

# The Impact of Perceptions of Chinese Culture on Intercultural Communicative and Linguistic Competence in Shandong Province

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Received: August 16, 2025; Revised: September 9, 2025; Accepted: December 30, 2025

## ABSTRACT

This study explored the impact of student's perceptions of Chinese culture on their intercultural communicative and linguistic competence. A mixed-methods approach was used, involving questionnaires from 395 students at three universities in Shandong Province and semi-structured interviews with nine students. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analyses revealed that high perceptions of Chinese culture significantly enhanced both competences, with strong correlations among the variables. Qualitative findings confirmed these results. The study suggested integrating systematic Chinese cultural education and experiential learning into EFL curricula to strengthen cultural cognition and communication skills in a globalized context.

**KEYWORDS:** Perceptions, Intercultural, Linguistic, competence

## Introduction

Culture plays a vital role in the survival and development of a nation (Wang, 2023). In the era of globalization, cultural and economic exchanges among countries have intensified, leading to interconnected and entangled cultural landscapes (Sotshangane, 2002). While globalization facilitates cross-cultural interaction, it also poses challenges to national cultural heritage, potentially diluting distinct cultural identities (Ergashev & Farxodjonova, 2020; Poshakrishna, 2022). For any nation, strengthening its cultural presence globally is crucial, both to maintain

national identity and to enhance international influence (Joseph, 2003; Ozer, 2020).

China has increasingly emphasized the promotion and international dissemination of its culture. Since the 21st century, initiatives such as the "Going Out Strategy of Chinese Culture" (Yang & Cong, 2019) and guidelines on preserving and developing traditional culture (Tomczak, 2017) reflect a strategic effort to strengthen cultural confidence and shape the nation's global image (Xi, 2022). Despite these initiatives, internal focus has limited the extent to which Chinese

culture engages in global exchanges, highlighting the need for effective cultural transmission through education (Wang, 2023).

In this context, intercultural communication (IC) has emerged as a critical competency for individuals in globalized societies (Makhmudov, 2023). English, as a global lingua franca, serves as a key medium for intercultural interaction, and its teaching is increasingly aligned with the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Sevimel-Sahin, 2020; Kusumaningputri & Widodo, 2018). The Chinese government has highlighted ICC as a core objective in foreign language curricula, aiming to develop students' ability to communicate effectively across cultures while preserving national cultural identity (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2018; Qian & Garner, 2019).

However, many Chinese students face the problem of "Chinese culture aphasia," struggling to express cultural concepts and values in English despite possessing knowledge of their own culture (Song & Bai, 2018). In the process of communication with Westerners, they never show the deep cultural literacy and independent cultural character that scholars from ancient cultural powers should have. This issue underscores the need to explore how students' perceptions of Chinese culture influence both their intercultural communicative competence and linguistic competence.

Shandong Province, with its rich cultural heritage and strong educational infrastructure, provides an ideal context for this investigation. University students in the region are expected to act as cultural bridges in the global context, yet research on the relationship among their

perceptions of Chinese culture, intercultural communicative competence and linguistic competence remains limited. This study aims to address this gap by systematically analyzing students' perceptions of Chinese culture, and examining their effects on their intercultural communicative competence and linguistic competence. The findings are expected to inform practical strategies for integrating cultural education into EFL teaching, fostering students' cultural confidence, and enhancing their ability to communicate effectively in a globalized world.

### **Purposes**

1. To examine Chinese university students' perceptions of Chinese culture in Shandong Province.
2. To investigate the effects of students' perceptions of Chinese culture on their intercultural communicative competence.
- 3 To explore how students' perceptions of Chinese culture influence their linguistic competence in the context of English foreign language.

### **Hypothesis**

H1: Students' perceptions of Chinese culture are hypothesized to have influence on their intercultural communicative competence.

H2: Students' perceptions of Chinese culture are hypothesized to influence their linguistic competence.

H3: There is significant relation among students' perceptions of Chinese culture, intercultural communicative competence and linguistic competence.

### **Benefit of Research**

Integrating Chinese culture into English education benefits teachers, students, and the nation. For teachers, it

enriches lessons, enhances engagement, and broadens students' cultural perspectives. For students, connecting their native culture with language learning boosts motivation, improves linguistic skills, deepens cross-cultural understanding, and fosters critical thinking and cultural adaptation, addressing the "cultural aphasia" issue. At the national level, promoting Chinese culture through education strengthens cultural confidence, supports China's storytelling internationally, and encourages youth to appreciate and preserve their heritage. Overall, cultural integration cultivates both individual competence and collective cultural awareness.

### **Research Process**

Step 1: Conduct a literature review and examine related studies and find the research gap. For the research design, this study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative method.

Step 2: Collect data through the questionnaire and semi-structured in-depth interviews with Chinese university students in Shandong Province.

Step 3: Analyze the collected data. Quantitative questionnaire data are processed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses. Qualitative interview data are coded and thematically analyzed to complement and interpret the survey results.

### **Population and Sample**

The research was conducted at three comprehensive undergraduate universities in Shandong Province. The total undergraduate population across these universities was 23,974 students. A sample of 400 sophomore students was selected using a convenience sampling

method, targeting students who had completed at least one year of college English courses. Sophomore students were selected to ensure adequate exposure to English learning and intercultural communication activities, avoiding first-year students' inexperience and the time constraints faced by third- and fourth-year students. The sample maintained a balanced gender representation to enhance the reliability of finding

### **Instruments**

#### **(1) Pilot study**

As for the pilot study, student involved through convenient sampling methods. This approach allowed for practical selection of participants, ensuring they were readily available and willing to engage in the initial testing phase. Approximately 50 students were recruited to participate in a questionnaire survey and three students for interviews. The pilot testing aimed to assess the reliability and validity of the survey among students. Feedback gathered during this phase informed adjustments to the instruments before full-scale implementation in the main study. This method ensured that the research tools were well-prepared and suitable for evaluating the intended constructs effectively in subsequent stages of the research.

#### **(2) Questionnaire:**

The questionnaire consisted of demographic questions and closed-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale. It incorporated items from established instruments, including the Intercultural Communication Scale (Liu & Fang, 2017) and the Chinese Cultural Knowledge Scale (Yang & Cong, 2019). The closed question contained 35 items assessing students' perceptions of

Chinese culture, intercultural communicative competence, and linguistic competence through a 5-point Likert scale. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods, including reliability and validity assessments, employing SPSS software. The questionnaire's reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.87 across all dimensions, and an overall alpha of 0.956, indicating excellent internal consistency.

### **(3) Interview**

The interviews of nine students aimed to explore deeper insights into the impact of students' perceptions of Chinese culture and on their communicative competence and linguistic competence. Interviews were conducted in Mandarin to ensure participants could express themselves fully and lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. The interview instrument was developed based on literature review and pilot feedback, ensuring clarity and relevance. Qualitative interview data were transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed thematically to supplement and enrich the quantitative findings with detailed contextual understanding.

## **Data Analysis**

### **(1) Pilot Study Analysis**

The pilot study aimed to validate the reliability and validity of the research instruments. During this phase, descriptive statistical analysis was applied to process the preliminary data. Specifically, means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages were calculated to assess the initial effectiveness of the research tools and to examine the distribution of the data. The results of the pilot study informed necessary adjustments to the

questionnaire design and interview guidelines, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the subsequent data collection.

### **(2) Questionnaire Data Analysis**

Quantitative data from 395 valid questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS (Version 27). Descriptive statistics provided an overview of participants' demographic characteristics and responses across students' perceptions of Chinese culture. Pearson correlation was conducted to examine the relationships among perceptions, intercultural communicative competence, and linguistic competence. Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the predictive effects of cultural perceptions on students' intercultural and linguistic outcomes. Prior to analysis, assumptions for parametric tests—normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity—were verified. Construct validity was further examined using exploratory factor analysis, ensuring the robustness of the findings.

### **(3) Interview Data Analysis**

Qualitative data from nine semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using software. A thematic analysis approach was employed to identify recurring patterns, while content analysis quantified keyword frequencies. To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, triangulation with quantitative findings, peer debriefing, and member checking were applied. The qualitative analysis provided deeper insights into students' perceptions of Chinese culture and its impact on their intercultural communicative and linguistic competence, complementing the quantitative results and strengthening the overall validity of the study.

## Research Results

### (1) Descriptive Findings

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, with 395 valid responses retained after excluding invalid entries. Respondents were 41.27% male and 58.73% female, all aged between 19-21. In terms of academic discipline, 45.8% were from humanities and social sciences, 32.4% from science and engineering, and 21.8% from other fields (education, arts, business, etc.), ensuring diversity in background. There is a better balance about the participants in gender, major and so on. Thus, it is good for the further research and data.

Regarding Chinese cultural knowledge needs, the top areas students wished to improve were universal knowledge (including festival traditions and celebrity information). This indicates that students attach equal importance to the behavioral dimensions of cultural learning and to the underlying value systems and everyday knowledge embedded in cultural practices. The findings highlight a strong demand for targeted cultural learning, especially in relation to behavioral norms, value orientations, and common cultural knowledge.

**Table 1** Aspects of Chinese Culture Students Wish to Improve

Description	Count	Percentage
A. Common behavior (e.g., ways of greeting, how to respond to compliments, etc.)	84	61.59%
B. Common knowledge (e.g., festivals, celebrities, etc.)	72	53.43%
C. Common values (e.g., what people consider important in life and society)	75	55.36%
D. Common beliefs (e.g., what religious beliefs or philosophies influence people's lives)	51	37.98%
E. Common perspectives on things (e.g., people's judgments on current events)	63	47.00%
F. Others (e.g., arts, customs, cuisine, famous scenic spots, etc.)	50	37.55%
Total	395	100%

### (2) Quantitative Findings

#### Correlation Analysis

This study explores the Pearson correlation among awareness perceptions of Chinese culture, intercultural communicative

competence and linguistic competence. The data for each indicator is analyzed using the mean value method. Statistical software is used for the correlation analysis, and the Pearson correlation results are as follows:

**Table 2** The Analysis of Person Correlation

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Perceptions of Chinese Culture</b>	<b>Intercultural Communicative Competence</b>	<b>Linguistic Competence</b>
Perceptions of Chinese Culture	1		
Intercultural Communicative Competence	0.682	1	
Linguistic Competence	0.546	0.782	1

The correlation coefficient between perceptions of Chinese culture and intercultural communicative competence is 0.682, reaching significance at the 0.01 level. This suggests that the stronger a student's sense of identification with and understanding of their own culture, and the higher perceptions and their intercultural communicative competence.

The correlation coefficient between students' perceptions of Chinese culture and linguistic competence is 0.546, indicating a moderate positive correlation, which is also significant at the 0.01 level. This suggests that the higher students' perceptions of Chinese culture, the higher their linguistic competence. This may be because a deep understanding of one's own culture helps students better grasp the contextual meanings of both their native language and foreign languages, thereby enhancing language learning effectiveness.

The correlation coefficient between intercultural communicative competence and linguistic competence reaches 0.782, showing a strong positive correlation, which is also significant at the 0.01 level. This result suggests that students with stronger intercultural communicative

competence tend to have higher linguistic competence. The improvement of linguistic competence not only helps students communicate more effectively in intercultural contexts, but also enhances their language application skills through the accumulation of intercultural communicative experiences. The two aspects complement each other. This finding supports the interactive relationship between language learning and intercultural communicative competence, indicating that linguistic competence is not only a tool for intercultural communicative but that intercultural communication practices can further facilitate the development of linguistic competence.

### **Regression Analysis**

To further explore the critical factors influencing these competencies, this research selects perceptions of Chinese culture as independent variables, while intercultural communicative competence and linguistic competence serve as dependent variables for regression analysis. The results (Table 3) show that the independent variable demonstrated significant explanatory power for both dependent variables ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 3** The Analysis of Model Summary

Model Summary						
Dependent Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Standard Error of Estimate	F	Significance
Intercultural Communicative Competence	0.682	0.465	0.464	0.31592	345.972	0.000
Linguistic Competence	0.546	0.298	0.296	0.43511	168.991	0.000

For the regression model with intercultural communication competence, the model yielded an R value of 0.682 and R<sup>2</sup> of 0.465, indicating that perceptions of Chinese culture explained 46.5% of the variance. The regression coefficient (B = 1.214, t = 18.6, p < 0.001) confirms a strong positive effect, suggesting that higher perceptions of Chinese culture are associated with better intercultural communicative competence. For

linguistic competence, the R value was 0.546 and R<sup>2</sup> was 0.298, with the regression coefficient (B = 1.168, t = 13.0, p < 0.001) indicating a moderate but significant positive influence. This implies that students with greater understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture tend to have stronger linguistic competence, although the explanatory power is lower than that for ICC.

**Table 4** The Analysis of Regression Results

Regression Results				
	Constant	Awareness Perceptions and Attitudes of Chinese Culture On ICC	Constant	Awareness Perceptions and Attitudes of Chinese Culture on English Linguistic Competence
B	-0.075	1.214	0.043	1.168
Standard Error	0.073	0.065	0.101	0.09
t	-1.021	18.6	0.422	13
Significance	0.308	0.000	0.674	0.000

Independent Variable: Awareness Perceptions and Attitudes of Chinese Culture

The regression analysis results confirm that perceptions of Chinese culture exert a significant positive effect on both intercultural communicative competence (B = 1.214, p < 0.001) and linguistic

competence (B = 1.168, p < 0.001). The effect is stronger for intercultural competence, where the model explained 46.5% of the variance, compared to 29.8% for linguistic competence.

## Hypothesis

Furthermore, this study identifies a close interrelationship among perceptions of Chinese culture, intercultural communicative competence, and linguistic competence, where these variables mutually reinforce each other. Both correlation and regression analyses show that the perception of Chinese culture, as a core

variable, plays a positive and facilitating role in enhancing these competencies. This outcome not only enriches the understanding of the integrated influence of cultural cognition on language learning and intercultural communication but also validates the rationale behind Hypothesis 3.

**Table 5** Hypothetical Results

Hypothesis		
H1	Students' perceptions of Chinese culture are hypothesized to have influence on their intercultural communicative competence.	Supported
H2	Students' perceptions of Chinese culture are hypothesized to influence their linguistic competence, particularly their ability to express Chinese culture in English.	Supported
H3	There is significant relation among students' perceptions of Chinese culture, their intercultural communication and linguistic competence.	Supported

In conclusion, the empirical analyses robustly support the proposed hypotheses, highlighting the pivotal role of students' perceptions of Chinese culture in cultivating their intercultural communicative competence and linguistic competence.

### (3) Interview Findings

The interview results are organized around three core themes: perceptions of Chinese culture, the influence on intercultural communicative competence, and the promotion of linguistic competence.

Firstly, the students generally demonstrated a rich understanding and strong interest in traditional Chinese culture. Secondly, students' perceptions of Chinese culture significantly enhanced students' intercultural communicative competence. Interviewees stated that a deep

understanding of their native culture helped improve their adaptability and confidence in intercultural settings. Lastly, students' perceptions of Chinese culture positively influenced linguistic competence, particularly in vocabulary acquisition, spoken fluency, and the ability to express cultural nuances.

## Discussion and Conclusion

### Discussion

#### (1) Objective 1

The results demonstrate that Chinese university students generally exhibit positive attitudes, strong cultural awareness, and rich knowledges of Chinese culture, that is a high level of perception of Chinese culture. Quantitative data revealed a high mean score ( $M = 4.12$ ), indicating a high level of identification with and

understanding of cultural elements such as traditional festivals, philosophical thought, and classical literature. This is consistent with findings from previous studies (e.g., Gao & Liu, 2020; Wang, 2023), which suggest that cultural heritage remains a key component of students' identity formation.

The qualitative interviews further confirmed that students take pride in their cultural roots and are motivated to explore and share cultural knowledge. However, differences were observed in the depth of understanding and engagement with modern cultural developments, as some students were more focused on traditional aspects than on contemporary innovations. This indicates that while cultural pride is prevalent, there may be a gap in perceptions of China's evolving cultural landscape, echoing observations by Chen (2018) that cultural education in universities often emphasizes the past over the present.

These findings also invite a reconsideration of how Chinese culture is taught in university settings. The overemphasis on traditional and historical content, while essential for identity formation, may inadvertently limit students' understanding of the dynamic, evolving nature of contemporary Chinese culture. As Hall (1990) argued, cultural identity is not fixed but constantly negotiated through discourse and practice. Therefore, a more balanced cultural curriculum that incorporates both classical and modern elements—such as digital media, youth subcultures, and global Chinese cultural expressions—could help cultivate a more comprehensive cultural perception. This would not only deepen students' cultural pride but

also prepare them to engage with others in more contemporary, relevant terms.

## **(2) Objective 2**

The findings of both the correlation and regression analyses confirm that students' perceptions of Chinese culture significantly contribute to their intercultural communicative competence (ICC). A strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.682$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and substantial predictive power ( $R^2 = 0.465$ ) were identified, suggesting that students who have a deeper understanding and higher perception of their native culture are better prepared to engage in intercultural dialogue.

This supports Byram's (1997) model of ICC, which emphasizes the importance of cultural knowledge and identity in facilitating meaningful intercultural exchanges. It also aligns with Deardorff's (2006) framework, highlighting cultural self-awareness as a prerequisite for interpreting and respecting other cultures. The interview data provided nuanced examples, such as students using traditional symbols (e.g., Spring Festival, Confucian values) to explain Chinese perspectives and establish rapport with foreign peers.

Notably, students who demonstrated higher cultural sensitivity were also more reflective and respectful in their communicative behavior, embodying what Fantini (2009) describes as "intercultural empathy." This supports the notion that cultural perception is not only cognitive but also behavioral and affective in nature. However, the presence of students who prioritized linguistic accuracy over cultural content also points to pedagogical gaps, suggesting a need to balance language instruction with cultural competence training.

Beyond confirming established theoretical models, this study reveals a deeper interrelationship between cultural empathy and communicative adaptability. Students with strong cultural perceptions often demonstrated flexibility in navigating cultural misunderstandings, suggesting that cultural perception serves not merely as background knowledge but as a behavioral compass during intercultural encounters. This echoes the argument by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) that intercultural competence is co-constructed through mindful communication. It also points to the need for language education to move beyond static culture lessons toward experiential, reflective learning—such as role plays, case studies, and intercultural narratives—that allow students to practice empathy and perspective-taking in authentic scenarios.

### **(3) Objective 3**

The statistical results indicate a moderate but significant correlation between perceptions of Chinese culture and linguistic competence ( $r = 0.546$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), with an explanatory power of  $R^2 = 0.298$ . This suggests that perceptions of Chinese culture contributes to, but does not fully determine, linguistic competence. Students with strong cultural foundations tend to express themselves more fluently, especially when discussing culture-related topics.

These findings support the concept of “content-based language learning,” wherein culturally rich content provides meaningful contexts for vocabulary development, discourse practice, and pragmatic competence (Snow, 2001). Furthermore, students’

exposure to cultural texts and idioms appears to enhance their semantic and inferential skills in English, aligning with Kramsch’s (1993) argument that language and culture are inseparable in communicative practice.

Nevertheless, the interviews also revealed that some students viewed language skills as independent from cultural learning, highlighting a persistent misconception in language education. As Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) emphasize, effective language learning requires the integration of intercultural perspectives, rather than treating culture as an “add-on.”

Importantly, this research sheds light on the motivational and cognitive mechanisms through which cultural familiarity enhances linguistic competence. When students draw upon familiar cultural concepts, they not only communicate with greater fluency but also exhibit more confidence and engagement, particularly in speaking and writing tasks. This supports Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1978), which posits that meaningful context and prior knowledge scaffold higher-order language functions. Hence, integrating culturally meaningful content into English language instruction goes beyond mere knowledge transfer; it functions as an effective pedagogical strategy to stimulate linguistic potential and enhance cognitive engagement.

### **Conclusion**

This study has presented a comprehensive analysis of the data collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, aiming to address the three core research objectives. Drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative methods, the findings provide a multifaceted

understanding of how Chinese university students perceive their native culture and how their perceptions of Chinese culture influence their intercultural communicative competence and linguistic competence. The results confirm that students' perception of Chinese culture play a pivotal role in shaping their intercultural communicative competence in global contexts. The integration of statistical evidence and interview insights ensures the validity and depth of the conclusions drawn. The study systematically addresses the research questions, offering comprehensive interpretations of the principal findings.

The research validates the proposed hypotheses, highlighting a dynamic interplay between culture, communication, and linguistic proficiency. It further emphasizes the importance of embedding cultural education within foreign language teaching to foster globally competent individuals who can confidently serve as cultural ambassadors. These insights have significant theoretical implications for intercultural communication models, particularly in non-Western educational contexts, and offer practical guidance for curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and policy development aimed at enriching cultural learning and language acquisition.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the study's findings, universities should integrate national cultural content, especially elements of local culture into foreign language curricula to simultaneously enhance students' intercultural communicative competence and linguistic competence.

Courses should balance traditional and contemporary cultural topics, using case studies, debates, role-play, and comparative analysis to strengthen cultural cognition and language expression. Teachers can embed cultural materials into vocabulary and grammar instruction, employ multimedia resources, and organize cultural activities such as exhibitions, contests, and international exchanges. These approaches foster cultural pride, critical thinking, and adaptability, enabling students to express Chinese culture effectively in English.

At the institutional and policy level, universities should invest in cultural curriculum development, create academically rigorous teaching materials, and promote interdisciplinary collaboration among language, humanities, and education faculties. Jointly designed "Language + Culture" programs, industry-academic partnerships, and policy-supported initiatives, such as funding for cultural dissemination projects, pilot programs on cultural export, and exchange opportunities, will strengthen cultural inheritance and innovation. These measures not only enrich language education with distinct Chinese characteristics but also cultivate graduates who can confidently represent Chinese culture in global contexts.

### **Acknowledgements**

Foremost acknowledgment is extended to the advisor, whose dedicated guidance, support, and care were invaluable to the success of this research. Sincere appreciation is also conveyed to Rangsit University for providing a supportive academic environment and essential resources, as

well as to all professors and staff whose academic and practical assistance contributed significantly to the completion of the study.

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