"I finally marginalized myself from the mainstream": An Autoethnography Study of Chinese International Student's Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Abstract

In the higher education market, the cross-border flow of international students has become increasingly apparent. For Australia, China has been a major student source and most of these students have been enrolled in the higher education sector. Such a phenomenon has rendered the innovation of higher education management necessary, and its socio-cultural influence has attracted attention from the Australian government. This study suggests that international students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) deficits could influence their self-perceptions thus compromising their ability to communicate with peers. Using a qualitative research approach, the study explores the extent to which China's College English influences Chinese international students' intercultural performance and unpacks the reasons for their behaviours. An autoethnography of a Chinese international student was provided to indicate that the experience from both home and host countries would constitute a habitual thinking pattern that could exert an enduring impact on individuals. Via critically engaging with Byram and Morgan's three dimensions of ICC and Byram's model of ICC, the participant's ICC was analysed, and her conceptions of culture and language were discovered. This study advocates more meaningful explorations about English curricula and highlights the need for forming a caring and humane society and tapping the value of international students in the era of globalisation.

Keywords

Chinese international student, intercultural communicative competence (ICC), China's English education, College English Curriculum (CEC), autoethnography

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Introduction

English has become a lingua franca in the current globalised world to conduct international communication in a broad range of areas, including business, technology, and culture. With the growing significance of the English language, many countries have placed English education in their compulsory education system to ensure their national talents have a good command of the English language. In this regard, the English curriculum is no longer restricted to the local level, for the fact that the English language is intertwined with the power relations in the global landscape. As Kachru's (1986) three-circle model specifies, the linguistic background is in line with a country's global position. Specifically, the traditionally English-speaking countries (e.g., Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the USA) are in the inner circle while countries using English as an official language are situated in the outer circle (e.g., India, Pakistan, Singapore, the Philippines; Kachru, 1986). The expanding circle contains countries where English is considered as a foreign language, such as China and Japan (Kachru, 1986). Such power relations have created an asymmetrical state in the higher education market.

In 2020, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that English-speaking countries received more than 40% of all international students worldwide. Specifically, OECD (2013) defines international students as those who cross the national borders for the purpose of education. Based on the data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, China had 993,367 mobile students abroad in 2019, which comprised 17.8% of the world international students' cohort. The USA, the most attractive destination country, has received over 370,000 Chinese international students – students who have Chinese nationality and cross the border to pursue education opportunities – during 2019 to 2020, with more than 133,000 of them participating in graduate-level courses (United Nation, 2020). Given this cross-border flow, it is vital to study graduate-level Chinese international students who, according to Yang et al. (2006), are challenged in inner-circle countries for their limited levels of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), despite their 4 – years of College English learning experience.

Since the 1980s, English education in Chinese universities has been accorded predominant importance (Xu & Fan, 2017). From 1985 to 2018, there have been five major rounds of College English Curriculum (CEC) innovations in China. For example, in 2004, a trial implementation of CEC was introduced with a focus on the improvement of students' speaking skills. However, Xu and Fan (2017) point out that the understandings of CEC are varied and often superficial. Moreover, what is missing from this field of study is the investigation of Chinese international students' perception of CEC in terms of developing ICC. Considering this, this article introduces the rarely incorporated actors of CEC studies – masters-level Chinese international students, who have received China's college education before participating in Australia's universities. By way of investigation, this study seeks to offer insights into this cohort and to harness the talents of international students by identifying their unique learning needs with reference to their previous education experiences. As such, the study hopes to uncover the potential of international students in contributing to the socio-cultural development in their host countries.

The next section will illustrate the development of the concept of ICC. In so doing, a body of literature would be drawn on to demonstrate the trend of higher education internationalization and to identify the need to investigate Chinese international students' experience in their host countries. The study will then outline autoethnography as a research method, specify the demographic information of the participant and the process of data collection. Following the narrative of the participant, the study would provide a discussion to identify limitations of CEC curriculum regarding the cultivation of ICC and point out the misalignment between real-life practice in Australia and Chinese international students' perception of intercultural communication. As such, the implications of the present study would be offered in terms of supporting Chinese international students' development of ICC. In this way, it hopes to innovate Australian universities' international students support service to promote the operation of international education.

The Development of ICC

Given that the trends of globalization show no sign of abating, educators need to equip their students with ICC. The notion of ICC could date back to Hymes's (1972) study, which points out the mastery of appropriate language interpretation and information interaction based on socio-cultural context could be one of the requirements of these who study English as the second language (L2). This notion is further expanded by Byram (1997) who conceptualizes ICC and refers to it as "the ability to interact effectively with people of cultures other than one's own" (p. 297). In this regard, ICC includes the interpersonal skills to interact with people in a non-judgmental manner and the consciousness of the diversity of value, religion, and

behaviors. Currently, various types of the ICC model have emerged, such as the compositional models (Hunter et al., 2006) and the developmental model (Bennett, 1986). These studies symbolize the flourishing in the field of ICC. Despite that, research that offers international students' perspectives on the relations between ICC and English curriculum is relatively scarce.

Within the field of English education, Byram's (1997) work has been influential to the understanding of the cultivation of ICC. He identifies attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction and critical cultural awareness as five core elements of ICC; and lists linguistic, intercultural, sociocultural and discourse competence as the general aspects of the ICC. In 1994, Byram and Morgan proposed three dimensions to decode a student's level of ICC – attitude, knowledge, and behavior. These theoretical frameworks have provided vital guidance for subsequent research, and the links between the dimensions and model have been uncovered.

In the dimension of attitude, scholars identify sensation-seeking as an interrelated factor of attitude (Arasaratnam, 2004; Morgan & Arasaratnam, 2003). Sensation seekers would be enthusiastic about exploring novelties in social practices and thus being positive in cross-cultural interactions (Morgan & Arasaratnam, 2003). Meanwhile, anxiety uncertainty management theory is advocated by Gudykunst (2005) and has been widely used in the measurement of the individual-level variables – global attitude – and intercultural communication. In the dimension of knowledge, Wiseman (2002) develops Caffi and Janney's (1994) concept of anticipatory schemata, which identifies the relationship between the skills of interpretation, interaction, and knowledge. Arguably, the behavior is the reflection of cognitions. In this regard, Arasaratnam and Banerjee (2007) highlight the significance of ethnocentrism in hindering intercultural performance. How the ethnocentric mindset and other personal variables interact with each other and present in the behaviors. While Byram's analyzations of ICC have attracted enduring attention, studies from international students' perspectives were rare, and there are few studies with incorporate the consideration of international students' learning experience to address challenges that occur in their host countries.

ICC and CEC

In recent years, research on ICC and CEC has increased significantly and could be divided into three categories. Firstly, scholars have investigated CEC educators' perceptions and practices in teaching ICC (Gu, 2016; Zheng; 2017). On the other side, CEC learners' levels of ICC have been evaluated as one of the learning outcomes of English education (Chen & Zheng, 2019; Ren, 2011; Yang et al., 2013). Nevertheless, some studies focus on pedagogical innovations (Clark-Gareca & Gui, 2019; Yang & Fleming, 2013). By so doing, scholars hope to integrate the learning of English language with the cultivation of ICC so that the effectiveness of College English education could be promoted in China (Gu, 2016; Yang, et al., 2013). What is rare in the literature is the consideration of international students – as non-traditional English learners – to investigate their perceptions of ICC and how education affects their intercultural communicative performance in inner-circle countries.

In inner-circle countries, research into Chinese international students' ICC has increased as China becomes the top source of international students worldwide (Heng, 2020; Holmes, 2006). Reportedly, the Australian higher education sector is admitting an increasingly higher number of Chinese international students (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2021). According to the Australian department of education, skills, and employment (2021), 726,174 international students were enrolled in Australian schools with 51% of them located in the higher education sector. China is specified as the top source country that takes up 26% of the international student cohort (Department of Education, Skill, and

Employment, 2021). The current literature has studied the level of international students' ICC and identified a set of challenges that they have during cross-cultural communications (Holmes, 2006; Marginson, 2012; Yang et al., 2006). Consequently, negative overseas experiences are reported by Chinese international students, including marginalization, perceived racism, and identity conflict (Holmes, 2006; Marginson, 2012). In the literature, it is possible to find the study of international students in terms of their ICC from the perspective of school leaders and educators (Clark-Gareca & Gui, 2019; Marginson, 2012). For example, in Australia, studies find that educators and school leaders acknowledge the positive influence that international students bring in higher education sectors, such as the internationalization of the curriculums, and the promotion of cultural diversity (Marginson, 2012; Sawir, 2013). Some have proposed ways to develop international students' ICC, for example, the intercultural interactions with culturally diverse peers have been considered as one of the meaningful methods (Pretorius et al., 2019). Despite these efforts, few studies focus on the relationship between international students' intercultural knowledge and their educational sojourns from the perspective of international students (Czerwionka, et al., 2015).

Although the existing literature sheds some light on Chinese international students' ICC in inner-circle countries (God & Zhang, 2018), the influence of China's college English education is underplayed. Post-Vygotskian scholars argue that education practice in real-life settings would form a special type of inter-psychological bonding between learners and educators (Wells, 1999; Wertsch, 1985). While such a learner-educator relationship could scaffold learners to accomplish the tasks that they are incapable of doing without assistance (Vygotsky, 1978), it could constitute "banking education" where the minds of learners are considered as an empty vault that can absorb pre-selected knowledge (Freire, 1970). Thus, it would be vital to revisit the education that Chinese international students receive, to uncover their unconscious stereotypes of cultures. In this regard, a profound understanding of them could be acquired so that their potential for contributing to social networks and cultural diversity in their host countries could be realized.

Moreover, most of English education has the tendency to simplify the meaning of ICC and highlight cultures from inner-circle countries as the knowledge that English learners need to be aware of (Zheng, 2017). In this sense, L1 English users' norms would be normalized during English education, leading cultures from inner-circle countries to be placed in a privileged position in the global cultural system. Accordingly, English learners from expanding countries would be encouraged to assimilate to the L1 users' cultural norms. In this regard, they may find themselves in a "third place" which is located between heritage culture and the target one (Kramsch, 1993). Hence, in English learning, there is a tendency to perceive cultures as a tightly structured system and thus limiting intercultural communication in a fixed-line. In this regard, English education may become a tool to achieve cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). Considering that, a cognitive transformation is urgently needed to shift the understanding of ICC from the conventional model to a more flexible one. By so doing, English learners from expanding countries could develop a flexible conception of culture (Cetinavci, 2012; Douglas & Rosvold, 2018); the hybridity of human agency in the globalized world could be understood; and the intrinsic nature of English to achieve homogeny could be weakened. Thus, the present study would pay special attention to the cultural bias that has rooted in Chinese international students' mindset and be critical about the power relations within China's English education. This study sought to fill the void in the literature by offering insights from one Chinese international student to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the Chinese international student's level of ICC?
2. How does the CEC influence the Chinese international student's intercultural communicative performance in Australia?

Methodology

Qualitative research promotes a generous understanding of human behaviors and emotions (Reed-Danahay, 2017). Thus, instead of generalizing human behaviors, autoethnography provides nuanced, specific information about actions, lives, and emotions. Such a methodology is widely viewed as a response to post-colonial power where social difference and political, cultural identities were ignored (Adams et al., 2015). Driven by the needs to recognize the diversity of human culture and the uniqueness of human beings, researchers started to re-consider the limitation of "scientific" knowledge in explaining the identities, emotions, and beliefs (Reed-Danahay, 2017). Meanwhile, the consciousness about colonialism arises the crisis of representation. Thus, researchers are encouraged to take more transparent, innovative approaches to underpin social science. Given that, the value of autoethnography in interpreting modern societies and human beings is acknowledged (Hayler, 2011).

Autoethnography, as a qualitative phenomenological methodology, is considered as a rallying point for those who advocate more humane understandings in social science studies (Allen-Collison, 2013). As Allen-Collison (2013) suggests, autoethnography "offers a variety of modes of engaging with self, or perhaps more accurately with selves, in relation to others, to culture, to politics" (p. 282). Hence, such a methodology allows researchers to critically analyze their cultural experiences and systematically interpret their cultural experiences. Meanwhile, it effectively combines autobiography and ethnography, which enables researchers to investigate the studied subject from an insider's perspective (Morse, 1994). As such, autoethnography is adopted in this study so that one Chinese international student's logic of thinking could be unpacked and the understanding of truth within this sociocultural context could be obtained. In the way of investigation, the connection between the participant's real-life situations and her co-participants would be elaborated. By so doing, a deeper, clearer self-consciousness could be formed, and strong reflexivity would be created to differentiate the research subject and other social actors (Reed-Danahay, 2017).

While autoethnography is considered as a personal process for the use of researchers' personal life experiences, it is also arguably a highly social practice (Reed-Danahay, 2017). Specifically, autoethnographers would display the way they interact with other social actors and demonstrate the interplay between different social forces and their life experiences. Thus, from a public perspective, autoethnography presents the complexity of the researchers' identities in personal, cultural, relational, and professional dimensions (Adams et al., 2015). By telling a vulnerable story, the current study explores one international student's struggles and embrace their vulnerabilities. Evidently, the majority of autoethnography research was conducted by educators in the position of the observer (Brandenburg, 2008); consequently, students' behaviors were then being interpreted in a restricted, personal scope. In this sense, their authentic thoughts and inner selves were overlooked. Under this circumstance, their voices were silenced, and their rights may be denied. Therefore, this study strives to present the real-life experience and real-time thinking of a Chinese international student. It hopes to empower international students by reclaiming their voice and calls for more attention to this cohort.

The Participant and Authors' Contexts

Autoethnography is an approach that allows researchers to present personalized accounts by drawing upon their experiences to extend the understanding of societal phenomena (Allen-Collison, 2013). As Ellis (2007) indicates, the writing of autoethnography is "a back-and-forth movement between experiencing and examining a vulnerable self and observing and

revealing the broader context of that experience" (p. 4). Hence, it is critical to understand the identities and positions of autoethnographers. This study is written from Author 1's positions, which are considered as marginal and silenced in the host country. As an Asian student in Australia, author 1 embodied privilege and disadvantage. In many aspects, author 1 is privileged – she has financial support from her parents to pursue an academic degree in Australia, received English education at a young age, and joined summer camps in different countries. Beyond recognizing her advantage, the cultural, social, and educational contexts of Australia and China may be revealed. Paradoxically, author 1 could also be considered as a disadvantaged member in Australia. Her race, gender, and culture are arguably different from the mainstream in Australia, and this could lead to her fears and insecurities in the Australian society. As such, autoethnography is deemed as an ideal approach to present the struggles that author 1 had in the process of studying a master's degree in an Australian university and demonstrate the ways that she makes sense of the world. In this study, author 1 intends to show the unnoticed side of international students' experiences by examining her field notes where the daily experiences are recorded, the conflicts between the inner self and outer self are elaborated, and the fluctuations of mood are described.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, three dimensions of ethics were taken into consideration. The concepts, namely procedural ethics – gaining approval from institutional review board committees, and ethics in practices – addressing ethical issues in the research process, is raised by Guillemin and Gillam (2004). While in the local context, the use of autoethnography does not require approval from the committees, the design of this study was carefully examined to ensure that both authors consent to the disclosure of personal information. In the research process, adequate human caring was provided, and emotional support was offered by author 2 to deal with ethically critical moments in a proper manner. Moreover, relational ethics is given sufficient consideration. As Ellis (2007) defined, relational ethics highlights the importance of recognizing relationships and connections between researchers and participants and requiring researchers to be genuine by "acting from their hearts and minds" (p. 4). This consideration is particularly critical in autoethnography, such as the current study, where researchers and participants have prior relationships. By practising relational ethics, a harmonious relationship is established by the authors to promote the development of the study.

Data Generation

In the process of data generation, Borton's reflective practice model was applied as a framework so that the data could be ordered systematically. By following Borton's (1970) cue questions: (1) What, (2) So What, and (3) Now What, the first author's reflection as the primary data was presented in this study. Such a practice is further advocated by Schön (1983), who identifies that practitioners' practice could be developed and improved through reflecting in, on and for action. As the participant of the present study, the first author was a Chinese international student who enrolled in a master program of an Australian university. Before participating in an Australian university, she finished her undergraduate study in Mainland China and received a College English education accordingly. She achieved the certification of College English Test (CET) 4 and 6 in China, and her English capacity was evaluated as CEFR C1 (IELTS 6.5).

The primary data here was originally from the first author's field notes of her experience in Australia. In her reflective writing, she documented her reactions in intercultural communications and self-reflections of intercultural performances and self-evaluation of ICC

from August 2019 to December 2020. The seventeen-months period covers her transition from a first-year graduate student to a second year one and incorporates her three semesters of academic study and two terms of volunteering. The field notes were written on a weekly basis by author 1 to record her Australian experiences and her insights into the relationship between these experiences and her previous educational journey. In this way, author 1's authentic experiences were documented, her true feelings were cached and her vulnerability and struggling were uncovered.

Data Analysis

After team discussion, author 1 analyzed the data, which was then backed and reviewed by author 2. We integrated multiple theories into the narrative to enhance the trustworthiness of the data analysis, as one of the expectations of autoethnography study "should make a contribution to the research community and have utility value" (Le Roux, 2017, p. 220). To develop a strong case for study validity, we have related author 1' personal experiences to the broader social and cultural experiences of others with similar educational situations (Allen, 2015). In the process of data analysis, regular meetings were scheduled to ensure effective communication between the researchers.

In this study, the aim for data analysis is explanatory than descriptive, meaning that the studied phenomenon is explained based on its origin rather than its outer appearance (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 62). An adult learner – author 1 – could be seen as an object with specific features and manifestations, constructed by her prior learning experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). As such, data analysis focuses on the process – author 1's experiences – not the object. Vygotsky's (1981) identification of four general fundamental genetic stages in the process of behavioral development is utilized as a theoretical framework in presenting the experience of the participant. Vygotsky (1981) specifies phylogenetic (individuals' undergoing natural/biological evaluation), cultural-historical (the socio-cultural environment of human activities), ontogenetic (humans' lifespan) and micro-genetic (immediate situations) domains. In the current case, the cultural-historical domain interplay with the first author's lifespan in the domain of ontogenetic, making the social experience becomes a significant element in her development. In other words, this study brings author 1's particular period of an individual life into the spotlight to investigate her interaction with society. Her movements – the dialectic of a human subject and the Australian society – are grounded by time and space, which constitute the cultural-historical domain of the current study.

This study combined Borton's (1970) reflective practice model – (1) What, (2) So What, and (3) Now What – with Vygotsky's four general fundamental genetic stages and developed the analytical framework (See Figure 1). Firstly, all documented cases were first listed chronologically to understand the transition of author 1 from the ontogenetic domains (Vygotsky, 1981). This stage – what, identified the micro-genetic domains – immediate situations – of the individual cases, the captured the object's emotional changes and documented her social interactions. This phase emphasizes the analysis of the emerging emotions of the first author during her education sojourn. It aims to discover the repeating feelings in her daily interactions within the university and community. In the phase of so what, human lifespan, cultural-historical contexts would be added into analysis. Author 1's participation in these social events were then regarded as the actions that took place in a particular point of her lifespan, and author 1's emotional relations toward individual situations were viewed as the reflections of her previous experiences and understanding of the cultural-historical contexts. During this process, the ongoing development of the first author was uncovered, which could be messy and irregular in nature. By exploring the first author's data alongside the literature, this study was able to capture the features of behaviors with the

consideration of her identity and sociocultural background. These practices provided rich information into the investigated case. In the phase of now what, all data would be reviewed by both authors to understand the process of human development.

Figure 1
Analytical Framework
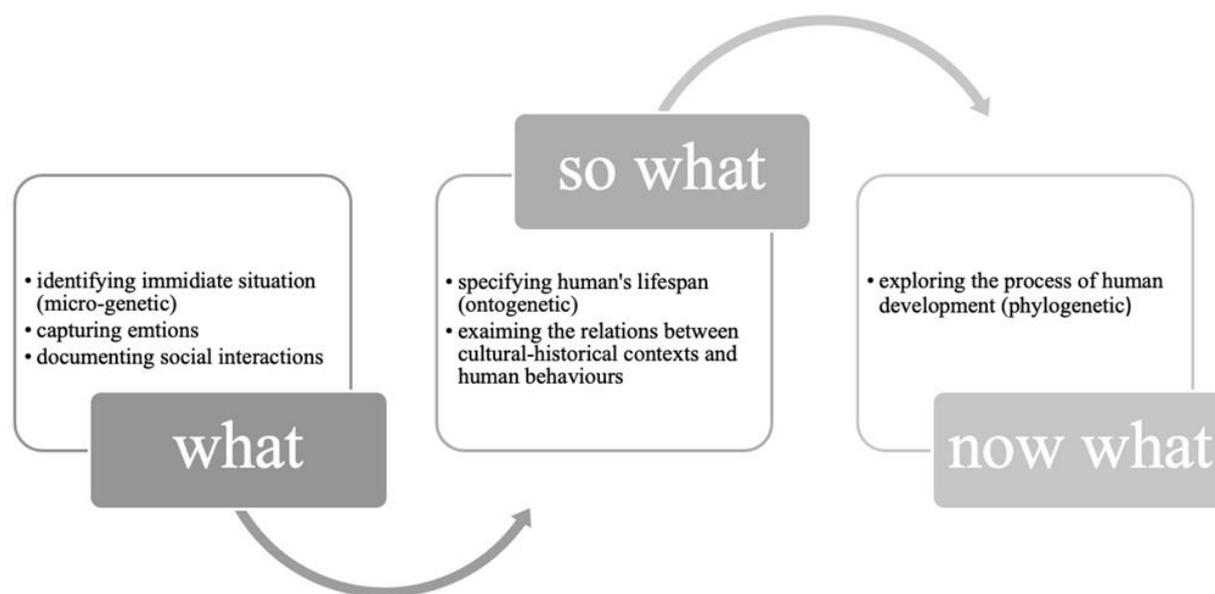
Results

To present the development of ICC from the perspective of a Chinese international student, three vignettes were selected to present the reflections of author 1 in her mental process of development. Her inner conflicts in the process of making sense of the world were highlighted.

"I Was a 'Successful' English Learner"

The learning of English, for me, was an ongoing practice. Being the only child in a newly developed family, my parents strived to provide me with English learning opportunities by exposing me to English language environments. Thus, I was the youngest learner in the English classes where I was able to access authentic English materials from either the US or the UK. As time goes by, I developed a blur idea that the English language was situated in the central of the world language system. Such an idea was further enhanced when I entered the Chinese public school system which was known for their high-achieving students and excellent test results. Consequently, I was able to develop my linguistic knowledge which establishes a foundation for me to pursue cross-border education. However, in these public schools, there was little room for innovation in curriculum and assessments for they were firmly designed by the authority. Even though educators were authorized to utilize meaningful pedagogies to improve learning outcomes, the use of the traditional teacher-centered model remained a dominant stage. Hence, these practices adhered to Confucius's teaching styles and followed local political philosophies. As such, the sense of hierarchy was gradually formed in my mind, and the power relations were legalized internally.

There were similarities in receiving an English education in schools and universities. In classes, the educators would use tapes – record the L1 users' reading of the textbooks – as the teaching aids. Then, they would require all students to memorize some sentences and phrases which were deemed as the key points to communicate with L1 speakers. To achieve the expected learning goal, I listened to these tapes repeatedly in the hope to enhance my memory. Meanwhile, the pronunciation has been attached a great value, meaning that students who have American or British accents would win high praise from the educators. In this sense, the ability to speak like a native speaker was considered as a kind of talent, and an aspect of English skills. In the aspect of assessment, the introduction of Chinese history and culture was a vital part. Students needed to translate these contexts from Mandarin to English. In this aspect, my strategy was imagining scenarios where I was presenting these cultural or historical materials to Americans or Britishers. In the college, educators iterated the fact that the certifications of CET 4 and 6 were the *only* official proof of the English ability. Moreover, these certifications were listed as the requirement of graduation. As a result, I focused on preparing for these exams and had no interest in changing the rules. For me, the meaning of learning College English was two-fold – earning credit from peers and educators; and passing the exams. Notably, I willingly accepted the meaning that the authority attaches to the English language.

"I Have Unrealistic Expectations of Cross-Cultural Friendships"

In 2019, I enrolled in an Australian university where the interaction with linguistically diverse people via English became a daily practice. In general, I could communicate with people at different social or academic events. However, I found myself becoming extremely anxious when communicating with other L2 users. Such a feeling prompted me to examine myself, and my initial answer was – I was afraid to offend them and embarrass myself in a public way. Moreover, their appearances, clothes and pronunciation gave me a sense of insecurity for I had zero understanding regarding their culture and social norms. Despite my deficiencies in cultural understanding, I held no intention to connect with them at a deeper level, as studying abroad for me, at this time, was about absorbing advanced knowledge and learning "authentic" English. Holding this idea, I was more willing to talk to local peers who utilize English as their first language and join community events. However, around six months later, I realized that I cannot achieve my expectation in building friendships with local peers as I expected. In most of the cases, the conversations were limited to the topics of academic areas, and the connections remained on a superficial level. Even though I was invited to some parties, such as a housewarming party, I found myself quickly losing interest in the games and constantly feeling tired to engage in conversations. As a result, I was frustrated and disappointed in my social life.

"I Was Trying to Survive from Self-Questioning"

These unrealistic expectations regarding cross-cultural friendships, to some extent, objectified local peers as I was trying to align them with the images that I learned from textbooks. In Australia, the media was not always kind to Chinese international students. Thus, during cross-cultural communication, I strived to prove that the descriptions of the Chinese were wrong. Such a mindset makes me extremely sensitive when interacting with either L1 or L2 users. For example, I would repeatedly delete and re-edit every sentence when using social platforms. Moreover, because of my assumptions, including that people would use stereotypes on me, I felt hurt in response to innocent questions, such as why did you choose Australia as your learning destination? Eventually, I stepped back to my cultural and social comfort zone

and built my social network within a particular group. In the process of interacting with culturally similar peers, I was surprised that my case was not isolated. Many international students were having the same psychological experience. After intensive discussions, I realized that my attitude toward both L1 and L2 was ignorance. For L1 speakers, my assumptions led to my negative feelings, such as disappointment, which hindered me from presenting my "real" personality. Cognizant of media influence, I marginalized myself from the mainstream. For L2 peers, I deliberately positioned myself outside the international students' group which could be viewed as disrespectful and unfriendly.

Commonly, it was believed that English proficiency is the key point to conduct cross-cultural communication. However, the lack of cultural knowledge toward other countries, the assumptions toward L1 people, the unconscious judgments in the cultural hierarchy and the inability in justifying look past the media's descriptions drag me into the mire. In the process of intercultural communication, I was struggling to re-establish my identity and trying to survive self-doubt. It was my sincere hope that I could communicate with all linguistically, culturally diverse people with dignity and pride.

Discussion

In this section, Byram and Morgan's (1994) dimensions of ICC would be utilized to decode the participant's level of ICC in terms of the dimensions of attitude, knowledge, and behaviors. While the participant's narrative is the source of investigation, it is believed that her behaviors, thoughts, and experiences are weaved from subjective elements, including cultural-historical contexts, immediate situations, and objective ones (Vygotsky, 1981). Therefore, to offer a holistic analysis of the participant's intercultural performance, recent concepts and theories would be drawn on to identify the influence of socio-cultural environments and the participant's education experience. Moreover, a cautious approach was taken to examine the data, so that individual differences would be identified, and personal bias would be minimized.

ICC and Knowledge

Knowledge has been stressed in the evaluation of ICC for its functions in promoting the effectiveness of cross-cultural communications. In Byram's (1997) model, knowledge has been linked to critical cultural awareness, an influential factor of ICC. In Byram and Moran's (1994) analysis, it accounts for a wider range, including understandings of lifestyles, cultural differences, stereotypes, and cultural diversity. Drawing on the concept of anticipatory schema – an interlocutor's ability to predict information and behaviors concerning the immediate or future situations of a conversation – the participant presented the incapacity of anticipating in multicultural settings (Caffi & Janney, 1994; Wiseman, 2002). For example, she (the participant) found it challenging to choose appropriate topics when communicating with other L2 English users. Meanwhile, she was intimidated to express her opinions. These negative feelings have accumulated and then created a psychological barrier for her to step out of the cultural comfort zone (Gudykunst, 2005). Arguably, the lack of intercultural knowledge has a direct impact on her ability to interpret and relate to others and thereby compromising her abilities to function in international settings as a cultural representative and individual actor (Wiseman, 2002).

Paradoxically, the participant's intercultural performance was rather satisfactory in local events. Such a phenomenon uncovers the conventional teaching objectives of communicative competence in China's English education. Evidently, the English language is considered to bridge the understanding of American/British cultural norms in China's English curriculum (MOE, 2015). In the aspect of assessment, the ability to communicate with L1

English users is deemed as the goal of cultivating a student's English communicative skills (MOE, 2015). A case in point is that the participant devoted a large amount of time to learn how to introduce Chinese historical sites to imaginary American tourists. As such, the understanding of cultural diversity becomes the null curriculum, English is then being precepted as a language tool to the British and American culture, rather than linguistic franca for global communication. For people making judgments based on their own representational categories, the recognition of people would be fitted into set ideas (May, 2005). This ignorance of critical cultural awareness would narrow the scope of culture and then limit the participant's exposure to the diversity of the world.

The misconception of English leads to the idealization of Anglo-American culture. For both China's English learners and educators, they practice English in a specifically socio-cultural, historical context; thus, they would be likely to reproduce culture and power unconsciously (Foucault, 1972). As the participant suggested, it was widely believed that British and American accents are the textbook of English pronunciation, making the ability to acquire these accents a symbol of well-educated elites. These perceptions idealize the images of L1 English users, simplified the function of the English language, and constitute the utopian ideas of Western cultures (Foucault, 1972). Meanwhile, the traditional banking method – the authority of educators and the inactive role of learners – has been commonly used in the participant's previous learning experience (Freire, 1970). In the global field of culture and language, Anglo-American culture and English are arguably situated in the inner circle (Kramsch, 1993). In this sense, the inclination of L1 users' cultural norms in English education becomes a powerful tool for achieving homogeny and increasing the soft power of inner-circle countries.

English educators who have accepted cultural hierarchy would reproduce these ideologies as a hidden curriculum in their educational practices, and then reinforce the power relations of the world. Such an argument is supported by Vygotskian scholars, whose studies indicate that education practice in real-life settings would establish the inter-psychological bonding between learners and educators (Wells, 1999; Wertsch, 1985). Hence, educators can have a powerful influence on learners in terms of their cultural, social understandings. The fact that the participant believed the interaction with local peers would be helpful to her to learn authentic English is a case in point. Such a mindset reflects her understanding of the global hierarchy, which can be considered as an unintentional outcome of Chinese English education. As Appadurai (1996) points out, the introduction of language policy in an education system could create the local imagination of the global, meaning that the practice of English education is not only about the language, but also the beliefs of language ideology. As Choi (2016) suggests, language ideology can be viewed as the "norms and expectations" of the language. As presented in this study, the participant considered native speakers to have superiority to L2, and longed to assimilate to native speakers' social circle. Such a mindset could be dated back to her English education experiences, where the educator asserted that "authentic" English materials should be from either the US or the UK. However, she lamented that it is difficult to establish relationships with local peers. Consequently, resistance and confusion were accumulated in her heart to constitute the defensive attitude. Moreover, she viewed herself as a deficient member of the Australian communities. On the other side, these rooted stereotypes of the cultural hierarchy may discourage students from exploring these unfamiliar cultural and ethnic groups. These findings are in line with Sawir's (2013) arguments –international students benefit Australian higher education in terms of creating a meaningful cultural experience for domestic students. In this sense, the concept of international students has been generalized and the diversity within this cohort has been overlooked. In this regard, the formation of positive, beneficial relationships between different groups of international students could be ignored. As presented in this case, the participant's previous learning experience and her current practice

compile and form a vicious circle that restricted her development of ICC. In educational sojourn, she was disadvantaged by her position – a citizen of China and a student of Australia – and was not given full attention by either of them. In other words, she was marginalized by her dual status. The limited attention and educational resources could undermine her development of ICC. Such a situation may, in turn, weaken the link between different ethnic groups which might lead to the polarization in her host country (Kuper, 1977).

ICC and Attitude

The attitude dimension includes the ability to understand, be empathic adaptative and flexible in multicultural settings (Byram, 1997; Byram & Morgan, 1994); hold a positive attitude toward other cultures (Arasaratnam, 2004). Such a trait is closely linked to anxiety, which has been interpreted through anxiety uncertainty management theory (Gudykunst, 2005) and individual-level variables, including ambiguity tolerance. In the current study, the participant exhibited anxiety during one-on-one communication. Evidently, she repeatedly deleted, re-edited sentences when chatting with peers with different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, she was anxious if the receiver did not reply to her and worried that she was offensive. The increasing level of anxiety signifies the participant's self-confidence is endangered. Following Gudykunst's (2005) prediction, the participant would not be able to make accurate predictions and interpretations of the receiver's massage. In such cases, she communicated on automatic pilot, meaning that she would apply her own cultural frames for reference (Gudykunst, 2005). Theoretically, the participant needs to be mindful and cognitively manage her anxiety, so that she could be aware of new information and alternative perspectives (Gudykunst, 2005). However, instead of simplifying the participant's anxiety by condemning it as a personal flaw, it is vital to unpack the complexity of her psychological development process of ICC.

The possession of a positive attitude requires the ability to manage both anxiety and uncertainty (Gudykunst, 2005). In this study, the participant also presented low-level sensation seeking (LSS) and a high level of uncertainty avoidance (HUA), suggesting her struggle to control the sense of uncertainty. In particular, she was intimidated to approach people from different ethnic groups and held a defensive attitude to people outside her social network and was reluctant to step out of the cultural comfort zone. These attitudes need to be studied under socio-cultural backgrounds rather than in an isolated perspective. Hence, the socio-cultural environments of the participant's home country and host country could contribute to her formation of LSS and HUA. Arguably, the participant was raised in an HUA cultural country where there is a high level of power distance, meaning that the leaders are unapproachable and controlling (Hofstede, 2001). In this case, individuals are cultivated to be submissive and thus decline their willingness to accept risk (Hofstede, 2001).

While the participant's reaction echoes her home culture, it contradicted the belief that the possession of economic capital could generalize social trust which would lead to the eagerness regarding sensation seeking and taking risks (Doney et al., 1998). Indeed, Chinese international students could be classified into the privileged group in their society. However, it is questionable whether they could fall into the same class in their host country. Thus, the declining level of familiarity, the shrinkage of economic capital and the increasing uncontrollable situations would considerably reduce the participant's psychological comfort in their host country and in turn, amplify the uncertain feelings, increase anxiety level, and contribute to negative attitudes. For international students, they may find themselves in the third place where they have been classified as others. As Marginson (2012) points out, the nation-boundedness education could lead students with high status at home to become a member in a subordinated status in the host country. In Australia, the increasing global flows

of international students build up pressure on the government to address the legal and social issues of temporary residents as well as the cultural plurality within the society (Marginson, 2012). As a result, international students "are located in a 'grey zone' of regulation with incomplete human rights, security and capabilities" (Marginson, 2012, p. 497), making their protection becomes a rhetorical slogan. As such, the well-being of international students was unnoticed by the public when they were struggling to function in the communities. As presented in the results, the participant was a sensation seeker who was enthusiastic about exploring the Australian socio-cultural environment (Morgan & Arasaratnam, 2003). For example, she went to parties and social events willingly and attempted to engage with different activities. However, after six months, she found herself only anxious, lacking confidence, and feeling insecure, and thus decided to step back to her comfort zone. Such a situation could be explained by Gudykunst's (2005) anxiety uncertainty management theory, which highlights the negative correlation between anxiety, uncertainty, and effective intercultural communications. These elements accrue and would then reflect on international students' attitudes and behaviours.

ICC and Behavior

While some certain level of uncertainty and anxiety in intercultural interactions could be unavoidable, scholars highlight the detrimental effects of ethnocentrism in the development of ICC (Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2007). Such an element could be presented on individuals' behaviors and then deteriorate their intercultural performances. Following Byram and Morgan's (1994) definition, behavior extends to not only respectful manners, politeness, and social etiquette, but also a wider range of social graces. In this regard, the evaluation of behaviors may remain in a superficial understanding. Thus, the present study seeks to explore the origins of the participant's behaviors in terms of her educational experience.

Based on the participant's narrative, she presented the ethnocentric tendency when evaluating peers' behaviors. Paradoxically, she also exhibited an inclination to Anglo-American ideologies. Such a self-contradictory viewpoint could be deemed as the result of strong education intervention regarding domestic ethnic nationalism and the aggressive progress of cultural homogeny. Evidently, in the CEC test, the focus is centralized on translating traditional Chinese works, such as *The Story of Stone*; social development, such as mobile payment; and national solidarity (College English Test Band4 and Band6, 2019). In this case, ethnic nationalism education becomes the hidden curriculum of English education, for it contains the propaganda that the commonality of culture, the ethnic group would be robust enough to surpass other forms of commonalities (Smith, 2010). In this process, the usage of the English language has been limited at the local level, meaning that learners' chance for creative interpretations of sociolinguistic knowledge has been deprived and eventually, the local culture has been centralized.

In modern societies, language itself is a symbol of power (Foucault, 1972), and the fact that China's education system accorded great importance to the English language contributes to the inner conflict of Chinese English learners, like the participant. Hence, as Foucault (1972) predicts, the discourse word would become a vital social element that constitutes social power relations. In this sense, despite the ethic nationalistic education which intends to form "a limited system of ideas and beliefs of politics and society" (Smith, 2010, p. 96) in the process of education, the learning of English – as a social phenomenon – transmits and re-enforced the concept of cultural hierarchy. As such, the participant possessed a semi-colonial and semi-national mindset which hinder her development of ICC and then compromised her intercultural performance.

Following Byram and Morgan's (1994) study, this section demonstrates the examination of the participant's ICC with the consideration of her English learning experience. What is highlighted here is the misconception of the English language, the utopian view of Anglo-American cultures, the significant influence of CEC and the current life experience in Australia. Based on the discussion, the participant arguably has a basic level of linguistic knowledge for her to engage in the host country. However, she suffered from the consequence of these unconscious transmitted stereotypes, which constitute psychological barriers and hinder her development of ICC and intercultural communicative performance in her educational sojourn. While the studies of international students have uncovered the positive relationship between the global flows of students and the development of higher education, the current study points out the insufficient attention to international students regarding their psychological issues. It is advocated that it is vital to avoid the generalization of the image and cultural habits of international students. Through understanding this cohort with humanity, a more inclusive society could be formed. By so doing, international students' potential to improve the cultural environment of their host country could be realized.

For the first time through this study, the relationship between international students' ICC, intercultural performances and Chinese English education was explored. By drawing on Byram and Morgan's (1994) analyzation, this study identifies the participant's limitations in understanding the diversity of culture which constitute to her submissive attitude on cultural hierarchy; her under-developed abilities in anxiety management, which reflects her insecurity in the host country; her presentation of nationalism and her tendency of assimilating to Anglo-American ideologies could be considered as one of the educational outcomes. A novel finding witnessed in this study is that English education in the expending country could potentially reproduce the cultural and political dynamic. For English learners, English education forms their initial understanding of power relations and hierarchy in the globalized world. The current study limits its discussion on the participant, and thus the variable concerning heritage status, and personalities could be individualized. However, the consideration of cultural contexts with other factors, such as social network, status in different countries, environments at the institutions, would be a meaningful avenue to explore given that the increase of international students is one of the most apparent cross-border flows.

By considering international students as cultural agencies in their host country, the study uncovered the marginalized aspect of a Chinese international student. Specifically, her previous learning experience and social status in the home country could intensify her inferior self-conceptions and then considering herself as an outsider within the cohort of international students. This might be an issue in the Chinese international students but is not necessarily the case elsewhere. While individual international students may develop different understanding of culture, language, society, history of the world, what matters about developing ICC, this study suggests that prior English education experiences could hinder their development in ICC and may undermine their abilities to contribute a more inclusive, friendly environment in their host countries. In this regard, it is suggested that more attention should be taken to examine the current design of the textbooks to provide a channel for learners to explore the outside world with the assistance of English. This innovation can revise the hidden curriculum from using English to understand Western countries to utilize English to communicate with the world. Meanwhile, educational courses should be organized to provide English educators with a space to reflect on their current practices, especially their understanding of culture. Indeed, the role of English education in cultivating young generations with ICC is worthwhile to study in future research. Admittedly, this aim can be only attenable through the collaboration of all stakeholders, including internationalized schools, policymakers, and social organizations. In the current study, the development of ICC is studied from the perspective of a Chinese international student. While some novel points are identified, it is necessary to investigate this

issue from different angles. For example, it could be meaningful to investigate the effectiveness of student service in internationalized universities in terms of promoting international students' ICC. Meanwhile, the booming of the globalized education industry in Australia signifies the increasing number of international students who are likely to use English as a second language. In this sense, it is critical to understand the diversity within the international students' group to better support them and cultivate their ICC. Thus, studies into culturally and linguistically different international students would be needed in the field of ICC studies. In sum, this study hopes to feed-forward to an ongoing scholarly investigation, debate, and research at the junction of international student development and globalized education.

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