

Cultural Globalization and Disciplinary Development of Intercultural Communication in China: Challenges and Opportunities

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In the era of cultural globalization, the discipline of intercultural communication in China has obtained a great opportunity of development. This paper expounds the development of Chinese intercultural communication studies from three perspectives. Firstly, the discipline of intercultural communication has enhanced the emergence and development of many other intercultural studies in a much broader scope. Secondly, intercultural communication studies in China is promoting and also developing through increased international collaboration. Lastly, cultural globalization has brought about new topics for intercultural communication studies in China.

Keywords: cultural globalization, intercultural communication, disciplinary development

Introduction

Disciplinary development is usually rooted in the historical and global context. With the proceeding of cultural globalization, most nations in the world are holding an open attitude to other cultures and actively participating in intercultural exchange, which has enhanced the harmonious existence as well as development of different cultures. In this process, intercultural communication (ICC) as an academic discipline has been booming rapidly in various sectors (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2015). Therefore, it is significant to investigate the relationship between globalization and the development of intercultural communication as well as foresee the future of ICC studies. By doing so, we would like to provide some insights for coping with the changes brought about by cultural globalization and some suggestions for the development of intercultural communication as an academic discipline.

ICC Studies and Intercultural Studies in China

In the age of globalization, modern transportation, and communication systems have unprecedentedly accelerated and expanded the exchange and communication between people, which, as Anthony Giddens argued, has “compressed” time and space (Giddens, 1991). Moreover, according to Fredric Jameson, globalization develops at the economic level and the cultural level (Jameson & Miyoshi, 1998). Meanwhile, the cultural innovations and the exchange between multi-dimensional cultures have been booming rapidly, which has contributed to the development of intercultural communication at the global level. In other words, cultural

globalization is the key factor that has led to the development of ICC (GAO, 2006) and this has been evidenced in the progressing of ICC as an academic discipline.

The development of ICC in the academic field falls into two trends. First, as the complexity of studies in the contemporary era has enhanced the further differentiation and specialization of disciplines in higher education institutions, the number of courses related to ICC studies has increased accordingly. In China, higher education discipline has undergone considerable reforms since the Opening and Reform, which has been accompanied by the emergence and disappearance of courses due to the need of social development (LIU, 2013). In this process, the number of courses related to ICC has grown rapidly. According to HU Wen-zhong (1999), although the course of ICC was introduced into China as early as in the 1980s, it was offered only in a few universities before the mid-1990s, such as Beijing Foreign Studies University, Heilongjiang University, and Harbin Institute of Technology. It was in the late 1990s that the courses of ICC started to spread in Chinese higher education institutions, especially in institutions with strong background of foreign language education because the students from those schools have been regarded as potential talents for China's international affairs. By the end of the first decade of 21st century, most Chinese universities, if not all, had made ICC as a course for both language majors and non-language majors (YANG, 2011). Later, some courses of ICC were developed as "National Quality Courseware", a project aiming at sharing the best higher educational resources in China.¹ This has evidenced that the value and importance ICC courses have been highly regarded.

Meanwhile, with the development of inter-disciplinary studies, courses related to ICC are no longer limited within the language, culture, or communication studies as they first appeared in China. At the 2006 International Symposium of Intercultural Communication, it was widely recognized by most scholars of ICC studies that cross-disciplinary studies would be a key trend for the discipline of ICC (ZHUANG, 2006). Thereafter, ICC studies in China have become closely related or even merged with other social science studies into cross-disciplinary courses. A large number of courses with the name of "intercultural" have appeared in Chinese universities, such as *Intercultural Education*, *Intercultural Administration*, *Intercultural Marketing*, *Intercultural Advertising*, *Intercultural Leadership Studies*, *Intercultural History*, *Intercultural Aesthetics*, to name just a few.

These "intercultural" courses have largely promoted the development of intercultural studies and even the whole social science sector. On the one hand, the ICC has provided many subjects a new perspective of investigating different social phenomena and activities. For example, Spencer-Oatey (2007) focused on the area of business and public administration and argued that intercultural communication would be a significant part in the studies of management of international corporations in the contemporary world. In China, with the development of its economy and the progressing of internationalization, ICC has been highly valued in studies of advertising, psychology, education, administration, mass media, anthropology, and language teaching (YIN, 2011). On the other hand, all these studies are in return enhancing the enrichment and development of ICC studies for they are investigating the similarities and differences between people from different cultural backgrounds in particular contexts. For instance, intercultural perspectives were adopted by Chinese researchers of psychology in the 1980s. Thereafter, a large number of studies have been conducted and findings have been achieved concerning both theories and practices, especially in the fields of cognition and cognitive

¹ National Quality Courseware Center. (2010). *Introduction to Chinese national quality courseware*. Retrieved from <http://www.jingpinke.com/about/jinppinke>

development, psychological health, personality, and intelligence, etc.. These findings have enriched the studies and practices of ICC in return (GAO, 2011).

Education is another example of the mutual promotion between ICC and other social sciences. According to the *Guidelines on Intercultural Education* published by UNESCO, intercultural education refers to the education for people from different cultural backgrounds or in multi-cultural contexts; it “respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 31). In China, intercultural education is meaningful for educational development (HUANG & Henze, 2013). As education is largely based on culture and is achieved through communication, ICC studies have been promoted significantly with the development of intercultural education. The key evidence is that ICC courses have been promoted from a specific language course to a general course in many Chinese colleges and its value as a independent discipline is receiving growing recognition as well (YANG, 2011).

International Collaboration and Research of ICC in China

In the era of culture globalization, it is inevitable for different cultures to encounter with each other, which has established a positive context for ICC studies. The exchanges between different cultures have enhanced the international cooperation on ICC research and the development of ICC as a discipline. In China, such exchanges first boomed in the late 1980s when the popular enthusiasm for learning English started to grow, which has witnessed China to become an active receiver of Western cultures. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the popularity of Chinese language has increased rapidly with the development of Chinese economy, which has further enhanced its exchanges with other cultures. Under such circumstances, transnational or even multi-national cooperation has been promoted for ICC studies.

In the contemporary era, the research target, the research field and the disciplinary features of ICC have determined that ICC studies would depend largely on international cooperation. It is through transnational cooperation that multi-cultural exchanges can be promoted and cultural ethnocentrism can be conquered (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2015). In China, there have been mainly two channels connecting Chinese ICC studies and international ICC studies. First, a large number of Chinese scholars with international experiences and international scholars in the field of ICC are conducting and enhancing ICC studies in China. Among them, some prominent figures include: Professor HU Wen-zhong, a key founder of ICC studies in China and one of the first visiting scholars abroad after the opening and reform in the 1980s; Professor JIA Yu-xin, an eminent scholar in ICC studies and the previous President of Chinese Association for Intercultural Communication (CAFIC), and Professor SUN You-zhong, President of CAFIC and a visiting scholar back from the U.S. Some international scholars include Professor CHEN Guo-ming, Executive Director of IAICS from the University of Rhode Island and Professor Steve Kulich, an American ICC scholar having worked at Shanghai Foreign Studies Institute for over 10 years. These scholars with international backgrounds, together with Chinese native researchers of ICC studies have achieved a large number of findings of ICC that are significant for the Chinese context as well as contributory to the global society.

Meanwhile, a number of international conferences and symposiums on topics related to ICC have been held in China, which has largely enhanced the collaboration on Chinese ICC studies. In 1995, the Fifth International Conference of IAICS was held in Harbin. The conference received more than 200 participants from over 20 nations and also witnessed the establishment of CAFIC, which made a significant start for the internationalization of ICC studies in China. From then on, international conferences on ICC have been held

regularly and the themes of the conferences have ranged from theoretical analysis of ICC studies to practices of ICC principles in various fields.

In fact, such rapid progress has not only benefited the ICC studies as an academic discipline in China, but also contributed to the international collaboration in other sectors such as business and politics, with China playing an increasingly role in these fields in the world. For example, “Conflict Management and Intercultural Harmony” was adopted as the theme for the 2014 International Conference of Intercultural Communication held at Shanghai Normal University. During the conference, scholars from different nations offered various perspectives about dealing with cultural conflicts in international corporations, schools and institutions with international students, and multi-cultural communities, and focused specifically on how to deal with the interaction between Chinese culture and other cultures.² Such perspectives would be valuable for managing multi-cultural groups in different sectors.

Prospects of ICC Studies in China in the Era of Cultural Globalization

As has been stated, ICC studies in China have experienced rapid development since the late 20th century. ICC studies have not only impacted and somewhat changed many other disciplines, but also promoted international cooperation and collaboration. Nevertheless, according to our investigation, we found that Chinese ICC studies are still limited in terms of the focus on the new problems emerging in the process of cultural globalization. Here we propose four themes of ICC studies in China that require further research:

Firstly, it is important to conceptualize cultural globalization in the Chinese context. Though cultural globalization is widely accepted as an existing phenomenon, there has been little research focusing systematically on its general connotation and denotation. It would be significant to investigate the positioning of cultural globalization in ICC studies in China and find out what kind of changes and challenges would cultural globalization bring to Chinese ICC studies. Moreover, as it is inevitable for cultural globalization to impact on intercultural studies and disciplines, ICC studies, the standard bearer of intercultural studies in China, should also provide perspectives for other intercultural disciplines to cope with the changes and challenges brought about by cultural globalization. Therefore, it is important to investigate how ICC studies could be better associated with and enhancing the development of other intercultural subjects in the era of cultural globalization.

Secondly, the relationship between different cultures has been a key topic in ICC since the very beginning of the studies. In the era of cultural globalization, such relations would be changing constantly, which requires investigation from the perspectives of ICC studies. For instance, it has been argued that cultural homogenization, cultural polarization, and cultural hybridization would be three possible consequences brought about by globalization. Cultural homogenization means the global culture would be standardized around a Western or American pattern; cultural polarization means the global culture would be standardized not only by Western or American patterns, but also some other power cultural patterns; and supporters of cultural hybridization theory hold that the globalization would enable cultures to borrow and incorporate elements from each other so as to create hybrid or syncretic forms (Holton, 2000). Nevertheless, there has been little research that verifies any of the three theories. As cultural globalization is proceeding rapidly, it is significant to investigate the changing relations between different cultures as well as the actual impact of cultural globalization on different cultures, especially the Chinese culture.

² The SHNU 2014 International Conference of Intercultural Communication was held on December 28th and 29th, 2014 at Shanghai Normal University.

Thirdly, as cultural globalization takes place together with the globalization of other sectors such as economy and politics (Hopper, 2007), it is valuable to find out how these sectors have been influenced by cultural globalization. More than two decades ago, Rosenau (1990) first proposed the concept of “global culture” and he argued that the tightened relations between different cultures would enhance economic and political collaboration in the global context while at the end of the 20th century, Held and his colleagues further argued that cultural globalization would bring about new practices and relations to all the sectors of human society; that is, the impacts of cultural globalization would range from various cultural phenomena to social norms and mechanisms (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999). Therefore, investigating the impacts of cultural globalization beyond the cultural sector would contribute to the understanding of the changes in Chinese society and the global context.

Finally, studies concerning intercultural communication competences should remain an essential research topic in the era of cultural globalization. Since the 1980s, a key aim of ICC studies in China has been the cultivation of intercultural communication competence. It has been broadly acknowledged that globalization has imposed higher requirements on citizens in terms of communicative skills and abilities in intercultural contexts and a large number of studies have been conducted for defining and assessing such competence in the Chinese context (GAO, 2014; WU, FAN, & PEN, 2013). Nevertheless, we believe that cultural globalization would bring further changes to the world and the definition and standard for intercultural communication competence should be constantly updated.

Conclusion

In the era of cultural globalization, intercultural communication studies in China the research concerning intercultural communication would be increasingly significant. The relationship between ICC and other intercultural studies is tightening and changing rapidly. International collaboration is playing an increasingly important role in ICC studies. And the cultural globalization would bring about much challenge and new topics for ICC research. Therefore, we expect that there would be more research aims, research methodologies, and research findings in ICC studies, which would further contribute to the disciplinary development of intercultural communication.

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