectural wonders, promoting China's rich cultural heritage to its followers. This enhances the visibility of "Chinese cultural elements" and educates and engages a global audience, fostering a deeper appreciation and understanding of Chinese culture.

Then, the broad and profound nature of Chinese culture created on social media often elicits admiration, which leads to a diminished perception of differences beyond the national context. Even though mediated culture becomes culture itself, it engenders the contingencies of everyday life, such as the stark distinctions between national and foreign. This is also evident from the experiences shared by students interviewed, who observed that their peers from different parts of China differ from them not in cultural terms but in terms of lifestyle habits. In contrast, the differences between them and international students are primarily cultural. This observation underscores how social media and cultural narratives might emphasize national unity and cultural continuity, which in turn may overshadow regional variations within the country and highlight the more pronounced cultural distinctions between domestic and international contexts. It constructs a sense of national identity, making intercultural exchange somewhat equivalent to transnationalism. Their content is expressed beneficially and positively to encourage the practice of intercultural competence and contributes to "telling China's story well." Thus, intercultural competence has become even more important to them, as only with these skills can they better convey the stories of China and show the greatness of Chinese culture to those outside China.

In this way, people strongly believe they share the same cultural practices and values as other members of their community, as Anderson (2016) explains, nations are socially imagined communities in which members envision themselves as having similar interests, identities, and cultural practices despite not being immediately

tangible and accessible. Social media provides users with such a space to imagine, and the more they consume such content, the stronger their sense of identification with cultural symbols represented by China's splendid landscapes, Confucian culture, calligraphy, cuisine, etc. They take pride in what is termed as Chinese culture and develop a strong desire to promote this culture internationally, such as showcasing the beauty of China to the world, like the Northeast Big Flowe（东北大花）and Hanfu（汉服）.

To some extent, Social Media translates and frames knowledge about intercultural competence in ways that make it accessible, understandable, and relatable to different audiences. Media construct narratives and discourses about intercultural competence that resonate with Chinese audiences' cultural values, norms, and expectations through storytelling, visual imagery, narrative framing, and cultural representations. These translations and framings shape how intercultural competence is conceptualized, perceived, and practiced in Chinese society. Its representations of the social world, images, descriptions, explanations frame understanding how the world is, why it works as it is said and shown to work (Hall, 1981, p. 35). The content displayed on these social media platforms supports China's policy orientation towards intercultural competence in traditional education. It actively constructs reality through language, symbols, rituals, and social institutions. This construction shapes social interactions, organizational structures, and collective identities, creating a shared understanding of reality within cultural groups. Cultural narratives, myths, and symbols convey collective meanings and shape perceptions of reality in the construction of culture. Simultaneously, individually or collectively, they embody common national sentiments, thus advancing toward a nation. In this way, culture becomes not only the product of media content, the sign communicated, but also of the modalities through which the content is produced and expressed. Social Media's representational spaces indicate that culture is a form of spatialization of power, materially and cognitively (Cimino, 2016, p. 126).

In the material practices of social media, a large number of actors and agents who utilize media representations to express themselves leverage their power (including the power of the media) to create culture/knowledge to solidify the durability of network power relations. Cultural symbols and narratives on social media depictions are not merely intermediaries among the participating social entities, such as the state or government and the social media users, but also vehicles for conveying meanings and ideologies that significantly affect, influence, and shape the perceptions and behaviors of people within Chinese society. Indeed, social media emerges as an omnipresent symbolic environment that constitutes an essential part of the societal definitions of reality (Schulz, 2004, p. 93).

9. Conclusion

Social media act as mediators in constructing and stabilizing knowledge networks. Media technologies are not merely passive tools but are active participants in shaping our understanding of the world. For example, social media platforms, algorithms, smartphones, and other technological devices are participants that regulate our interaction with knowledge and shape our perceptions of reality. I also try to explain the interaction and interdependence of social media with Chinese government and other institutions materializing through the process by way of the media frame and shaping the means (technological/ideological) through which the knowledge for intercultural competence is created and communicated. Moreover, I discuss how the production and dissemination of knowledge through material practices on social media remain a product of power relations. Social media is integral to constructing this knowledge network and shaping and organizing people's perceptions of reality at the individual and collective levels. At the same time, reality is reconstructed through our senses and narratives. Culture, in a mediatized age, exists as a form of power space in both material and cognitive terms within this network construction. As an active participant, I believe that social media is a part of the entire network, to a large extent, presenting the primary forms and contents of culture.

After Three Case Studies and Conclusion

I have investigated the integration and utilization of intercultural competence within educational curricula within Chinese higher education institutions. This investigation is comprised of three different case studies examining various facets: leadership within the collegiate environment, teaching practices within the classroom setting, and the utilization of social media platforms beyond formal instructional contexts. The primary aim underpinning this research endeavor is to offer a new perspective for re-examining intercultural competence through actor-network theory.

Actor-network theory (ANT), developed by scholars such as Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law, provides a comprehensive framework for examining the dynamic networks involved in intercultural competence. Unlike traditional sociological approaches, which often emphasize static social structures or cultural norms and overlook material practices, ANT focuses on how a technology, artifact, or material object participates in construction (Grant, 2009, p. 29).

ANT conceptualizes the construction of intercultural competence as a dynamic network of interactions involving both human and non-human actors (or actants). It views this construction as an effect produced by a network of heterogeneous, interacting materials. This perspective emphasizes that intercultural competence is not merely an individual achievement but rather a collective effort shaped by the actions and interactions of diverse participants and networks. In other words, intercultural competence is a collective endeavor, and the collective is not a homogeneous entity. On the contrary, it comprises various elements that form networks. It includes individuals and groups, various entities such as states, parties, governments, educational institutions, media, and other actors such as policies, language exchange programs, communication technologies, etc.

During the process, ANT also helps to see culture as emergent from the interactions in

the network rather than stemming from a single source. If following ANT, culture is not predetermined but constructed through the connections and associations within a network. It is also an ongoing negotiation, translation, and alignment of interests among different actors rather than a static object. In such a network, as Law (2009,p.146) mentioned, there are material, semiotic relationality (it's a network whose elements define and shape one another), heterogeneity (there are different kinds of actors, human and otherwise), and materiality (stuff is there aplenty, not just "the social"). There is an insistence on the process and its precariousness (all elements need to play their part moment by moment, or it all comes unstuck). There is attention to power as an effect (it is a function of network configuration and, in particular, the creation of immutable mobiles), to space and to scale (how it is that networks extend themselves and translate distant actors).

Thus, my research did not attempt to offer a new definition of intercultural competence. Instead, I aimed to trace the process of its production and usage at Chinese universities, essentially studying how this network operates: how it holds together and shapes its components. My investigation comprehensively tracked how the network is constructed through actor-network, translation, and performativity, thereby creating an intercultural reality equivalent to transnationalism by using "Chinese culture" as a communication symbol (it defines culture through the process of ignoring local differences, especially but not limited to distinguishing China from the rest of the world). The constructed intercultural reality promotes the belief that intercultural competence is a crucial skill, transforming it into a personal responsibility that encompasses linguistic, emotional, and attitudinal aspects and further tries to present it as a neutral concept.

Simultaneously, the network has facilitated the formalization and standardization of intercultural competence at Chinese universities. A series of policies related to intercultural education and the development of intercultural skills have been implemented through standardized tests and competitions. This approach increases the

uniformity of learning and content across the nation. People are immersed in a standardized set of knowledge and cultural rituals, which serve to standardize cultural perceptions and interactions across diverse populations.

In this process, symbolic forms (abstract signifiers) and narratives (stories that define and give meaning to the symbolic) are the conceptual aspects of cultural ritual. Within cultural rituals, we can identify the enactment of spatial form and the materiality of culture, shifting our understanding of material practice from a focus on form to process. At the same time, it emphasizes the actor—or actant—is "created" by connections in the process, each regarded as an agent entity that forms part of an extensive network (Cerulo, 2009, p. 533). These actors are considered a 'string of actions where each participant (human and non-human, subject and object) is treated as a full-blown mediator' (Latour, 2005, p. 128). The networks of connections must be actively performed; neither actors nor networks merely 'exist.' It is the performances in, by, and through relations that render networks durable and fixed (Law, 1999, p. 8). In other words, it is a relational effect. Thus, agency, as Latour (1996, p. 374) argues, is simultaneously natural, social, and material, semiotic; we must explore how these come together rather than distinguish between them.

Following the relations within the network, I explained national/governmental/ political bodies, educational instruments, school leaders, teachers, students, and other vital roles, along with China's social media system (social media platforms, users, technology, etc.). Together, these elements assemble and enact a set of practices that shape a reality characterized by its performative, multiple, and partially connected nature within the realm of material semiotics. This process narrates creating a heterogeneous reality that embodies a specific set of knowledge about intercultural competence (Callon, 1998a, 2007).

Firstly, I delineated the process of translation—comprising problematization, interessement, enrolment, and mobilization—pertaining to educational leadership. I

expounded on leadership within Chinese universities as a nuanced power structure intricately constructed by various forces, including actors, mediators, and intermediaries. This examination illuminated how the network establishes and maps intercultural competence. Furthermore, it underscored that knowledge of intercultural competence is a product of power dynamics; it emerges from a network composed of heterogeneous elements, reflecting the social outcomes of various power relationships. These relationships constitute a complex interplay of authority and influence, manifested in a dynamic translation process imbued with notions of obedience and authority. It is evident that realities are not immutable but are shaped, enacted, and contested within this intricate web of interactions.

At the same time, by tracing the teaching practice, I can elucidate how the knowledge of intercultural competence becomes black-boxed. It is highlighted that this knowledge is not simply bequeathed or given but is instead constructed through reflective, dialogical practice by actors as a series of actions within a network becomes enacted into being. Knowledge, such as utilizing national boundaries to demarcate cultural distinctions or interpreting culture through symbolic representations like calligraphy, cuisine, and clothing, may initially appear as fairly closed boxes, ostensibly possessing clear boundaries and functioning in expected ways. However, upon closer examination, one may discern a myriad of undefined and indescribable entities, participants, and relationships that actually constitute these forms of knowledge. As Armand (2002) pointed out, symbols serve as a means of social control, with the definition of politics originating from language and culture. In the current international landscape, all ideas and meanings are mediated, symbolized, and swiftly disseminated worldwide through informatization.

Thus, I also explained how social media act as mediators in constructing and stabilizing knowledge networks. Social media platforms, algorithms, smartphones, and other technological devices are participants that regulate our interaction with knowledge and shape our perceptions of reality; in the process, the interaction and

interdependence of social media with Chinese government and other institutions materializing through the process by way of the media frame and shaping the means (technological/ideological) through which the knowledge for intercultural competence is created and communicated. In a mediatized age, culture exists as a form of power space in both material and cognitive terms within this network construction.

I expounded on how social media act as mediators in constructing and stabilizing knowledge networks. Social media platforms, algorithms, smartphones, and other technological devices are active participants that regulate our interaction with knowledge and shape our perceptions of reality. Throughout this process, the interaction and interdependence of social media with other actors become materialized via the media frame, thereby shaping the means, both technological and ideological, through which knowledge about intercultural competence is created and communicated. In the mediatized age, culture exists as a form of power space in both material and cognitive terms within this network construction.

It further means that ANT shifted from our concerns about "principles of power" to "practices of power", given that actor networks are inherently contingent (Grint, 1991,p.150). This shift emphasizes the dialogue between theory and practice, highlighting not only how power is conceived and defined theoretically but, more importantly, observing and analyzing how power operates and is enacted in actual social actions. ANT research not only concentrates on describing how power is communicated and transmitted among diverse actors through symbols and language, incorporating both human and non-human entities such as technology, objects, and other non-human elements, but also offers a deeper comprehension of how these power relations are established, maintained, challenged, or altered in practical operation. This necessitates moving beyond theoretical discussions of power and delving into specific social practices, such as policy implementation, technological application, and organizational behavior, to observe how power is effectively exercised within these domains.

Just as in my case study on intercultural competence, it is imperative not only to analyze the theoretical significance of intercultural competence but also to observe how it is produced, promoted, and applied across various levels of education, policy, technology, and social spheres. Additionally, it is crucial to examine how power is distributed and executed within these processes. In this regard, ANT offers a more prosperous and more dynamic analysis by not only revealing the existence and mechanisms of power structures but also demonstrating how power is accepted, challenged, or reconfigured by different actors in everyday practices. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the intricate ways in which intercultural competence functions within and influences broader societal structures.

In short, through the three case studies, it becomes evident that ANT delves into the enactment of realities, as well as the creation of knowledge; it illustrates that knowledge and realities are co-constituted, existing in tandem and being enacted together; this is not to say that they are not real, rather, they may indeed be made real through these practices. ANT underscores that knowledge and reality are constructed through the interplay of numerous actors, encompassing both human and non-human entities. It emphasizes that knowledge and reality emerge from the interactions among these actors, highlighting the dynamic and relational nature of their construction.

Thus, it also indicates intercultural competence is the result of interactive negotiation among various actors. To understand intercultural competence, we need to trace how the webs of heterogeneous material and social practices produce them. It is these that are performative that generate realities. Furthermore, the construction of knowledge and realities is deeply intertwined with the performative image of culture. Cultural norms, values, and identities are not fixed entities but are constantly negotiated and redefined through social interactions and material practices. These interactions form intricate webs of meaning that shape our understanding of the world and our place within it. Therefore, to comprehend intercultural competence, we must not only acknowledge the performative image of culture but also delve into the processes by

which these heterogeneous materials and social practices come together to produce and reproduce cultural realities.

ANT's contribution is to direct attention toward studying how reality comes into being. By exploring the translation process of educational leadership mapping intercultural competence, opening up the "black box" of knowledge, and investigating the material practices outside of the classroom (such as those involving social media) rather than assuming that realities pre-exist. ANT enables a re-examination of the concept of intercultural competence. I can see that "knowledge" about intercultural competence and the "intercultural reality" are not natural, neutral, or objective; instead, they constitute a network of collectives, realities, and narrative accounts representing a political project. ANT's insistence on relationality applies to ANT itself, and ANT can thus be seen as continually "becoming with" (Haraway, 2008, p. 4). My research and I can indeed be understood as participating in the process of becoming this partially connected version of reality.

Apart from this, a crucial aspect that cannot be overlooked is its political side. In the process of exploring the construction of intercultural competence in China, ANT challenges traditional intercultural understanding and turns to questions of politics. This highlights the importance of considering material participation, power dynamics, institutional influences, and societal contexts in shaping perceptions and practices related to intercultural competence. For example, as Latour (1988c, p. 25) explained, technology (including media technology) is called on as political allies, just as humans are. Traditionally, we tend to perceive technology as apolitical, leading to the mistaken belief that the power of technology is synonymous with human power. However, in reality, technology plays a significant role in the political ordering of the world, serving as sophisticated allies in recruiting and maintaining other allies in place. Latour also views the development of science as an ongoing political struggle akin to a "war" within laboratory settings involving various participants engaged in continuous conflict. One of the key ontological elements of ANT emphasized by

Bruno Latour (1987; 1988) is politics. Similarly, Mol (1999, p. 81) regards the construction of reality as a political struggle, asserting that since reality is not fixed but multiple, and realities are not static, different realities coexist and unfold simultaneously. These performances and realities are inherently political because they construct specific realities, such as intercultural realities under consideration.

Chinese higher education, particularly universities, represents an intricate amalgamation of various elements, including political influence from the state, government, and party, financial instruments, educational leaders, teachers, students, and the broader Chinese social media system encompassing platforms, users, and technology. It operates as a system wherein individual elements, whether people or objects are subordinated to the logic of its architecture, often created or reshaped within that system (Hughes, 1983). In essence, it functions as a system of purification that depends on a heterogeneous web of relations, which are subsequently effaced. Within this purification process, the alignment between government, official media, and academics not only shapes the material realities of the educational system but also engenders a distinctly Chinese form of "intercultural discourse." This discourse serves to reinforce and legitimize these realities, permeating various channels such as classroom practice, official publications, academic research, and online platforms, thereby influencing both the operation of the system and its perception by different stakeholders within society. In contemporary China's strategic narratives, the government, official media, and academics form a discursive alliance (Zhang, Orbie, 2021, p. 20), each playing distinct roles in constructing strategic narratives. Through this process, the system not only reinforces specific ideologies and values but also ensures their acceptance and internalization by individuals and institutions within the educational landscape. This dialectical relationship between material reality and discursive construction underscores the nuanced interplay between power, ideology, and knowledge production within the Chinese higher education system. In the process, we not only observe educational practices as reality but also track how the collective performs. They engage in translation, mediation, and extension of networks; they

trace and build actor networks. The collective embodies a set of relations, memories, and preferences. Their discourses are manifested in performances, materials, and spatial arrangements, both corporeal and otherwise. When together, they generate effects that contribute to the shaping of the educational landscape.

As demonstrated by the three cases, it has been observed that intercultural competence in Chinese intercultural discourse is inherently political. Even intercultural competence is shaped to typically involve the specification of the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultural differences based on particular knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deardorff, 2006; Byram, 1997), and a person who is considered to be interculturally competent is expected to draw on this collection of attributes to manage interaction among culturally distinct individuals by alternating between different perspectives and being conscious of their evaluations of differences (Byram et al., 2001, p. 5). This seemingly neutral way to assigning responsibility to individuals merely obscures the operations of the entire power dynamic interactions. In this discourse, "Chinese culture" has always been an essential part of the content in cultivating intercultural competence in China. It is not only regarded as an integral part of the cultural identity of the Chinese people but also encompasses values that rulers can promote or embody to facilitate their continued leadership and governance, such as personal morality, responsibility to society and country, and social harmony and stability. Among these, the most commonly used method is teaching how to use cultural symbols in communication to enhance the national image. The application of cultural symbols is one of the effective tools in this construction process. Due to the metaphorical and metonymic nature of symbol encoding, as well as the expansion and value-added nature of meaning, in order for the information transmitted by cultural symbols in the construction of the national image to achieve meaning sharing, it is necessary to make the signifier and signified of a symbol. The relationship between the symbols and their meanings can be recognized by others, allowing the symbol's meaning to become shared knowledge between the country and others. In this way, the practical construction of the national

image by cultural symbols has practical significance.

Hence, a fundamental aspect of fostering intercultural competence in China entails nurturing cultural identity and the ability to promote cultural symbols. This involves borrowing imported words and adopting a friendly and inclusive demeanor to showcase the allure of one's own culture. Various cultural symbols serve as ambassadors of China's image. The Chinese culture has become a symbolic system composed of Chinese characters, Kung Fu, Peking Opera, Confucius, calligraphy, the Great Wall, traditional Chinese medicine, the Forbidden City, Terra-cotta Warriors and Horses, Kung Fu, pandas, tea, Chinese food, Peking Opera, and porcelain, etc. Additionally, establishing or hosting major world, international, or regional events, producing essential industrial products with global market appeal, and exporting cultural and artistic products such as literary works, dances, songs, paintings, and movies contribute to enhancing China's global presence (Liang, 2014, p. 110).

Besides, intercultural competence in China has also transformed from explaining China to the world to telling Chinese stories well and spreading China's voice well. It requires China's intercultural communication research and practice to take a community with a shared future for humankind as the core. The starting point of epistemology is to tell China's historical story, development story, governance story, civilization story, and world story while focusing on constructing new concepts, new categories, and new expressions and understanding the Chinese story from the perspectives of local and global.

In China's intercultural discourse, country and culture are always closely linked, and China's cultural identity is first and foremost national identity. The evolution of China's narrative model, coupled with the integration of national policies and initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Construction of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind, Telling Chinese Stories Well, and Enhancing Cultural Confidence, underscores the cultivation of intercultural competence as an integral part

of government policy. Chinese culture, to a significant extent, serves as a national symbol. Leveraging China's rich cultural resources to launch cultural symbols with universal cognitive value and garner psychological resonance from both domestic and international audiences is crucial for asserting China's voice on the global stage. Therefore, promoting the "going-out" strategy of Chinese culture and enhancing China's national image hold significant practical significance. Constructing cultural identity and shaping the national image have emerged as one of China's most critical political imperatives.

It can be contended that the education of intercultural competence constitutes an integral component of China's domestic and international strategic framework. Domestically, it serves as a vital element of patriotic education and national identity cultivation. The dissemination and utilization of intercultural competence concepts and knowledge primarily support China's path to modernization and its integration into the globalized world. This initiative aims to cultivate an education system that embraces modern principles, thereby positioning China as a modern nation. Furthermore, it serves as a strategic endeavor to foster a cohesive national identity internally while also competing for influence on the international stage. Actively shaping China's international image and effectively narrating "the China story" are integral parts of a broader nationalist movement aimed at fostering goodwill and understanding toward China worldwide.

In the construction of intercultural competence, there is an attempt to shape culture from a neutral standpoint, aiming to socialize individuals' needs and values so that they align with the desires and actions desired by those in positions of power. This form of power operates without overt conflict of interests, opposition, or resistance, not because these elements have been eliminated from the equation as in cases of non-decision-making power but because individuals subjected to this power may no longer perceive any conflicts of interest within the power dynamic. Consequently, this type of power can be wielded without coercion or reward and without engendering

perceived manipulation or conflict of interest (Ng, Deng, 2017).Anderson (2016) argued the nation is an imagined community, and a culture based on a collective consciousness is the core of national identity construction. Specifically, the identity of a nation is constructed based on a national narrative composed of the collective memory, national symbols, and historical events of a specific nation. It is a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenes, historical events, national Symbols, and rituals that represent the shared experiences, sorrows, triumphs, and disasters that give the nation meaning.

Therefore, culture is strategically packaged as a means of producing and reproducing the country's legitimacy, deployed by the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) as a crucial field alongside economic development. Following its entry into the World Trade Organization, the CPC initiated a process of cultural system reform. This is mainly because China's national identity, officially propagated in 2012 as the "Chinese Dream" has been pragmatically framed using traditional Chinese culture to bolster the CPC's legitimacy and sustain its leadership. By re-positioning and patronizing Chinese culture, the CPC aims to construct an expanded national identity while consolidating political dominance and maintaining legitimacy (Xu, 2018, p.621).

Culture is considered an essential ideological component of national memory (Ho, 2013, p. 680). It contributes to nurturing national identity and enables individuals to locate and contextualize their personal experiences (Anderson, 2016; Githens-Mazer, 2006). It is an unseen but powerful force that holds everyone captive and wants us to imagine ourselves (our cultural group) as a homogeneous identity. ANT tells us that "culture" should not be regarded as a state of nature; it suggests that it will take different forms in different places (Callon, 1998b), and it is not real until it is enacted into being.

Indeed, when we discuss intercultural competence, we always use a series of static

and fixed cultural symbols to try to explain "跨(inter-; trans-; cross-)," but in fact, we ignore the position of culture as the subject of this concept. The explanation of culture is missing. In the concept of intercultural（跨文化）, culture is regarded as static, fixed, and used as a tool to explain other things rather than the object itself that should be explained. In the process of exploring this network construction, I found that culture is regarded as static, symbolic, and representational. By limiting culture to simple symbols-----calligraphy, food, clothes, etc., and avoiding a deeper discussion of culture. When discussing intercultural competence, we often rely on a series of static and fixed cultural symbols to explain the concept of "跨" (inter-, trans-, cross-). However, this approach overlooks the dynamic nature of culture as the central subject of this concept. The current discourse on intercultural（跨文化）tends to treat culture as a static, fixed entity used merely as a tool to explain other phenomena rather than as an evolving object worthy of deep exploration and understanding. In examining this network construction, I found that culture is often reduced to simple symbols such as calligraphy, food, and clothing, which restricts culture from being representational rather than recognizing its fluid and dynamic nature. As Swidler (1986, p. 273) stated, the approach of understanding culture as "symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, artistic forms, and ceremonies" views culture as a "toolkit" people use to address issues. A further issue is that constructions of interculturality are frequently predicated upon solid approaches to culture (Dervin, 2016), in which cultures are seen as stand-alone entities that influence how individuals think and behave. This can easily lead to pigeonholing individuals into static identities related to national cultures or other racialized identity markers (Kim, 2007; Tian, Lowe, 2014). In intercultural competence training, many methods focus on narrowly learning about culture as a static, self-sufficient entity, making it possible to essentialize and stereotype cultural belonging. As Blasco (2012, p. 478) puts it, "this paradoxically reproduces an ethnocentric way of perceiving self as perspicacious, self-transcendable, and able to expose the features of a fixed and knowable other." From the perspective of ANT, it overestimates symbolism and assumes backgrounds and structures that, in reality, do not exist. ANT posits that culture loses any a priori, essential, or primary

explanatory status or power. Instead, culture is not understood as a distinct part of reality; it continuously manifests within heterogeneous practices of material and discourse. In this light, culture is seen as emergent from the interactions and relationships among various human and non-human actors rather than being a static backdrop or a fixed set of symbols. ANT encourages us to examine how cultural elements are enacted and materialized through networks of practices, thereby offering a more dynamic and fluid understanding of culture that transcends traditional symbolic interpretations.

Thus, we should not only regard culture as human practices but also view these practices as enactments of socio-material realities. Secondly, the performative characteristics of reality create a novel understanding of the performative role of culture/knowledge and other significant elements within specific practices. While ANT is not the only approach stressing the significance of semiotics, technology, and materiality for cultural practices today, it is its job to keep reminding us that we often consider technology, semiotics, materiality as being outside of the culture, and thereby behave as if the distinctions that ANT has argued against actually existed. Since ANT does not privilege humans over non-human actors, it requires a methodological openness to follow the actors wherever they may lead, which might involve crossing traditional boundaries between social science and natural science or between cultural and material analysis. This approach emphasizes the coproduction of cultural products/materials, producers, and audiences. ANT seeks to expose the intimate relations between humans and materials, actors and actants, and networks. In this method, technology, artifacts, and material objects are allowed to speak in their own voice as much as possible, describing their own array of alliances, struggles, and victories.

Bruno Latour (1993, p. 104) most clearly highlights ANT's position toward and its analytical consequences for the study of culture. Drawing upon contemporary anthropological theory, Latour sets out to open the two separate blackboxes of nature

and culture, which underlie the constitution of modernity: "The very notion of culture is an artifact created by bracketing nature off. Cultures – different or universal – do not exist, any more than Nature does. There are only nature-cultures". In sum, ANT's argument characterizes culture as neither contextual nor symbolic, neither explanatory nor autonomous. It is the participation of humans and non-humans. We enter the cultural world through the network interaction between cultural symbols and cultural materials; that is to say, culture (the whole and the parts) is defined by the practices of actors.

Culture, explaining ANT's attention to the mechanics of material, and semiotics by emphasizing how society, organizations, agents, and technology are all effects generated in patterned networks of diverse materials (not simply human). Since networks are ordered with materials and strategies, patterns generating effects of power and hierarchy in institutions and organizations (Law, 1992, p. 381). According to ANT, culture is nothing other than patterned networks of heterogeneous materials composed of people, machines, animals, texts, architecture, symbolic materials, and more. Therefore, the task of explaining culture is to characterize these networks in their heterogeneity and explore how they come to be patterned to generate effects such as organizations, inequality, and power. Our narrative of culture, in fact, is a depiction of the process of network construction. Rather than the singularity of narrative language as fractional knowing, it expressed as multiple story tellings makes rhizomatic networks—elaborations and interactions that hold together fractionally, like a tissue of fibers (Law, 2002, p. 5). Therefore, in analyses of culture, it is necessary to consider how 'culture' is created as different through actors that classify knowledge and practices. Yet the construction of culture is socially meaningful and socially acted, and human and non-human actors participate in different ways in such cultural assemblages. It is these dynamic processes that we should focus on.

For my research, this is a version of a narrative of the ways I have encountered

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and how I translate those encounters to explain culture. By applying ANT to see culture, we can gain a nuanced understanding of how cultures function as networks of varied and interconnected elements, where human and non-human actors continuously shape and are shaped by the network's dynamics. This approach helps illuminate how cultural practices emerge, stabilize, and evolve over time. By tracing these interactions and their impacts, ANT helps uncover the complex, interconnected nature of cultural phenomena, highlighting how every actor, human or not, contributes to the broader cultural narrative. This approach reveals the complexity and the continual making and remaking of culture through a wide array of interactions and negotiations. Law (1992, p.389) said, social structure is better treated as a verb than as a noun, perhaps the same applies to the various networkings of culture, and this is the starting point for us to re-think intercultural competence.

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Appendix 1

List of Interview Questions for Discussion (College Layer):

Part 1:

1.您是在哪所学校院系任教？At which school and department do you teach?

2.您从事相关工作多久了？How long have you been working in this field?

3.您的专业背景是什么？What is your professional background?

4.您有过出国经历吗？如果有请举例说明。Have you ever been abroad? Please provide examples if you have been to abroad.

A. 有 Yes

B. 没有 No

5.您会说外语吗？如果会，您会说哪门外语？Can you speak any foreign languages? If so, which languages can you speak?

6.您是否有过跨文化的经历？您是如何理解它的？Have you had any intercultural experiences? How do you understand it?

Part 2:

1.您如何理解跨文化和跨文化能力？您理解的依据是什么？How do you understand intercultural and intercultural competence? What is the basis of your understanding?

2.您认为目前国内主要的跨文化能力是从哪个方面来诠释的？（如果都有，请选择程度，从低到高 1 到 10 分）From which aspect do you think intercultural competence is mainly interpreted in China? (If all aspects apply, please rate them from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest.)

A. 个体方面 Individual aspect

B. 群体方面 Group aspect

C. 其它（请解释其它是指什么） Others (please explain what you mean by "others")

为什么？Why?

3.您认为文化多样性应该在跨文化的概念中讨论吗？为什么？Do you think cultural diversity should be discussed within the concept of intercultural? Why?

4.您从哪些方面来区分文化多样性？

A. 民族 Ethnicity

B. 国家 Country

C. 种族 Race

D. 宗教 Religion

E. 语言 Language

F. 其它（请解释其它是指什么） Others (please explain what you mean by "others")

为什么？Why?

5.您认为身份认同应该在跨文化的概念中讨论吗？为什么？Do you think identity should be discussed within the concept of intercultural? Why?

6.您认为推广跨文化课程的主要原因或背景是什么？

A. 全球化加强了国家或文化之间的联系 Globalization has strengthened the connections between countries or cultures

B. 有跨文化课程的学院将更加国际化 Colleges with intercultural courses will become more international

C. 联合国科教文组织的支持 Support from UNESCO

D. 其它（请解释其它是指什么） Others (please explain what you mean by "others")

7.您如何理解全球化和跨文化的关系？How do you understand the relationship between globalization and intercultural?

8.您认为跨文化能力是否有一个权威的定义？如果有，是什么？它来自哪里？Do you think there is an authoritative definition of intercultural competence? If so, what is it? Where does it come from?

9.您认为跨文化怎样才算是成功的？怎么才叫具备跨文化能力？How do you define a successful intercultural experience? What does it mean to possess intercultural competence?

Part 3:

1. 您认为目前国内的教育政策里对跨文化相关的教育发展重视吗？Do you think current education policies in China emphasize the development of intercultural education?

A. 重视 Yes

B. 不重视 No

Why?

2. 中国目前的教育政策里有没有明确规定什么是跨文化能力？同时，有没有相关的跨文化能力发展的政策指导？Are there clear definitions of intercultural competence in current Chinese education policies? Are there any policy guidelines for the development of intercultural competence?

3. 中国和国外的与跨文化相关的教育政策有没有区别，主要区别是什么？Are there any differences between Chinese and foreign education policies regarding intercultural issues? What are the main differences?

4. 贵学院的跨文化课程是设置在哪个专业？为什么？In which major are intercultural courses offered at your college? Why?

5. 贵学院还提供哪些和跨文化相关的课程？What other intercultural related courses does your college offer?

6.与贵学院该专业目前提供的其它课程相比，跨文化课程的重要性如何？Compared to other courses offered in your major, how important are intercultural courses?

A. 极为重要 Extremely important

B. 非常重要 Very important

C. 一般重要 Moderately important

D. 不重要 Not important

体现在哪些地方？为什么？In what ways? Why?

7.贵学院跨文化课程使用的教材由谁指定的？Who designates the textbooks used in intercultural courses at your college?

A. 国家教育部 Ministry of Education

B. 当地教育局 Local Education Bureau

C. 大学/大学校长 University/University President

D. 学院/学院院长或系主任 College/College Dean or Department Head

E. 任课教师 Course Instructor

为什么？Why?

8.跨文化能力课程的教材和材料主要源自哪里？为什么？Where do the textbooks and materials for intercultural competence courses mainly come from? Why?

9.学院目前所使用的跨文化相关定义和评估跨文化能力的理论主要来自哪里？为什么？Where do the definitions and theories used to assess intercultural competence at your college primarily come from? Why?

Part 4:

1.您认为跨文化课程的老师需要具备什么样的条件？What qualifications do you think intercultural course teachers should have?

A. 是做跨文化研究的 Conduct research in intercultural

B. 外语专业毕业 Graduate from a foreign language major

C. 去国外学习或工作过 Have studied or worked abroad

D. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）Others (please explain what you mean by "others")

2.贵院以何种具体方式拓展学生的跨文化能力？In what specific ways does your college expand students' intercultural competence?

A. 上课 Classes

B. 讲座 Lectures

C. 活动 Activities

D. 交换项目 Exchange programs

E. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）Others (please explain what you mean by "others")

3.贵院以何种具体方式拓展教师的跨文化能力？In what specific ways does your college expand teachers' intercultural competence?

A. 教学实践 Teaching practice

B. 培训项目 Training programs

C. 交换项目 Exchange programs

D. 理论学习 Theoretical study

E. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）Others (please explain what you mean by "others")

4.贵学院目前是否评估/衡量学生的跨文化能力？如果是，评估的方法是什么？Does your college currently assess students' intercultural competence? If so, what are

the assessment methods?

5.贵学院目前是否评估/衡量教师的跨文化能力？如果是，评估的方法是什么？
Does your college currently assess teachers' intercultural competence? If so, what are the assessment methods?

Part 5:

1.自引入跨文化相关课程以来，贵学院是否取得了显著的成果？ Since the introduction of intercultural courses, has your college achieved significant results?

A. 没有成就 No achievements

B. 小有成就 Minor achievements

C. 有一些成就 Some achievements

D. 及其重要的成就 Significant achievements

它们是什么？ What are they?

2.您认为学院的跨文化课程或跨文化能力的培养是否存在问题？如果有，主要是什么问题？ Do you think there are any issues with the intercultural courses or the cultivation of intercultural competence at your college? If so, what are the main issues?

A. 课程设置 (Course design)

B. 课程教学 (Course teaching)

C. 教学材料 (Teaching materials)

D. 教师 (Teachers)

E. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）(Others - please explain what you mean by "others")

3. 您认为跨文化课程要达成什么样的目标？ What goals do you think intercultural courses should achieve?

4.您认为跨文化能力应该朝哪个方向发展？（比如：发展前景、工作重点和方向、教学方面等） In which direction do you think intercultural competence should develop? (e.g., development prospects, key areas of focus, teaching aspects, etc.)

Appendix 2

List of Interview Questions for Discussion (Teacher Layer):

Part 1:

1.您是在哪所学校院系任教？At which school and department do you teach?

2.您从事相关工作多久了？您教授跨文化课程有多久？

How long have you been working in this field? How long have you been teaching intercultural courses?

3.您的专业背景是什么？

What is your professional background?

4.您有过出国经历吗？如果有请举例说明。Have you ever been abroad? Please provide examples if you have been to abroad.

A. 有 Yes

B. 没有 No

5.您会说外语吗？如果会，您会说哪门外语？

Can you speak any foreign languages? If so, which languages can you speak?

6.您是否有过跨文化的经历？您是如何理解它的？

Have you had any intercultural experiences? How do you understand them?

Part 2:

1.您如何理解跨文化和跨文化能力？您理解的依据是什么？How do you understand intercultural and intercultural competence? What is the basis of your understanding?

2.您认为目前国内主要的跨文化能力是从哪个方面来诠释的？（如果都有，请选择程度，从低到高 1 到 10 分）From which aspect do you think intercultural competence is mainly interpreted in China? (If all aspects apply, please rate them from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest.)

A. 个体方面 Individual aspect

B. 群体方面 Group aspect

C. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）Others (please explain what you mean by "others")

为什么？Why?

3.您认为文化多样性应该在跨文化的概念中讨论吗？为什么？Do you think cultural diversity should be discussed within the concept of intercultural? Why?

4.您从哪些方面来区分文化多样性？From which aspects do you distinguish cultural diversity?

A. 民族 Ethnicity

B. 国家 Country

C. 种族 Race

D. 宗教 Religion

E. 语言 Language

F. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）Others (please explain what you mean by "others")
为什么？Why?

5.您认为身份认同应该在跨文化的概念中讨论吗？为什么？Do you think identity should be discussed within the concept of intercultural? Why?

6.您认为推广跨文化课程的主要原因或背景是什么？What do you think are the main reasons or background for promoting intercultural courses?

A. 全球化加强了国家或文化之间的联系 Globalization has strengthened the connections between countries or cultures

B. 有跨文化课程的学院将更加国际化 Colleges with intercultural courses will become more international

C. 联合国科教文组织的支持 Support from UNESCO

D. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）Others (please explain what you mean by "others")

7.您如何理解全球化和跨文化的关系？

How do you understand the relationship between globalization and intercultural?

8.您认为跨文化能力是否有一个权威的定义？如果有，是什么？它来自哪里？

Do you think there is an authoritative definition of intercultural competence? If so, what is it? Where does it come from?

9.您认为跨文化怎样才算是成功的？怎么才叫具备跨文化能力？

How do you define a successful intercultural experience? What does it mean to possess intercultural competence?

Part 3:

1.您教授的课程名称是什么？

What is the name of the course you teach?

2.与贵校该专业目前提供的其他课程相比，跨文化课程被重视的程度如何？

Compared to other courses offered in your major, how important is the intercultural course?

A. 极为重视 Extremely important

B. 非常重视 Very important

C. 一般重视 Moderately important

D. 不被重视 Not important

为什么？Why?

3.在您的课堂上介绍跨文化和跨文化能力时，您常用哪些使用具体的术语，或者哪些理论？ When introducing intercultural and intercultural competence in your classroom, what specific terms or theories do you often use?

4.您是否有权选择使用什么教材？如果有，您选择教材的依据是什么？考虑的主要因素是什么？ Do you have the authority to choose which textbooks to use? If so, what is the basis for your selection? What are the main factors you consider?

5.跨文化能力课程的教材和材料主要出自哪里？为什么？

Where do the textbooks and materials for intercultural competence courses mainly come from? Why?

6.学校目前所使用的跨文化相关定义和评估跨文化能力的理论主要来自哪里？为什么？

Where do the definitions and theories used to assess intercultural competence at your school primarily come from? Why?

7.您认为现在使用的教材是否符合您的课程需求？Do you think the currently used textbooks meet the needs of your course?

A. 完全符合 Fully meet

B. 部分符合 Partially meet

C. 不符合 Do not meet

D. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）Others (please explain what you mean by "others")

为什么？您能提供一下您认为的最佳做法和最差做法的实例吗？Why? Can you provide examples of what you consider best practices and worst practices?

Part 4:

1.您觉得作为跨文化课程的老师需要具备什么样的条件？What qualifications do you think teachers of intercultural courses should have?

A. 是做跨文化研究的 Conduct research in intercultural

B. 外语专业毕业 Graduate from a foreign language major

C. 去国外学习或工作过 Have studied or worked abroad

D. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）Others (please explain what you mean by "others")

2.您教授跨文化课程的主要方法是什么？从学生的反馈来看，它的效果如何？What is your main method of teaching intercultural courses? How effective is it based on student feedback?

3.您通过什么方式获得学生的反馈？How do you obtain student feedback?

A. 学生在课堂上的反应 Student reactions in class

B. 问卷调查 Surveys

C. 课后作业 Homework

D. 与学生交谈 Conversations with students

4.您如何评估或衡量学生是否以及在何种程度上具有跨文化能力？以何种方式？使用什么具体工具/方法来衡量学生的跨文化能力？

How do you assess or measure whether students have intercultural competence and to what extent? In what ways? What specific tools/methods do you use to measure students' intercultural competence?

5.您认为跨文化能力是否应该被评估，或者说真的能够被评估？Do you think intercultural competence should be assessed, or can it really be assessed?

6.作为跨文化课程的教师，您的跨文化能力有没有被评估，如果有，评估的方式是什么？As a teacher of intercultural courses, has your intercultural competence been assessed? If so, what is the method of assessment?

Part 5:

1.您认为跨文化课程要达成什么样的目标？

What goals do you think intercultural courses should achieve?

2.您认为在您的跨文化课程中是否有需要改变或改进的部分？Do you think there are parts of your intercultural course that need to be changed or improved?

A. 教材 Textbooks

B. 理论 Theories

C. 教学方法 Teaching methods

D. 评估方法 Assessment methods

E. 其它（请解释其它是指什么） Others (please explain what you mean by "others") 为什么？Why?

3.您认为目前的跨文化课程是否符合学生的期望？或者说，它是否符合社会的实际应用？

Do you think the current intercultural course meets students' expectations? Or does it meet the practical application needs of society?

A. 完全符合 Fully meets

B. 部分符合 Partially meets

C. 不符合 Does not meet

D. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）Others (please explain what you mean by "others") 为什么？Why?

4.您对跨文化课程你还有什么好的建议或想法？Do you have any other good suggestions or ideas for the intercultural course?

Appendix 3

List of Interview Questions for Discussion (Student Layer):

Part 1：

1.您现在几年级的学生？Which year are you in now for your university study?

2.您有过出国经历吗？如果有请举例说明。Have you ever been abroad? Please provide examples if you have been to abroad.

A. 有 Yes

B. 没有 No

3.你是否有过你认为是跨文化的经历？你是如何理解它的？Have you ever had an experience you consider intercultural? How do you understand it?

4.你认为你有跨文化能力吗？从哪些方面体现？

Do you think you have intercultural competence? In what aspects is it reflected?

A. 有 Yes

B. 没有 No

Part 2：

1.你如何理解跨文化和跨文化能力？你理解的依据是什么？

How do you understand intercultural and intercultural competence? What is the basis of your understanding?

2.你认为目前国内主要的跨文化能力是从哪个方面来诠释的？（如果都有，请选择程度，从低到高 1 到 10 分）From which aspect do you think intercultural competence is mainly interpreted in China? (If all aspects apply, please rate them from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest.)

A. 个体方面 Individual aspect

B. 群体方面 Group aspect

C. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）Others (please explain what you mean by "others")

为什么？Why?

3.你认为文化多样性应该在跨文化的概念中讨论吗？为什么？Do you think cultural diversity should be discussed within the concept of intercultural? Why?

4.你从哪些方面来区分文化多样性？From which aspects do you distinguish cultural diversity?

A. 国家/民族 Country/Nationality

B. 种族 Race

C. 肤色 Skin color

D. 语言 Language

E. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）Others (please explain what you mean by "others")

为什么？Why?

5.你认为推广跨文化课程的主要原因或背景是什么？What do you think are the main reasons or background for promoting intercultural courses?

A.全球化加强了国家或文化之间的联系 Globalization has strengthened the connections between countries or cultures

B.有跨文化课程的学院将更加国际化 Colleges with intercultural courses will become more international

C. 联合国科教文组织的支持 Support from UNESCO

D. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）Others (please explain what you mean by "others")

6.您如何理解全球化和跨文化交流的关系？How do you understand the relationship between globalization and intercultural exchange?

7.你认为跨文化能力是否有一个权威的定义？如果有，是什么？它来自哪里？

Do you think there is an authoritative definition of intercultural competence? If so, what is it? Where does it come from?

8.您认为跨文化怎样才算是成功的？怎么才叫具备跨文化能力？

How do you define a successful intercultural experience? What does it mean to possess intercultural competence?

Part 3：

1.你在哪个学校学习？你学习的是什么专业？

Which school are you studying at? What is your major?

2.你选择的跨文化课程名称叫什么？这一门课是开多久？一个学期？一个学

年？ What is the name of the intercultural course you selected? How long is this course? One semester? One academic year?

3.跨文化课程在你的专业中是必修课还是选修课？如果是选修，你选择这门课的原因是什么？

Is the intercultural course in your major compulsory or elective? If it is elective, why did you choose this course?

4.与贵校该专业目前提供的其他课程相比，跨文化课程被重视的程度如何？

Compared to other courses offered in your major, how important is the intercultural course?

A. 极为重视 Extremely important

B. 非常重视 Very important

C. 一般重视 Moderately important

D. 不重视 Not important

为什么？ Why?

你认为跨文化课程是否重要？ Do you think the intercultural course is important?

A. 极为重要 Extremely important

B. 非常重要 Very important

C. 一般重要 Moderately important

D. 不重要 Not important

为什么？ Why?

6. 你认为跨文化课程是否能有效地培养跨文化能力？ Do you think the intercultural course can effectively develop intercultural competence?

A. 是 Yes

B. 不是 No

7.你对跨文化课程的感觉如何？你认为学习跨文化课程有什么好处或作用？或者说你觉得它有用吗？ How do you feel about the intercultural course? What benefits or functions do you think learning an intercultural course has? Or do you think it is useful?

8. 你认为应该增加跨文化课程的比重吗？ Do you think the proportion of intercultural courses should be increased?

A. 应该增加 Yes

B. 不应该增加 No

为什么？ Why?

9.你期望的跨文化能力课程应该包括什么？ What do you expect the intercultural competence course to include?

10.你从这个课程中学到了什么？ What have you learned from this course?

11.这门课程是否提高了你的跨文化能力？体现在哪些方面？ Has this course improved your intercultural competence? In what aspects?

Part 4：

你觉得教授跨文化课程的老师需要具备什么样的条件?What qualifications do you think teachers of intercultural courses should have?

A. 是做跨文化研究的 Conduct research in intercultural

B. 外语专业毕业 Graduate from a foreign language major

C. 去国外学习或工作过 Have studied or worked abroad

D. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）Others (please explain what you mean by "others")

2.你认为教师在跨文化能力培养中是否起到最重要的作用？ Do you think teachers play the most important role in developing intercultural competence?

A. 是 Yes

B. 不是 No

3.在课堂上你的老师介绍跨文化和跨文化能力时，常用哪些具体的术语？

What specific terms does your teacher often use when introducing intercultural and intercultural competence in class?

4.在这门课程中如何评估你的跨文化能力？你认为这种评估是否合适，你有什么建议？ How is your intercultural competence assessed in this course? Do you think this assessment is appropriate? Do you have any suggestions?

5.你认为教师的跨文化能力应不应该被评估？为什么？ Do you think teachers' intercultural competence should be assessed? Why?

Part 5：

1.跨文化课程应该达成什么样的目标？What goals should intercultural courses achieve?

2.除了参加跨文化课程外，你还用什么方式来学习跨文化知识和培养跨文化能力？或者你认为除了课堂之外，还有其他学习跨文化的好方法吗？Besides attending intercultural courses, what other ways do you use to learn intercultural knowledge and develop intercultural competence? Or do you think there are other good ways to learn intercultural outside the classroom?

3.你认为学院提供的跨文化课程是否与你所了解的社会实际经验相符？Do you think the intercultural courses provided by the college match the real-life social experience you understand?

A. 完全符合 Fully match

B. 部分符合 Partially match

C. 不符合 Do not match

D. 其它（请解释其它是指什么）Others (please explain what you mean by "others")
为什么？Why?

4.你认为你上的这门跨文化课程中有哪些需要改进的地方？您有什么建议？

What do you think needs to be improved in the intercultural course you are taking? Do you have any suggestions?

Appendix 4

Questionnaire Survey for My Doctoral Dissertation on intercultural Competence Studies:

非常感谢您能抽出几分钟的时间来参加我关于跨文化研究的博士论文的问卷调查，本次问卷调查采用匿名方式进行，请您如实回答，所得数据仅用于研究，感谢配合！

Thank you very much for taking a few minutes to participate in the questionnaire survey for my doctoral dissertation on intercultural studies. This survey is conducted anonymously, so please answer honestly. The data obtained will be used solely for research purposes. Thank you for your cooperation!

Part1 第一部分：

1. Which university are you from? 您来自哪个大学？

2. What faculty are you from? 您来自哪个学院？

3. What is your current major? 您现在学习什么专业？

4.What stage are you at in your studies? 您正在学习的什么阶段？

A. Undergraduate 本科

B. Master's program 硕士研究生

C. Doctoral studies 博士研究生

5.Have you ever experienced going abroad? 您有过出国经历吗？

A. Yes. 有

B. No. 没有

4. What foreign language can you speak? 您会说哪门外语？

A. English 英语

B. French 法语

C. Russian 俄语

D. Spanish 西班牙语

E. German 德语

F. I can't speak any foreign languages 我不会说外语

G. Others 其它

Part2 第二部分：

7.Are you offered intercultural courses in your major? 您的专业是否有开设跨文化课程？

A. Yes.有

B. No.没有

If Yes, what is the name of the course about intercultural offered in your major?如果开设，您的专业开设的跨文化课程名称叫什么？

8. Do your university offers public elective intercultural courses? 您的大学是否提供公共选修的跨文化课程？

A. Yes.是

B. No.不是

C.Don't know.不清楚

If your university offers public elective intercultural courses, what is the name of the course offered? 如果您的学校开设了跨文化相关课程，请问开设的课程名叫什

么？(If not offered, please skip. 没有开设请跳过）

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9.Do you choose intercultural courses？ 您是否有选择上跨文化课程？

A. Yes.有

B. No. 没有

If yes, what textbooks or materials are used in your classes? (Please skip if not offered)

如果您选择了上跨文化课程，请问您上课使用的教材是什么？（没有开设请跳过）

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10.Do you think intercultural courses are popular or not so popular in your university?

您认为跨文化课程在您所在的大学是热门课程还是冷门课程？

A．Popular 热门

B．Not Popular 冷门

Follow up questions:

What is your reason for choosing a popular option?您选择热门的原因是什么?

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What is your reason for choosing an unpopular option?您选择冷门的原因是什么？

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11. Do you think it is necessary to offer intercultural courses, even if only as public elective courses? 您认为跨文化课程的开设是不是必要的，即使只是作为公共选修课开设？

A. Yes.是

B. No.不是

12.Do you think is the intercultural courses considered to be effective in developing intercultural competence? 您是否认为跨文化课程能有效地培养跨文化能力？

A．Yes.是

B．No.不是

C．If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

13.Do you believe that teachers play the most crucial role in the development of intercultural competence? 您是否认为教师在跨文化能力培养中起到最关键的作用？

A．Yes.是

B．No.不是

Part3 第三部分：

14. In China, intercultural means more of cultural exchange between countries, do you agree?在中国，跨文化更多地意味着不同国家之间的文化交流？您认同吗？

A．Yes 认同

B．No 不认同

15. Do you think that cultures are less different in the context of globalization? 你是否认为在全球化的背景下，文化是不是差异性更小了？

A．Yes 是

B．No 不是

C.If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

16. Are cultures diverse? 文化是多样的吗？

A．Yes 是

B．No 不是

C.If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

17. Are cultures equal? 文化是平等的吗？

A．Yes 是

B．No 不是

C.If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

18.Cultural diversity refers mainly to different nations or races,, different skin colors and different languages? 文化的多样性主要指不同民族或种族，不同肤色和不同语言吗？

A．Yes 是

B．No 不是

C.If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

19. Do you think you have more cultural differences with foreigners or with some other parts of the country? 您认为您和外国人的文化差异更大，还是和国内其它一些地方的差异更大？

A. 外国人 Foreigners

B．国内的人 People in the country

20. What do you think intercultural competence is? 您认为跨文化能力是一种什么能力？

A. The ability to communicate well with people from different countries 和不同国家背景的人良好地交流的能力

B.The ability to deal with cultural differences, conflicts and other problems encountered in the process of cultural exchange 能够处理在文化交流过程中遇到的文化差异、矛盾冲突等问题的能力

C. The ability to criticize from another cultural perspective 从另一个文化角度进行批评的能力

D. The ability to compare and analyze cultural difference 文化比较的能力

E. The ability to communicate in different languages 用不同语言交流的能力

21. Globalization provides the world with the greatest opportunities for cultural exchange, so intercultural competence needs to be developed.全球化为世界提供了最大范围内的文化交流的机会，所以需要培养跨文化能力。

A．Yes 是

B．No 不是

C.If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

22.How important do you think intercultural competence is in the context of globalization?

您认为在全球化背景下，跨文化能力其重要性如何？

A.Extremely important 极其重要

B.Very Important 非常重要

C. Somewhat important 有一般重要

D.Not important 不重要

23.Is intercultural competence the ability to understand language and cultural differences?跨文化能力是理解语言和文化差异的能力吗？

A. Yes 是

B. No 不是

C. If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

24.Does the concept and content of intercultural competence include political elements? 跨文化能力的概念和内涵是否包含政治因素？

A. Yes 包含

B. No 不包含

C. If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

25.Do you think intercultural competence includes foreign language competence? 您觉得跨文化能力是否包括外语能力？

A. Yes 包括

B. No 不包括

C. If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

26.The more knowledgeable about foreign cultures you have, the better intercultural competence you have? 一个人的外国文化知识越丰富，说明他的跨文化能力越强？

A．Yes 是

B．No 不是

C. If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

27.The better your foreign language skills are, the better your intercultural skills are? 一个人的外语能力越强，说明他的跨文化能力也越强？

A．Yes 是

B．No 不是

C. If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

28.The more cultural differences you understand/master, the better your intercultural competence?一个人了解/掌握的文化差异越多，说明他的跨文化能力越强？

A．Yes 是

B．No 不是

C. If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

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29. The better a person is able to negotiate between cultures, the better his intercultural competence? 一个人能够在不同文化之间进行协商的能力越强，说明他的跨文化能力越强？

A．Yes 是

B．No 不是

C. If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

30. To improve intercultural competence means to improve students' ability to translate and understand different languages and cultural differences? 提高跨文化能力，是指提高学生翻译和理解不同语言和文化差异的能力？

A．Yes 是

B．No 不是

C. If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

31.Is intercultural competence in China the same as intercultural competence abroad? 中国的跨文化能力和国外的跨文化能力的概念是否一样？

A．Yes 一样

B．No 不一样

C. If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

32.Do you think that intercultural competence should be assessed? 您认为跨文化能力应不应该被评估？

A. Yes 应该

B. No 不应该

C. If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

33.Do you think that intercultural competence can be assessed? 您认为跨文化能力能不能被评估？

A. Yes 能

B. No 不能

C. Not sure 不确定

34. Do you think intercultural competence is a better way to resolve cultural conflicts? 您认为跨文化能力能更好地解决文化冲突吗？

A．Yes 能

B．No 不能

C. If you have any other thoughts, please write them in the blank space 如有其它想法请写到填空处：

Thank you very much for participating in this survey. Wishing you all the best!

非常感谢您参加本次问卷调查，祝您一切顺利！

Appendix 5

Consent for Participation in Interview

Research project title: Yingying Ye's Doctoral Program

Researcher's name: Yingying Ye

Research Participant's name:

Thank you for reading the information sheet about the interview. If you are happy to participate then please sign the form below to confirm that you agree with each statement below:

1. I agree to participate in the doctoral research project conducted by Yingying Ye from University of Cologne.

2.   My participation as an interviewee in this research is completely voluntary. There is no explicit or implicit coercion whatsoever to participate. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation.

3. Participation involves being interviewed by Yingying Ye from University of Cologne. I allow Yingying Ye to take notes during the interview and transcript the interview afterwards.

4. I agree for this interview to be tape-recorded. I understand that the audio recording made of this interview will be used only for analysis and that transcript or extracts from the interview may be used in Yingying Ye's doctoral dissertation, or any conference presentation, report or journal article developed as a result of the research. I understand that no other use will be made of the recording without my permission.

5. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this research will remain secure.

6. I agree that my anonymised data will be kept for future research purposes such as publications related to this study after the completion of the research.

7. I have carefully read and fully understood the points and statements of this form. All my questions were answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this research.

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

For further information, please contact:

The Researcher: Yingying Ye

Email:

参与访谈同意书

研究项目名称:叶颖颖博士项目

研究人员的姓名:叶颖颖

研究参与者的姓名:

谢谢您阅读关于采访的信息表。如果您愿意参加，那么请在下面的表格上签字，以确认您同意下面的每一项声明:

1. 我同意参加由科隆大学叶颖颖主持的博士研究项目。

2.   我作为受访者参与本研究完全是自愿的，没有任何明示或暗示的胁迫来参与。我明白，我的参与没有任何报酬。

3. 参与本研究需要接受科隆大学叶颖颖的采访。我允许叶颖颖在采访过程中做记录，并在访谈后转录采访内容。

4. 我同意对此次采访进行录音。我理解本次访谈的录音仅用于分析，访谈的记录或摘录可用于叶颖颖的博士论文，或作为研究结果的任何会议报告、报告或期刊文章。我明白，未经本人同意，不会对录音进行其它使用。

5. 我理解研究者不会在任何使用本次访谈所获信息的报告中指认我的姓名，并且我作为本研究参与者的保密性将得到保证。

6. 我同意在研究结束后，我的匿名数据将被保留用于未来的研究目的，如与本研究有关的出版物。

7. 我已仔细阅读并完全理解本表的要点和声明。我的所有问题都得到了满意的回答，我自愿同意参与这项研究。

_____ _____
参与者签名   日期

_____ _____
研究人员签名   日期

如需进一步信息，请联系。

研究者：叶颖颖

电子邮件：