

哈尔滨工业大学外国语学院跨文化交际研究中心
中国跨文化交际学会

跨文化交际研究

第二辑

Intercultural
Communication Research
(Volume 2)



主 编

贾玉新
Guo-Ming Chen [美]

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孙有中
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**INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION STUDY
IN CHINA TODAY**

China's Intercultural Communication Studies: Its Current Status and Problems¹

Hu Wenzhong

Beijing Foreign Studies University, China

Abstract

This paper first reviews the beginning, growth and landmarks of China's intercultural communication (ICC) studies. Then it discusses its special features in the past decade: 1) the publication of articles and books on ICC has increased rapidly; 2) the scope of research has widened and a diversified approach is beginning to emerge; 3) research in international communication has broadened and inter-ethnic communication has also become a topic of research; and 4) a number of intercultural communication classics have been reprinted in mainland China. The limitations of China's ICC studies mainly lie in two aspects: Most of those engaged in ICC research are foreign language professors, who are not well-equipped with theories of communication and psychology and have not had systematic training in ICC research methodologies; and secondly, the scope of research is still too limited and the approach often is not multi-disciplinary.

The writer holds that an analogy may be drawn between linguistic studies and ICC studies in China. While the situation of linguistic studies was much the same as what ICC studies is like today, remarkable progress has been scored in China's linguistic studies in the past two decades because of the measures taken over the years. The writer recommends that the strengthening of graduate programs and the training of teachers and scholars in ICC theoretical and methodological issues should be top priority. Plans should also be made to work on syllabus design, course development and teaching resources.

It is my great pleasure to be invited to this symposium, for it has given me a chance to meet so many distinguished intercultural communication scholars from Germany, UK, the United States, China and other countries. I am especially pleased to see pioneers of intercultural communication studies like Professor Michael Prosser and Professor Dan Landis are here with us. I am sure we all feel indebted to Shanghai International Studies

1 Address made on June 11, 2010 at the Chinese Intercultural Disciplinary Development Symposium held at Shanghai International Studies University.

University for hosting this symposium and for bringing together scholars from all over China. I believe this symposium will be an impetus to China's intercultural communication teaching and research and to furthering the collaboration between Chinese scholars and scholars from overseas.

Before we delve into the history of China's intercultural communication, there is one important concept we have to clear up first. This is the translation of the English word "communication." In English this word covers interpersonal communication as well as mass communication. Thus under International Communication Association (ICA) there are such divisions as Interpersonal Communication, Intercultural Communication, Global Communication and Social Change, Journalism Studies, Mass Communication, Language and Social Interaction, Organizational Communication, Information Systems and some others. When intercultural communication was first introduced in China, it had five or six different versions of translation². After about ten years we now settle for two terms: kuawenhua jiaoji (跨文化交际) and kuawenhua chuanbo (跨文化传播). The former is used by scholars often with a foreign language teaching background while the latter is used by scholars with a media studies background. When the former group holds conferences, those in the latter (chuanbo) group sometimes join. But foreign language professors as a rule do not attend conferences of the other group. When you use the English word "communication", you may understand it in either its broader or narrower sense. But when it comes to Chinese, you have to decide what you mean before you choose the right word. This dual translation reflects the way China's intercultural communication has developed.

Roughly speaking, China's intercultural communication studies started in the early 1980s. This was at a time when China first opened its door to the outside world and everything from the West appeared new and alien to the Chinese. Those who went overseas to study noticed that in addition to language obstacles there were cultural hurdles in communicating with foreigners. Teachers of foreign languages were among the first to recognize the importance of culture in teaching languages and they started to introduce culture in their language courses. It was against this background that intercultural communication was first introduced to the Chinese. Professor Xu Guozhang published "Culturally-loaded words and English language teaching" in 1982, thus ushering in the study of language and culture in foreign language teaching circles (Xu, 1982). He Daokuan introduced the discipline of intercultural communication in an article he wrote in 1983 (He, 1983). In 1988 the first collection of papers on intercultural communication was published under the title of *Intercultural Communication: What It Means to Chinese Learners of English* (Hu, 1988) and two years later the first reader of intercultural communication was published by the Hunan Education Press (Hu, 1990). In 1991 Edward Hall's *The*

2 They include 跨文化传通, 跨文化交流, 跨文化交际, 跨文化传播, and 跨文化沟通。

Silent Language was published in translation by the Shanghai People's Press (Hall 1991). Articles about how to handle cultural differences in communication appeared in journals and magazines in increasing numbers, but the total number of articles published at the time was still very small. According to the Chinese Journal Full Text Database (CNKI), in 1989 only 11 articles on intercultural communication were published in Chinese journals. The breakdown of these articles is as follows:

Interpersonal communication	3
Translation	2
Linguistics	2
Language teaching	1
Theory	1
Miscellaneous	2

From the above we can see that articles on language study make up about half of the total. This is a trend that has persisted throughout the history of China's intercultural communication studies. These articles deal with such topics as the cultural connotation of words, pragmatic failures, discourse patterns, and problems involved in translation.

It was during this period that some universities started offering intercultural communication as a course at undergraduate and graduate levels. These include Peking University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Shanghai International Studies University, Harbin Institute of Technology, Zhejiang University, Fujian Normal University and some other universities. At present there must be over a hundred universities in China where one or more courses in intercultural communication are offered. A few universities offer graduate programmes in intercultural communication at both masters' and doctoral levels.

1995 marks a turning point in China's intercultural communication history. Two things deserve our mention here. It was in August 1995 that China's first conference on intercultural communication was held at Harbin Institute of Technology. This was held in conjunction with the 5th IAICS International Conference on Cross-cultural Communication. Attending the conference were over 270 participants and about 120 of them came from overseas. The topic areas include theories of intercultural communication, verbal communication, nonverbal communication, literature and culture, information science, culture and media, and bilingualism. It was during the conference that the China Association for Intercultural Communication came into being. The standing council of the association decided that a conference be held biennially. Since then eight national conferences on intercultural communication have been organized in China and because of the national association and the conferences it organized the influence of intercultural communication grew quickly in academic circles. Up till this year at least 14 intercultural studies centres

have been set up in this country. The close collaboration between Chinese and overseas scholars in this area has been a special feature of China's intercultural communication and some of the conferences were jointly organized. Secondly, it was also in 1995 that the first intercultural communication monograph written by a Chinese scholar was published. This is Guan Shijie's *Intercultural Communication: An Area of Study to Improve Skills in Communicating with Foreigners* (Guan, 1995). In the book Guan made a comprehensive study of intercultural communication and unlike other works published in China he laid emphasis on media studies and international politics. The following year saw the publication of Lin Dajin's *Intercultural Communication Studies: A Guide to Communicating with Britons and Americans* and Wang Hongyin's *Intercultural Communication: How to Interact with Foreigners* (Lin, 1996; Wang, 1996). In 1997 Jia Yuxin published his *Intercultural Communication*, which adopts a sociolinguistic approach to the study of this subject (Jia, 1997). Other works on intercultural communication were published soon after and most of them were written by professors of foreign languages. And most deal with how culture impacts foreign language teaching and learning including the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language and how intercultural communication competence is to be acquired.

Since the beginning of this century intercultural communication in China has taken on some new characteristics. Firstly, the number of publications has increased rapidly. According to the Chinese Journal Full-text Database, in 1999, 573 articles were published in Chinese journals. In 2000 it jumped to 859 and in 2009 the total number of articles reached 5,812. What follows is a table showing the fast growth of published articles on intercultural communication in Chinese journals.

Table 1: Number of articles in Chinese journals
on intercultural communication 2000–2009

Year	Number of articles	Percentage growth over past year	Year	Number of articles	Percentage growth over past year
2000	859		2005	2,748	25.7
2001	1,151	34%	2006	3,596	30.8
2002	1,584	37.6	2007	4,895	36.1
2003	1,831	15.6	2008	5,693	16.3
2004	2,185	19.3	2009	5,812	2

We should note here that the database has as its source 6,642 journals, of which only 37% (2,460) are classified as core or important journals. So a big proportion of the articles included here are what we may call general discussion articles published in less important