

A Study on the Integration of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture and the Progressive Mechanism of Intercultural Communicative Competence

ZOU Yanqun

Beijing International Studies University, Beijing, China

To address the imbalanced predicament of “overemphasis on foreign cultures and absence of local cultures” in college English intercultural communication courses, this study explores the impact of integrating Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture (ETCC) into such courses on students’ intercultural communicative competence (ICC). It sorts out the three-stage evolutionary characteristics of integrating Chinese culture into foreign language education, namely “cultural attachment—cultural compensation—cultural symbiosis”, and points out the insufficiency of current empirical research. Based on the two-dimensional interactive model of “attitudes and values—metacognition”, and supported by the practical framework of “diversified learning coordination—teaching method matrix—full-link integration”, a quasi-experimental study was conducted. The results show that the experimental group achieved significantly better improvements than the control group in the cognition of traditional culture and the attitudinal, cognitive and behavioral dimensions of ICC. The study proposes the mechanism of “local cultural feedback”, providing theoretical support and a practical paradigm for the reform of intercultural communication courses.

Keywords: Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture, metacognitive competence, intercultural communicative competence

Introduction

In the era of globalization, intercultural exchanges have become increasingly frequent, and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has emerged as a core indicator of talents’ international literacy. Its cultivation is directly linked to individuals’ multicultural adaptability and national cultural communication effectiveness. China’s *College English Teaching Guide (2020)* incorporates “coordinated development of ICC and cultural confidence” into core curriculum objectives, responding to the era’s talent demands and addressing the key intercultural education issue—how to consolidate local cultural roots while broadening global vision.

As an important carrier of intercultural education, Chinese college English courses have long had an “imbalance tendency”: Foreign culture introduction stays at superficial symbols, while local culture integration lacks systematic design, leaving students trapped in “speechlessness” during intercultural interactions or prone to stereotypes. The essence lies in failing to regard local culture as a vital source for ICC development and

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ZOU Yanqun, M.A., associate professor, School of English, Beijing International Studies University, Beijing, China.

neglecting cultural subjectivity's profound shaping effect on cognition and behavior. Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture (ETCC) provides a unique cognitive framework and behavioral guidelines for intercultural communication. Fei Xiaotong's Theory of Cultural Awareness clarifies that "understanding one's own culture" is a prerequisite for "comprehending heterogeneous cultures". However, such wisdom is not effectively transformed into curriculum resources, with ETCC treated as isolated knowledge, lacking organic connection with ICC core dimensions. Accordingly, this study focuses on the practical exploration of integrating ETCC into college English intercultural communication courses. By constructing a targeted teaching model and conducting empirical tests, it highlights the endogenous value of local culture in ICC cultivation from both theoretical and practical perspectives, and provides new ideas for promoting the transformation of intercultural education from "one-way input" to "two-way mutual learning". This research is not only related to the improvement of intercultural teaching, but also involves the cultivation of new talents of the times with both a global vision and cultural roots, thus bearing important practical and academic value.

Literature Review

The evolution of Chinese culture integration in foreign language education is deeply coupled with contemporary educational concepts and theoretical frameworks, characterized by expanded perspectives and deepened value positioning, which falls into three stages. The pre-2000 "cultural attachment" stage was dominated by structural linguistics and communicative competence theory, with foreign language education centered on target language culture. Chinese culture remained recessive, simplified to a language learning auxiliary. Guided by the contrastive analysis hypothesis, studies focused on the impact of cultural differences on language use (Hu, 1994), limited to vocabulary or custom comparisons without touching value cores.

The 2000-2017 "cultural compensation" stage was marked by the proposal of "Chinese cultural aphasia" (Cong, 2000), shifting research to reflection and compensation. Based on the ICC model, scholars advocated Chinese culture compensation for balance (Liu & He, 2000; Yuan, 2006), noting that native culture absence causes expressive deficiency and identity crisis (Gao, 2002), and conducted relevant surveys (Zhang & Zhu, 2002; L. Xiao, D. Xiao, Li, & Song, 2010). However, the compensation was passive, relied on Western frameworks, and positioned Chinese culture as a deficiency-supplement, lacking independent value awareness.

The post-2014 "cultural symbiosis" stage, driven by policies like *Guidelines for Improving Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture Education* (2014) and *Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education Guidelines* (2020), takes cultural awareness and moral education as the theoretical basis, defining Chinese culture integration as a core educational value. Scholars propose cultivating culturally confident intercultural communicators (Wen, 2022) and explore value interpretation, practical paths, and technological empowerment (Zhang, 2017; Xiao & Huang, 2020; Li & Liu, 2023), realizing the shift from instrumental compensation to value construction.

The 40-year evolution of research on the integration of Chinese culture into foreign language education reflects the awakening process of Chinese foreign language education from "instrumental rationality" to "value rationality". However, most existing studies remain at the level of speculative discussions or experience summaries on "Why Chinese culture should be integrated into foreign language education?", with insufficient empirical verification of the effects on the three dimensions of attitude, cognition, and behavior after integration. Based on empirical teaching data, this study explores:

1. What specific effects does integrating ETCC into college English intercultural communication courses

have on students in the attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions respectively?

2. How to form a complete evidence chain through the mutual verification of quantitative and qualitative data?

Model Construction

This study holds that ICC consists of attitudes and values as well as metacognition, which interact bidirectionally and complement each other. Metacognition includes metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive competence: The former comprises declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge, while the latter includes monitoring, reflection, and regulation. Attitudes/values form ICC's spiritual core. Metacognition drives ICC advancement. Guided by Constructivism, a practical ICC model is built via "situational practice → cognitive conflict → reflective reconstruction".

ETCC embodies intercultural wisdom, yet is underutilized in curricula. This study explores ETCC integration into college English courses via targeted models, aiding the shift from one-way input to two-way mutual learning, with notable academic and practical value.

The Framework of the Practical Model: In-Depth Integration of Diversified Learning and Traditional Culture

The model covers two dimensions: attitude-value construction (central level) and metacognition construction (middle level: self/other/task/strategy knowledge; outer level: metacognitive activities including learning mode coordination, teaching method matrix, and monitoring-reflection-regulation).

Learning mode coordination includes three types: (a) project-based learning (integrating cultural research and communicative skills via real intercultural tasks), (b) inquiry-based learning (guiding independent research on cultural origins and comparisons with AI (artificial intelligence)-assisted data mining), and (c) cooperative learning (multicultural groups conducting case co-creation to foster empathy and coordination).

Teaching method matrix includes a case teaching system, AI-empowered learning, and simulation and practical teaching.

1. The case teaching system comprises classic cases, generative cases, and multimedia cases.

(a) Classic cases: Typical intercultural communication cases are selected to analyze cultural cognition, strategy application, and result reflection, building a bridge between theory and practice;

(b) Generative cases: Cases co-created by teachers and students, including students' role play and field research cases, are close to real learning and practice scenarios, enhancing the vividness and pertinence of cases;

(c) Multimedia cases: Videos and movie clips are introduced, combined with AI-assisted analysis, to expand the perceptual and analytical dimensions of cases in multiple ways.

2. AI-empowered learning provides personalized learning support for students: AI is used to analyze students' cultural cognition data and push customized learning resources, forming a closed loop of "cognitive diagnosis—resource adaptation—strategy push" to meet personalized learning needs. It also enhances dynamic interaction and participation: AI-assisted bullet screen interaction is used in class to strengthen the collision of ideas among students and between teachers and students; after class, AI assists in case generation and reflection guidance to extend the depth and breadth of learning.

3. Simulation and practical teaching:

(a) Situational simulation: Intercultural conflict scenarios embedded with traditional culture are designed,

where students conduct role play and discuss strategic responses, deepening cultural sensitivity and the communicative strategy library through the loop of “cognitive conflict—strategy application—reflective reconstruction”;

(b) Cultural decoding practice: “Cultural decoding presentation” activities are carried out, requiring students to produce videos combining traditional cultural elements from the “Chinese and foreign perspectives, theoretical perspective and practical perspective”, and strengthen the integration of cultural cognition and expressive ability through self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher evaluation (see Figure 1).

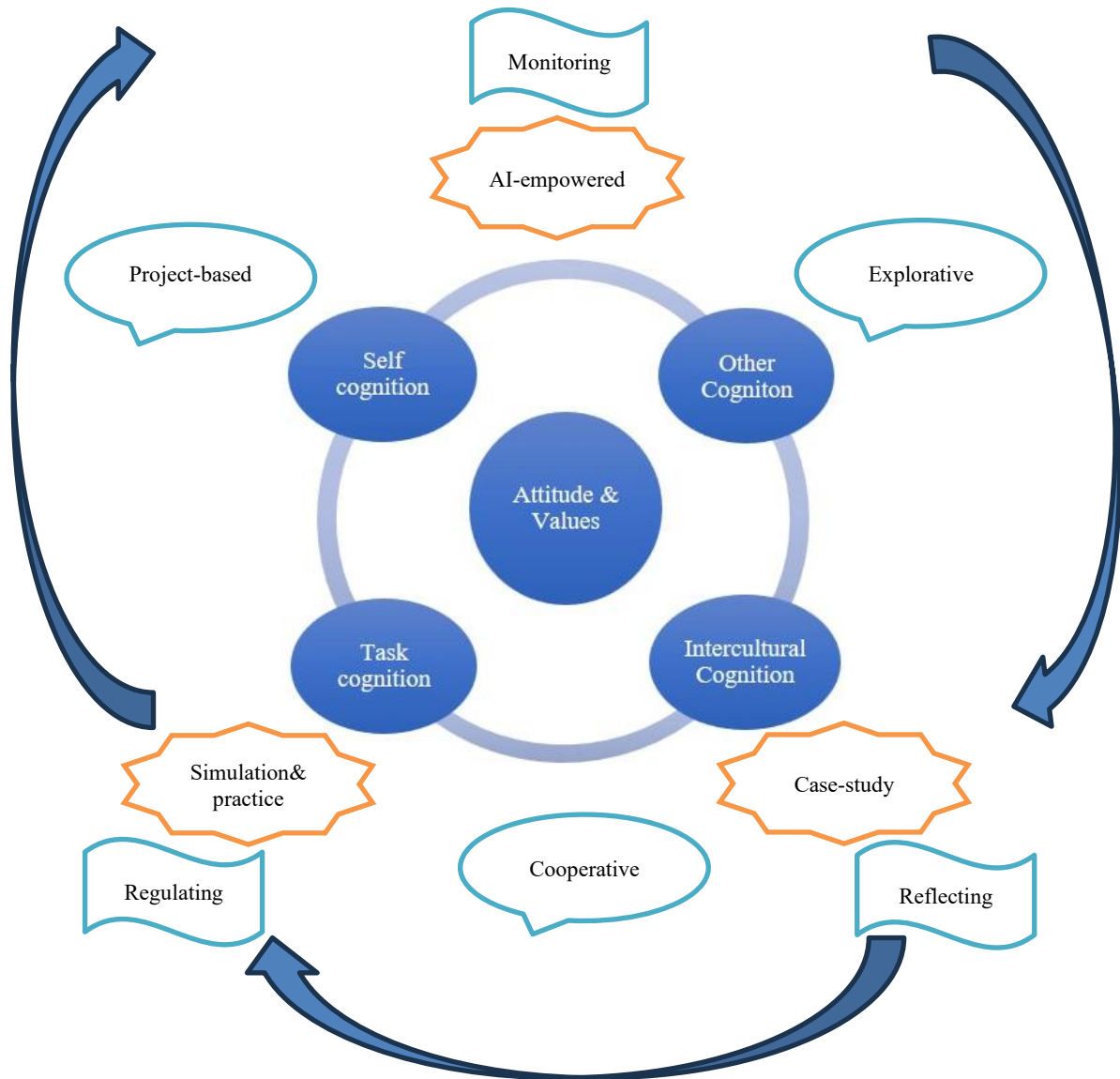


Figure 1. The framework of the practical model.

The Design of Teaching Links

1. Pre-class: Light inquiry and cognitive activation:

The “123 Task” is assigned: Around the unit theme article, students complete one mind map, put forward

two research questions, and extract three enlightening sentences. With AI tool assistance, students actively explore the connection between traditional culture and intercultural communication, realizing knowledge pre-construction.

2. In-class: In-depth interaction and progressive competence:

(a) Cultural decoding presentation: Students report on ETCC, covering intercultural comparison, theoretical interpretation, and practical paths, deepening cultural cognition integration through teacher-student interaction;

(b) Multidimensional interaction: Guided by teacher and student research questions, combined with real-time bullet screen interaction, cultural thinking collision is activated; core ETCC concepts are introduced to highlight the contemporary application of Chinese wisdom;

(c) Case co-creation and application: Activities like role play, thematic debate, and group case analysis are carried out, integrated with AI-assisted evaluation and Chinese wisdom, to strengthen practical skill and cultural strategy application.

3. Post-class: Practical extension and cognitive reconstruction:

(a) AI-assisted case expansion: Students use AI to generate major-related intercultural cases, complete analysis, and strategy design; AI provides feedback on cognitive biases and optimization suggestions to deepen knowledge transfer;

(b) Cultural practice reflection: Through reflection logs, thesis writing, and simulated project reviews, students adopt Sino-Western dual perspectives, reconstruct cultural cognition via “practice-reflection”, and accelerate ICC.

Evaluation and Feedback: A Diversified Mechanism to Guarantee Competence Development

(a) Formative assessment: Integrates learning behavior data, cultural cognition, and practical skills, with AI-assisted evaluation to track ICC development and dynamically adjust teaching interventions;

(b) Summative assessment: Comprehensively evaluates ICC progress via questionnaires, case analysis, reflective theses, self-evaluation, and teacher evaluation, providing a basis for teaching iteration and student development.

Characteristics of the Model

1. Localized innovation of theoretical integration: Breaking the limitations of Western paradigms:

Taking the Constructivist closed loop of “situational practice—cognitive conflict—reflective reconstruction” as the logical framework, and with attitudes and values as core guidance, the model integrates ETCC core concepts to build an underlying cognitive system of “self—other—task—strategy”. It abandons the parallel view of attitude, cognition, and skills, elevating attitudes and values from universal emotions to a “spiritual anchor guided by cultural awareness”.

2. Dynamic reconstruction of the cognitive framework: Strengthening dialectical adjustment driven by metacognition:

Surpassing traditional knowledge and skill-oriented cognitive frameworks, the model establishes a “cognition—interaction—reconstruction” dynamic system with metacognitive competence as the path. Through the closed loop of “situational practice triggers cognitive conflict—reflective inquiry activates metacognition—strategy optimization promotes cognitive iteration”, cultural cognition is upgraded from fragmented knowledge to a dialectical tool for dynamic adjustment.

3. Diversified coordination of the practical system: Creating an integrated and operable paradigm:

Abandoning the limitations of single teaching methods, the model constructs a collaborative practical system

of “diversified learning—AI empowerment—full-link integration”, which balances systematicness and operability, and provides a feasible path for ETCC-integrated intercultural teaching.

Research Design

Research Subjects

This study selected 80 third-year non-foreign language majors from a university in Beijing, including 41 students in the experimental group and 39 in the control group. The two groups were homogeneous in core characteristics: all aged 21-22; using the same textbook *English Intercultural Communication* (2nd edition); and taught by the same teacher.

Experimental Implementation

In cultural positioning, the control group regarded Western culture as the “benchmark framework” and traditional Chinese culture as an “auxiliary reference system” for understanding and comparing Western culture; the experimental group took traditional Chinese culture as the “subjective fulcrum” to form a “dual-axis symbiosis” with Western culture.

In content organization, the traditional Chinese culture content of the control group was “fragmented and attached” to Western culture modules, only focusing on cultural phenomenon comparison without in-depth interpretation of ETCC’s core spirit. It was merely mentioned at the “natural extension points” of Western culture content, with no customized teaching activities. The experimental group introduced ETCC following the three-level system of “core values—behavioral norms—symbolic carriers” to deeply interpret the philosophical connotation of traditional culture. Through the three-stage activities of “cultural decoding—situational transfer—practical output”, it activated traditional cultural elements and realized a “two-way dialogue” with Western culture.

Research Results and Analysis

This study used a mixed quantitative-qualitative research method. Data collection and statistical tools are as follows:

1. The test of cognition and identification of excellent traditional Chinese culture: Compiled based on the *Syllabus for Intercultural Communicative Competence Examination*, it integrated the “cultural knowledge” dimension of Byram’s (1997) model with local cultural features, forming five measurement dimensions: “diachronic inheritance”, “educational philosophy”, “folk customs”, “social norms”, and “core values” (eight questions per dimension, 24 single-choice questions total).

2. The intercultural communicative competence scale: Revised by integrating Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman’s (2003) IDI Scale (measuring the five-stage development of “denial/defense - integration”) and Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven’s (2000) MPQ Scale (measuring five personality traits like “cultural empathy” and “flexibility”), this 24-item scale covers attitude, cognition, and behavior dimensions, using a five-point Likert scale (1 = “Strongly disagree”, 5 = “Strongly agree”).

3. Case analysis and reflection logs: A “three-dimensional coding framework” was applied to final exam annual reflections and case analyses: cognitive dimension—the “depth of cultural difference attribution” (superficial phenomenon description/in-depth value analysis); attitudinal dimension—extraction of cultural awareness and confidence expressions; strategic dimension—application of traditional cultural strategies and dependence on Western ones. Open coding extracted initial categories from 10 random samples; two researchers

coded independently, resolving discrepancies through discussion to reach consensus.

The above tests and scales were administered to both groups pre- and post-experiment. Electronic questionnaires were distributed before and after ETCC's comprehensive integration into the junior intercultural communication course, with 70 recovered (89% response rate). Data were statistically analyzed via SPSS 26.0.

Pre-experiment data showed no significant differences in all abilities between the two groups (see Tables 1 & 2 for details). After one school year of the experimental group's ETCC-integrated intercultural communication course—with comprehensive, multi-angle ETCC integration in pre-class, in-class, and post-class sessions—the ETCC Cognition Test and ICC Survey were conducted, with results compared to the control group.

1. Cognition of excellent traditional Chinese culture:

Table 1 presents the results of the independent-samples *t*-test on the pre-test and post-test of ETCC cognition of the two groups. Post-test data indicated that the experimental group achieved significant improvement in cultural identification after one school year of ETCC-integrated intercultural communication courses, while the control group showed no such improvement, with a significant difference between the two groups.

Table 1

Cognition of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture

Tests	The experimental group	The control group	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Pre-test	28.15±8.76	26.93±7.79	-0.603	0.549
Post-test	32.55±8.21	27.48±7.27	-2.709	0.009

Teachers' comprehensive, multi-angle integration of ETCC—especially spiritual culture—positively stimulated students' cultural identification, interest, and exploratory desire. Classroom cultural decoding activities involving active inquiry, in-depth interpretation and multi-dimensional discussion deepened students' understanding of ETCC's material and institutional levels, as well as their connection with spiritual culture. Tasks like group discussion, case analysis, role-play, debate, and reflection logs encouraged students to go beyond superficial identification for in-depth exploration, significantly enhancing their cultural cognition, confidence, and identification.

2. Pre-test & post-test of intercultural communicative competence:

This section explores the changes in students' ICC from three dimensions: cognition, attitude, and behavior. Table 2 presents the results of the independent-samples *t*-test on the pre-test and post-test of ICC of the two groups.

Table 2

Pre-test & Post-test of ICC

	Dimension	The experimental group		The control group		<i>P</i>
		Intercultural competence average score	<i>SD</i>	Intercultural competence average score	<i>SD</i>	
Pre-test	Attitude	14.23	±4.07	14.79	±3.68	0.530
	Cognition	14.00	±3.60	15.05	±4.08	0.233
	Behavior	15.28	±4.01	15.58	±3.61	0.734
Post-test	Attitude	16.64	±3.67	14.92	±3.14	0.030*
	Cognition	16.97	±3.24	15.26	±3.51	0.029*
	Behavior	17.46	±3.34	15.66	±3.96	0.034*

Attitudinal Dimension

Independent-samples *t*-test results showed no significant pre-test difference in the attitudinal dimension between the two groups (the experimental group: 14.23 ± 4.07 ; the control group: 14.79 ± 3.68), indicating homogeneous initial intercultural communication attitudes. In post-experiment, the experimental group scored significantly higher (16.64 ± 3.67) than the control group (14.92 ± 3.14) ($p = 0.030$), confirming the unique effect of integrating traditional Chinese culture on improving attitudes.

Theoretically, this attitude change stems from cultural identity reconstruction. Through systematic exposure to core traditional Chinese cultural concepts like “Harmony in Diversity” and “inclusiveness”, the experimental group students established stable cultural subjectivity cognition—not closed superiority, but an open mindset based on clarifying their cultural genes. This aligns with Kim’s (2001) “Developmental Model of Intercultural Adaptation”, which emphasizes “flexible cultural identity reconstruction” in attitude change. The control group, lacking systematic cultural immersion, maintained baseline scores, verifying the impact of cultural input quality.

The experimental group students’ reflections confirmed attitudinal improvement:

S1: “This transformative learning reshaped my understanding of human interaction, enhancing communication skills and instilling lifelong cultural sensitivity in an interconnected world”.

S2: “It’s one of my most important classes—useful beyond college. Understanding others, building connections and respecting cultural differences are life skills. I’m more confident communicating across cultures and more open-minded”.

S3: “We learned not only about other cultures but our own heritage, forming a comparative perspective that combines global viewpoints with insights from China’s history”.

Notably, the experimental group’s attitude improvement standard deviation (3.67) was slightly higher than the control group’s (3.14), suggesting the intervention activated individual differences. Some students deepened reflections on cultural relativity, while a few remained in cognitive adjustment—guiding refined teaching interventions.

Current practice must avoid symbolic implantation of traditional culture. Despite positive results, we need to explore how to prevent cultural ethnocentrism and balance bicultural competence via comparative teaching. Qualitative methods should be integrated to further explore the micro-process of students’ attitude reconstruction.

Cognitive Dimension

Independent-samples *t*-test results showed no significant pre-test difference in the cognitive dimension (the experimental group: 14.00 ± 3.60 ; the control group: 15.05 ± 4.08), but a significant post-experiment difference (the experimental group: 16.97 ± 3.24 ; the control group: 15.26 ± 3.51 , $p = 0.029$), indicating ETCC integration more effectively promotes cognitive-level ICC improvement.

Hu (1994) noted that “ethnocentric reference” in cultural cognition distorts foreign culture understanding. Initially, both groups had cognitive limitations: some generalized cultural traits, while others had fragmented knowledge, only listing superficial foreign cultural elements without grasping underlying values—consistent with primary cultural learners’ characteristics (Brislin, 1981), lacking diversity perception and systematic analysis frameworks.

After ETCC-integrated teaching, the experimental group’s cognitive structure was reconstructed. Through “cultural decoding” and “foreign cultural case traceability”, students broke initial limitations, as reflected in their reflections:

S4: “This project revealed unexpected cultural differences between East and West, bringing a refreshing, exciting discovery despite my prior assumptions”.

S5: “The course taught me to understand cultures systematically. I realized I’d never truly learned to explore and respect other cultures deeply before”.

S6: “An effective highlight is anchoring discussions in ETCC concepts (e.g., comparing Confucian harmony with Western individualism), making abstract theories tangible and facilitating in-depth comparative analysis”.

This cognitive deepening relies on “cultural metacognition”—monitoring and regulating cognitive processes—breaking “cultural stereotypes”. The control group only accumulated knowledge (e.g., more foreign cultural points) without in-depth decoding ability, explaining their non-significant slight score increase.

Notably, the experimental group’s “two-way decoding” ability is valuable: They understood foreign cultures via ETCC’s “Harmony in Diversity” and reflected on their own culture through foreign references. As one student put it: “Analyzing Shakespeare’s ‘human nature good/evil’ discussions helped me grasp *Analects*, ‘Human nature is similar, habits differ’—cultures’ views on human propositions differ in approaches but equally satisfy”. This leap reaches intercultural cognition’s “dialectical stage” (Bennett, 1993), laying a foundation for dynamic cultural cognitive systems.

Behavioral Dimension

Independent-samples *t*-test results showed no significant pre-test difference in the behavioral dimension (the experimental group: 15.28 ± 4.01 ; the control group: 15.58 ± 3.61), but a significant post-experiment difference (the experimental group: 17.46 ± 3.34 ; the control group: 15.66 ± 3.96 , $p = 0.034$). This confirms ETCC integration more effectively promotes behavioral-level ICC improvement, supporting Byram et al.’s (2014) proposition that “cultural practice is the core path of skill internalization”.

The behavioral dimension’s core is “contextual execution ability”—flexibly applying cultural knowledge in real interactions (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Initially, both groups had limitations: Some had basic skills but withdrew due to “cultural performance anxiety” (Gudykunst, 2005), while others used rigid strategies and ignored non-verbal signals. This “knowledge-behavior disconnection” stems from traditional teaching’s focus on rules over practice.

ETCC-integrated teaching addresses this via three-layer practice: situational simulation and case analysis; “real communication tasks” with international students; and a “reflection-revision” mechanism (behavior logs for strategy adjustment). Students’ reflections confirm behavioral changes:

S7: “This course gave me practical tools to connect with Japanese and Western classmates—I’d been interested but didn’t know how to approach them, and this skill benefits my whole life”.

S8: “I applied what I learned in conversations with Western friends, speaking more naturally and building closer bonds, even if I didn’t master everything perfectly”.

S9: “Though challenging, the class helped me grow—I listened and interacted more meaningfully, got closer to foreign dorm mates, and built sincere friendships”.

These changes reflect a leap from cognition to flexible adaptation, consistent with Byram’s (1997) “three dimensions of communicative skills”: contextual adaptation and reflection rely on in-depth cultural practice, not just knowledge input.

Notably, the experimental group progress varied: Students familiar with traditional culture adapted faster, while those with weak foundations needed more scaffolding. Future teaching should build a “traditional cultural

cognition—intercultural behavior” path and add “cloud-based cultural dialogue” for the digital age.

In summary, ETCC integration fosters intercultural behavioral competence by integrating “cultural concepts—behavioral norms—contextual execution”, shaping communicators with cultural confidence and adaptability—key for globalization.

Conclusion

Through a one-year teaching experiment, this study verifies the promoting effect of integrating ETCC into college English intercultural communication courses on the development of students’ ICC. Empirical data show that the experimental group achieved significantly better improvements than the control group in the cognition of Chinese culture and the attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of ICC, and the qualitative coding results form a triangular verification with the quantitative data, confirming the effectiveness of cultural integration.

At the theoretical level, this study breaks through the linear paradigm of “target culture input” and proposes the mechanism of “local cultural feedback”—ETCC, as a cognitive coordinate system, promotes the leap of ICC from passive adaptation to active construction through a non-linear path of cultural awareness—difference perception—strategy generation. This mechanism is not a simple supplement to Byram’s (1997) five-dimensional model, but materializes its dimension of critical cultural awareness into an operable cognitive tool. It also provides micro-empirical evidence for Fei Xiaotong’s Theory of Cultural Awareness in the field of intercultural education, revealing the unique value of local culture as the core of competence development. In practice, the three-stage path of “concept decoding—situational transformation—behavior adjustment” constructed in the study elevates traditional culture from “curriculum content” to “curriculum gene”, explores an effective path to transform cultural knowledge into communicative skills, and provides a paradigm with both theoretical support and operability for the reform of college English courses.

The limitations of this study lie in the limited sample coverage (a single university). In the future, multi-center experiments can be conducted to improve the generalizability of the conclusions; meanwhile, a longitudinal follow-up design can be further introduced to explore the long-term mechanism of the effect of cultural integration. Looking ahead, research on ICC needs to pay more attention to the dynamic process of two-way cultural construction, especially to deepen the in-depth impact of the core concepts of traditional culture on intercultural cognition, so as to provide more theoretically supported intercultural education with local roots for the era of globalization.

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