

A Multidimensional Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence

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The essence and composition of intercultural communicative competence have long been core proposition in academic research. Existing theories are mostly limited by Western-centrism and the separation of value and competence dimensions. Based on the dialectical thinking of the distinction between Dao (the way) and Qi (the instrument) in Chinese philosophy, this paper constructs a model of intercultural communicative competence integrating attitudinal values and metacognition. With the four-stage system of “appreciating one’s own culture, appreciating others’ cultures, achieving harmony in diversity, and pursuing universal unity” as the core of attitudinal values, the model takes the metacognitive knowledge dimension of self-cognition, other-cognition, task-cognition and strategy-cognition, as well as the metacognitive behavioral dimension of monitoring, reflection and regulation as its practical approach, revealing the dialectical relationship of the unity of Ti (substance) and Yong (function) and the circulation of knowledge and practice among all dimensions. Breaking through the instrumental rationality limitations of existing models, this study elevates intercultural competence from skill adaptation to a spiritual practice of civilizational symbiosis, and provides a new paradigm with both local subjectivity and academic inclusiveness for the theoretical construction of intercultural communicative competence in the era of globalization.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, attitudinal values, metacognition

Introduction

Against the backdrop of great changes unseen in a century, global civilizational interactions feature deepening dialogue and coexisting conflicts, with intercultural communicative competence evolving from an individual quality to a core support for national soft-power. The urgency of constructing a Chinese-characteristic intercultural competence theory is highlighted in cultural mutual learning discourse, new liberal arts talent training in higher education, and enterprise internationalization needs. Fei Xiaotong’s cultural self-awareness proposition is highly practical today: Breaking the passivity of losing voice and blind following in cultural collisions, and upholding local cultural subjectivity in effective cross-border communication have become pressing theoretical and practical issues.

Cultivating intercultural communicative competence is a clear orientation of China’s educational policies, as listed in the Teaching Guidelines for English Majors and College English Teaching Guidelines as a core

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foreign language education goal. Zhang Hongling and Wu Shiqin (2022) noted the essence of foreign language education is intercultural education, focusing on nurturing talents with Chinese feelings and a global vision. Wen Qiufang (2022) emphasized its role in integrating cultural attitudes, cognition, and methods to shape learners' Chinese stance. However, existing practices have deviations: Overemphasizing globalization, some studies de-localize culture, equate diversity with one-way adaptation to heterogeneous cultures, and neglect native cultural cognition and value dissemination—creating tension with cultural self-awareness requirements.

Domestic intercultural communicative competence models rely heavily on Western theories. Though explaining partial interaction phenomena, they have structural limitations: incompatibility with China's "harmony in diversity" ethics, constraint by instrumental rationality, and insufficient interpretation of self-other cognitive dialectics. They also disconnect from local needs like cultural self-awareness, leading to a theory-practice gap with national strategies. Thus, this study, rooted in Chinese philosophical wisdom, attempts to construct an intercultural communicative competence model with local foundations and international dialogue capability.

Literature Review

Constructing Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) models is a core academic proposition. Scholars worldwide have built diverse models, with a consensus that ICC comprises three dimensions: affect, knowledge, and behavior (Dai, 2018, p. 45). However, divergences exist regarding their weight, forming knowledge-dominant, skill-behavior dominant (Spitzberg, 2009; Xu & Sun, 2013), and attitude-morality dominant theories (Gao, 1998; Deardorff, 2009). Essentially, these divergences reflect differing philosophical views on ICC essence: instrumental effectiveness vs. humanistic value symbiosis.

Western research, dominated by positivism, focuses on observable, quantifiable behaviors, ignoring hard-to-measure dimensions like ethics and emotion, resulting in a skill-over-ethics bias. While enhancing model operability, this strips intercultural communication of its humanistic context. Domestic studies acknowledge attitudinal values but lack in-depth theoretical interpretation, remaining confined to skill-based frameworks.

Some scholars have incorporated strategic or reflective capabilities into ICC models (Byram, 1997, p. 44; Sun, 2016; Zhang & Wu, 2022) but treat them as auxiliary, not dynamic cores. Academic circles separate short-term efficacy and long-term value: Most emphasize task effectiveness (Fantini, 2006), while a few focus on long-term goals (Gao, 1998; Dai & Chen, 2015) without a coordination mechanism. This leads to instrumental rationality, disconnecting from Fei Xiaotong's "harmony in diversity" vision and the "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind".

Most domestic models are revised Western frameworks; only a few draw on traditional Chinese culture (Gao, 1998; 2014). They insufficiently highlight native cultural anchors and fail to systemize Chinese philosophical wisdom, resulting in shallow localization.

ICC model construction advances from external to internal, explicit to implicit, moving toward a value leap from egocentrism to mutual understanding and from cultural adaptation to symbiosis. This study, rooted in the Chinese context, constructs an ICC model anchored in cultural self-awareness and centered on metacognition, addressing three questions:

1. How to break skill-based model limitations?
2. How to meet the era's "uphold fundamentals and adapt to changes" demand via theoretical innovation?
3. What are the model's theoretical breakthroughs and practical values?

Model Construction

Cultivating intercultural communicative competence should not be confined to target language cultures, but also emphasize the anchoring value of native culture and cultural self-awareness (Xiao, 2025; Guo & Ma, 2023), while highlighting the core role of attitudinal values and the in-depth value of metacognitive competence (Gao, 1998; Sun, 2016). Based on this, rooted in intercultural communication theories and combined with foreign language teaching rules and China's cultural context, this study constructs an interactive intercultural communicative competence model (see Figure 1). With attitudinal values of “appreciating one’s own culture, appreciating others’ cultures, achieving harmony in diversity, and pursuing universal unity” as its *Ti* (substance), and metacognitive knowledge (“self-other-task-strategy”) and behavior (“monitoring-reflection-regulation”) as its *Yong* (function), the model follows the *Ti-Yong* unity principle to attain civilizational symbiosis.

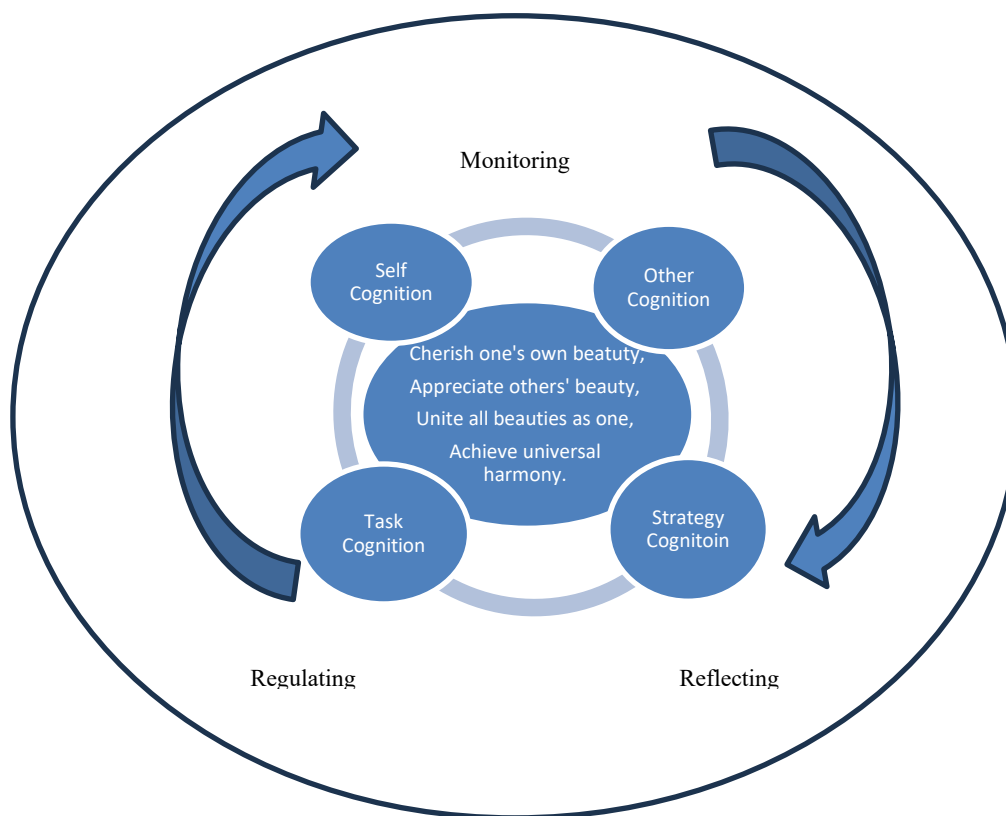


Figure 1. Model of ICC.

In line with academic consensus on intercultural communicative competence dimensions, the model includes attitude, knowledge, and skill. This study argues that it comprises attitudinal values and metacognitive competence, which interact bidirectionally. Metacognitive competence covers metacognitive knowledge (declarative and procedural) and behavior (monitoring, reflection, and regulation). Attitudinal values form the core, while metacognition serves as the path, with *Ti* and *Yong* mutually promoting progress.

Dimension of Intercultural Communication Attitudes and Values: A Four-Stage *Ti* Based on Chinese Philosophy

Attitudes and values are the spiritual core of intercultural communicative competence, reflecting the communicator's value orientation in cultural interaction. Based on Chinese philosophy's self-cultivation-interpersonal

communication-symbiosis logic, Fei Xiaotong's cultural self-awareness theory, and intercultural research core propositions, this study constructs a four-stage progressive system (self-anchoring, other-acknowledgment, dialectical difference cognition, and practical ethics), breaking Western theories' instrumental rationality limitations.

Cultural self-awareness, confidence and appreciating one's own culture: The spiritual anchor. As the starting point, this dimension focuses on rational cognition and emotional identification with native culture. Cultural self-awareness is critical reflection on one's culture (Fei, 1997), and cultural confidence is value conviction based on it. "Appreciating one's own culture" integrates awareness and confidence, avoiding cultural universalism arrogance and nihilism, differing from Western ethnic emotional-focused identity theories (e.g., Huntington's Clash of Civilizations) and going beyond Byram (1997, p. 44) and Gao Yihong's (1998) reflective awareness discussions.

Sincerity-respect intergrowth and appreciating others' cultures: Ethical acknowledgment. This dimension involves dual ethics toward foreign cultures: sincerity (non-hypocrisy) and respect (recognizing others' subjectivity), mutually dependent. "Appreciating others' cultures" transcends superficial acceptance to identify spiritual cores. Unlike Western scholars' behavioral-level respect (Ruben, 1977; Hofstede, 2009) and instrumental anxiety reduction (Gudykunst, 2005), it uses Chinese philosophy to elevate interaction to ethical practice, avoiding utilitarianism.

Seeking harmony in diversity: Dialectical cognition of differences. Based on "appreciating one's own and others' cultures", Fei Xiaotong (1997) proposed "achieving harmony in diversity" as the ultimate attitude. This dimension regards differences as resources, pursuing dynamic coexistence balance instead of homogenization, breaking the relativism-universalism binary opposition, which complements scholars' insufficient clarification on difference handling paths.

Balancing righteousness and interests, prudent adaptation, and pursuing universal unity: Practical ethics. This dimension embodies practical rationality: balancing righteousness and interests (opposing interest-first colonialism and extreme righteousness emphasis), prudent adaptation (adjusting strategies without compromising core values), and pursuing universal unity (linking interaction to the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind). Cultural symbiosis here means mutual nourishment rather than hybridization, forming a positive cycle.

The four stages form a progressive loop: self-awareness (foundation), sincerity-respect (ethical premise), harmony in diversity (dialectical wisdom), and practical ethics (ultimate embodiment). Rooted in Chinese culture, it provides a localized intercultural competence research paradigm.

The Metacognitive Dimension

As the core hub linking internal attitudinal values and external behaviors, the metacognitive dimension's integration of theoretical foundations and practical dimensions is key to advancing intercultural competence. Proposed by American psychologist Flavell (1979), metacognition refers to the cognitive subject's awareness of their own psychological states, abilities, goals, and strategies, manifested in monitoring, reflecting on and regulating cognitive activities—essentially self-monitoring of one's cognitive system.

This study holds that intercultural metacognition comprises metacognitive knowledge and behavior. The former includes self-cognition, other-cognition, task-cognition, and communication knowledge/strategy-cognition; the latter covers monitoring, reflection, and regulation. Echoing Wang Yangming's mind theory of

self-examination, this dimension emphasizes identifying cognitive biases in interaction to unify knowledge and practice, breaking the traditional self-other binary framework into a dynamic cognitive ecology.

The Construction of Metacognitive Knowledge

Self-cognition: Based on introspection, integrating psychological and cultural awareness. Self-cognition encompasses micro-individual cognition (abilities, thinking styles, strategy applicability in language decoding, and cultural interpretation) and macro-cultural cognition (nested interaction of material, institutional and spiritual cultures). It achieves three dialectical unities: rooted openness, dual empathy/adaptation foundation, and identity-innovation balance, embodying Fei Xiaotong's "appreciating one's own culture" through rational cultural value recognition.

Other-cognition: Taking empathy as the path, surpassing binary opposition. Interdependent with self-cognition, other-cognition explores the in-depth logic of heterogeneous cognitive models, establishing intersubjective dialogue. It focuses on individual uniqueness (micro) and systematic cultural logic (macro), supported by Chinese ethics: "Do not do to others what you do not want done to you" (micro-intersubjectivity) and "all things grow together" (macro-symbiosis), sublimating to meaning co-construction.

The synergy of short-term and long-term in task-cognition: From constant-variable principle to symbiosis. Task-cognition coordinates short-term instrumental goals and long-term humanistic values (civilizational dialogue). Rooted in Chinese "constant-variable" philosophy, it balances flexibility and ethical boundaries via righteousness-interest distinction, resolving Western instrumental rationality conflicts, and realizing a leap to civilizational symbiosis.

The cognition of communication knowledge and strategies: From harmony in diversity to prudent adaptation. Communication knowledge (symbolic, rule, and situational) provides a comprehensibility foundation; strategies (dynamic regulation for interaction goals) activate knowledge into practice. The two interact dialectically, consistent with Chinese "harmony in diversity" wisdom, driving intercultural competence evolution from cognition to effective practice.

Metacognitive Behavior: Monitoring-Reflection-Regulation

The metacognitive behavioral level comprises metacognitive monitoring, reflection, and regulation. Metacognitive monitoring refers to real-time tracking and deviation identification of cognitive processes and communication behaviors in intercultural interaction, with cultural sensitivity awareness as its core—including monitoring one's own cognitive operations and real-time interpreting others' responses. It draws on the procedural awareness core of Flavell's metacognitive theory and integrates the dual coding monitoring unique to intercultural contexts, which involves both the accuracy of surface symbol transmission and the adaptability of deep cultural logic. Metacognitive reflection is the critical retrospective analysis of cognitive presuppositions and interaction processes post-communication, centered on the misplaced attribution of cultural logic. It transcends simple evaluations of single interaction outcomes, focusing on cognitive framework limitations and the cultural appropriateness of strategic selection, and uncovers the mechanism of meaning misinterpretation by analyzing the root causes of discrepancies between self-cognition and others' cultural logic. Metacognitive regulation is the systematic correction of subsequent cognition and behavior based on monitoring and reflection results, with the strategic optimization of cultural adaptation as its core. It operates in two clear dimensions: immediate behavioral correction (e.g., language style conversion) for specific interaction scenarios, and long-term cognitive framework

reconstruction (e.g., rethinking cultural values)—a sublimation of repeated immediate corrections that lays a cognitive foundation for broader intercultural interactions.

As a high-level driving mechanism of intercultural communicative competence, the triad of monitoring, reflection, and regulation embodies its value through three progressive systematic functions. Monitoring serves an error prevention function: Real-time process tracking in intercultural interaction controls meaning deviations within a repairable range, aligning with the situational sensitivity requirement in Ting-Toomey's Face-Negotiation Theory by capturing others' face need signals to avoid interaction breakdown due to cultural insensitivity. Reflection delivers a cognitive iteration value: Critical retrospective analysis breaks through empiricist cognitive limitations, driving the shift of intercultural cognition from cultural stereotypes to a dynamic cultural perspective and enabling intercultural competence to move beyond basic rule application to the advanced stage of grasping cultural essence. Regulation has a competence evolution value: This adaptive optimization transcends the limits of single interactions, transforming fragmented experiences into structured cognitive improvement. It constructs an evolutionary pathway for intercultural competence, upgrading it from passive adaptation to active construction and greatly enhancing the cultural appropriateness of interactions. The linkage of the three constructs a metacognitive regulation mechanism with both stability and flexibility, acting as the core driver for intercultural competence to evolve from basic cognitive adaptation to advanced cultural competence.

Critical scrutiny of this metacognitive triad aligns with the introspective spirit of "I examine myself three times a day", demanding a self-reflective attitude to assess the limitations of one's own cultural presuppositions. The dialectical thinking of the *I Ching*—"when in a predicament, one changes; change brings understanding; understanding ensures endurance"—provides Eastern philosophical theoretical support for metacognitive regulation. Its inherent dynamic transformation logic reveals how cognitive systems achieve adaptive reconstruction and sustainable development through active adjustment when confronted with difficulties, sharing a profound theoretical isomorphism with the cognitive process monitoring, reflection, and regulation emphasized in metacognitive theory. This not only endows metacognitive regulation with a trans-temporal and trans-spatial philosophical foundation, but also uncovers the essence of cognitive adaptability in cultural differences: It is not static compromise, but dynamic balance based on the logic of change.

The Dialectical Unity of the Relationships Among Dimensions of Intercultural Communicative Competence: From "Intergrowth of Yin and Yang" to "Universal Unity"

The four-stage attitudinal value system (self-anchoring, other-acknowledgment, dialectical cognition of differences, and practical ethics) constitutes the *Ti* (substance) and *Dao* (way) of intercultural communicative competence, while metacognitive competence serves as its *Yong* (function) and *Qi* (instrument), adhering to Wang Fuzhi's *Ti-Yong* unity. Cultural self-anchoring provides a value benchmark for metacognitive self-cognition; other-acknowledgment injects an ethical context into understanding others. Metacognitive competence exerts its function based on harmony in diversity, balancing righteousness and interests, and prudent adaptation, forming a dialectical unity of "*Ti* determining *Yong* and *Yong* manifesting *Ti*" that breaks Western binary oppositions.

The four elements of metacognitive knowledge embody the *I Ching*'s Yin-Yang intergrowth: Self and other cognition act as Yin-Yang poles, achieving dynamic transformation through "difference perception-deviation

correction”. Task and strategy cognition, as a mediating hub, facilitate conflict-to-symbiosis transformation via constancy-variability and prudent adaptation, forming a complementary Yin-Yang cognitive ecology. The relationship between metacognitive knowledge and ability aligns with Wang Yangming’s unity of knowledge and practice: Knowledge lays the foundation for “knowing”, and ability drives “practicing”. Through the closed-loop spiral progression of “cognition-practice-recognition”, knowledge is refined by practice, and practice gains consciousness from knowledge.

Harmony in diversity, a high-level realm, governs the above dimensions, realizing the leap from difference tolerance to value mutual nourishment via metacognitive knowledge’s Yin-Yang intergrowth and ability’s knowledge-practice unity. Universal unity, the ultimate ethical orientation, anchors all dimensions, forming a closed loop of realm guidance-cognitive support-ability implementation-ethical guarantee. Guided by these two goals, all dimensions of intercultural communicative competence form a dialectically unified dynamic system through *Ti-Yong* and knowledge-practice unity, advancing from cultural self-awareness to civilizational symbiosis.

Significance

The theoretical innovation of the model is reflected in the three breakthrough reconstructions of the research paradigm of intercultural competence: First, through the dialectical logic of the unity of *Ti* and *Yong*, it constructs an interactive system of attitudinal values and metacognitive competence, responding to the limitation of Western models in separating value and cognition. It clarifies how the value anchor of appreciating one’s own culture corrects ethnocentric biases through metacognitive monitoring, and how the ethical orientation of pursuing universal unity provides an ultimate coordinate for task cognition, making value and cognition form a dynamic closed loop of guidance-correction-sublimation. Second, it academically transforms traditional philosophical concepts, making the intergrowth of sincerity and respect the ethical norm of other-cognition, and the principle of constant and variable the balance mechanism between short-term goals and long-term visions in task cognition, realizing the precise implementation of traditional wisdom into theoretical mechanisms. Third, it focuses on the dynamic innovation of the metacognitive system, connecting metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive behavior with the logic of the unity of knowledge and practice, breaking through the static cognitive framework, realizing the synergy of short-term and long-term tasks and the flexible adaptation of strategies, and responding to the core proposition of change and immutability in intercultural cognition.

Conclusion

The model of intercultural communicative competence constructed in this study takes the unity of *Dao* and *Qi* as its theoretical core. Through the dialectical interaction of attitudinal values and metacognition, it achieves three breakthroughs in intercultural competence research: First, breaking through the Western de-culturalized paradigm, it elevates attitudinal values from universal affect to a spiritual anchor guided by cultural self-awareness, endowing intercultural ethics with a local foundation of “knowing not only what is so but also why it is so”; second, surpassing the static cognitive framework, it reconstructs the metacognitive system with the logic of mutual reflection and symbiosis and the principle of constant and variable, elevating cognition from knowledge accumulation to a dialectical tool of dynamic adjustment; third, it elevates the competence goal from instrumental

smoothness to civilizational symbiosis, responding to the fundamental proposition of human coexistence with others in the era of globalization by adhering to the fundamental and adapting to changes. The core value of this model does not lie in the supplementation of existing theories, but in the construction of a new paradigm rooted in local philosophy, taking dialectical thinking as its vein and civilizational symbiosis as its soul: It not only responds to the dilemma of the separation of value and ability in Western models with the unity of Dao and Qi, but also provides a dynamic explanatory framework for intercultural cognition with the intergrowth of Yin and Yang and the unity of knowledge and practice, and further injects theoretical support into the cognitive foundation of the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind with the vision of universal unity.

However, the model still has limitations, such as the lack of quantitative standards for the degree classification of cultural self-awareness and the sensitivity threshold of metacognitive monitoring, which need to be verified and adapted through cross-cultural samples. Future research can be deepened in three directions: first, conducting empirical tests, analyzing the interaction path of attitude-metacognition through structural equation modeling, and developing quantitative evaluation tools including the ethical dimension; second, focusing on scenario subdivision, exploring the adaptation mechanism of the model in extremely heterogeneous cultures; and third, promoting educational transformation, embodying the self-cultivation-based training path into curriculum modules, and realizing the closed-loop verification of theory and practice.

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