



The Relationship between Foreign Literary Work
Reading and Intercultural Competence of
Chinese College Students

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Abstract: This study constructs a scale to investigate Chinese college students' foreign literary work reading situation based on the basic genres of literary works, and to explore the correlation between foreign literary work reading and six dimensions of intercultural competence. Through reliability analysis, the results show that the Foreign Literary Work Reading Scale for Chinese College Students has good reliability. Moreover, the basic situation analysis of foreign literary work reading and intercultural competence development is conducted by Foreign Literary Work Reading Scale for Chinese College Students and Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students (AIC-CCS), which is proposed by Wu et al (2013) ^[1]. Finally, combined with the Pearson Correlation of SPSS, the correlation analysis is performed and reveals that there is a significant positive relationship between foreign literary work reading and intercultural competence. And it has the greatest effect on knowledge of others, the general effect on intercultural communicative and cognitive skills, and the minimal effect on knowledge of self, attitudes and awareness. This research can provide a theoretical basis for foreign language teaching, and also can provide a practical reference for carrying out activities to improve intercultural competence.

Keywords: intercultural competence, foreign literary work reading, Chinese college students

1. INTRODUCTION

Under Chinese President Xi Jinping's initiative of "One Belt and One Road" , China's internationalization process has gradually accelerated. At the same time, intercultural competence is also regarded as a necessary quality of modern talents. So how to improve intercultural competence of students who are the major intercultural contact group has become a heated topic in teaching and research. Most scholars discuss the importance of foreign literary work reading to the intercultural competence development, and put forward the effective method of developing intercultural competence (Jiang, 2016) ^[2]. However, few of the scholars conduct the empirical study on the situation of foreign literary work reading in foreign language teaching. So based on the theory of foreign literary work reading and intercultural competence, this article designs the questionnaire of foreign literary work reading situation and intercultural competence development, then comprehensively explores the influence of foreign literary work reading to the six dimensions of intercultural competence. It can give the guidance for colleges to implement foreign literary work reading activities to improve intercultural competence of students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Foreign literary work reading

In the broadest sense, literature is the written record of man's spirit, thoughts, emotions and aspiration. It involves all aspects of social life, like geography, history, politics, economics, education and so on. And it can be divided into different genres: essay, fiction, poetry and drama. Reading literary works can make students know more about cultural background knowledge and improve their sociolinguistic competence. So it triggers

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the attention of scholars to research reading situation and reading difficulties of foreign literary work reading for students and the teaching strategies that teachers need to adopt, especially in high school education stage (Cai, 2013) ^[3]. In addition, western scholars have investigated the dilemma of reading foreign literature works for second language learners (Urlaub, 2012) ^[4], and tested the benefits of reading foreign literary works in collegiate language education (Thoms et al., 2017; Raees et al., 2019) ^{[5][6]}.

2.2 Intercultural competence

In 1959, Edward Hall first proposes the concept of intercultural competence in his work *The Silent Language*. As for its definition and components, different scholars present different views.

For its definition, Byram (1997) ^[7] claims that it is an individual's ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries. Spitzberg (2000) ^[8] considers it broadly as appropriate and effective behaviors in a particular context. It is also defined as "a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself". (Fantini, 2006) ^[9]. Later, Peng (2015) ^[10] states that based on their intrinsic and external qualities (such as: knowledge, attitudes, skills and awareness), communicators can effectively and appropriately communicate and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds in the context of intercultural communication. And the two core concept of intercultural competence can be concluded: special context and effectiveness, appropriateness.

For components, Byram (1997) proposes a widely accepted five-factor composition: attitudes, knowledge, skills (the skills of interpreting and relating; the skills of discovery and interaction), critical cultural awareness. Dearsdoiff (2006) ^[11] notes three dimensions of ICC that depict the movement between attitudes, skills, and knowledge and comprehension at the individual level and the internal and external outcomes at the interaction level. Fantini (2006) describes it as intercultural competence, cross-cultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, ethnorelativity and global competencies. Wu, Fan, and Peng (2015) find that ICC involve six main factors: knowledge of self, knowledge of others, attitudes, intercultural communicative skills, intercultural cognitive skills, and awareness in the Chinese context. And this article follows these dimensions to evaluate the intercultural competence of students.

2.3 Review on the relationship between foreign literary work reading and intercultural competence

As a kind of rich teaching materials, foreign literary work plays an important role in second language teaching (Tevdovska, 2016) ^[12]. It triggers a lot of scholars to explore the relationship between them. Some scholars discuss how foreign literature teaching should contribute to the development of students' intercultural competence in a intercultural context (Zeng, 2006; Zhang, 2007; Xu, 2014; Chen, 2015; Mao, 2017) ^[13]. More specially, most of the scholars pay attention to the issue of how to improve students' intercultural competence by British and American literature course teaching (Li, 2011; Xu & Li, 2014; Shen et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2015; Guan et al., 2018) ^[14], also Japanese literature teaching (Yu, 2012; Li, 2016). And even more, scholars directly research on the media role of foreign literary works in intercultural communication (Wang et al., 2011; Zhang, 2013; Jiang, 2016). Besides, some scholars explore the importance of literary work reading on the development of intercultural awareness (Xu, 2014; Chen, 2015; Wang, 2015), also mentioned by students' master thesis (Xiao, 2011; Zhou, 2012).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research questions

- (1) How is the reliability of Foreign Literary Work Reading Situation Scale for Chinese College Students?
- (2) How is the basic situation of foreign literary work reading and intercultural competence development for Chinese college students?
- (3) What's the relationship between foreign literary work reading and Chinese college students' intercultural

competence?

3.2 Participants

The participants of this study are 712 undergraduate students (384 males/328 females, 457 freshman/219 sophomore/32 junior/4 senior) who are chosen from eight universities in China. From the demographic information in the questionnaire, 69.8% are major in science and engineering, 14.3% are major in literature and history, 5.5% are from arts major and 10.4% are from other majors. Among those participants, 76 (10.7%) have the overseas experience for periods ranging from 15 days to one year mainly in the four countries: Japan, USA, Thailand and Singapore; 390 (54.8%) have previous intercultural contact experience with native speakers of English.

3.3 Instruments

This study takes a quantitative method with questionnaire. And it mainly includes three parts: the first one is basic information for students, including gender, grade, major, English examination score, overseas experience and intercultural contact experience; the second part is foreign literary work reading situation scale, involving the four main dimensions and 17 descriptive items; and the third part is the measurement scale of intercultural competence for Chinese college students by Wu et al. (2013), involving six dimensions and 28 descriptive items. This study constructs the Foreign Literary Work Reading Situation Scale for Chinese College Students, based on the four basic genres of foreign literary works (essay, fiction, poetry and drama) and reading situation of Chinese college students. In order to test the internal consistency of this scale, the reliability analysis is operated. And the results show that the value of Cronbach's Alpha is 0.926, so this scale has a high degree of reliability.

3.4 Data collection and analysis

The questionnaires are collected by the way of face-to-face and post. A total of 800 questionnaires are issued, and the effective response sample is 712 which account for effective rate of 89%. And then SPSS statistical software is adopted for data analysis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability analysis

To test the internal consistency of Foreign Literary Work Reading Situation Scale with the 17 descriptive items, the reliability analysis is measured by Cronbach's alpha. Not only the reliability analysis for total scale is conducted, but also the four main dimensions (foreign fiction, foreign essay, foreign poetry and foreign drama). And the results show that the values of Cronbach's alpha are high, ranging from 0.737 to 0.926, which are greater than the threshold value 0.7 that is considered to be criteria for demonstrating internal consistency of the established scale. So from the presentation of the Cronbach's alpha value, it can be seen that foreign literary work reading situation scale for Chinese college students has a high degree of reliability. The detailed information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability analysis of Foreign Literary Work Reading Situation Scale

Factors	Items	Cronbach's α	
		Part	Total
foreign fiction	5	0.850	0.926
foreign essay	3	0.880	
foreign poetry	3	0.737	
foreign drama	6	0.884	

4.2 The basic situation for foreign literary work reading

Through the data presentation, college students' foreign literary work reading situation can be seen clearly.

As for the reading time, most of the students spend less than 30 minutes a day on reading literary works, as shown in figure 1. As for the reading pathway, most students tend to buy books on their own and to read books through digital ways, as seen in figure2.

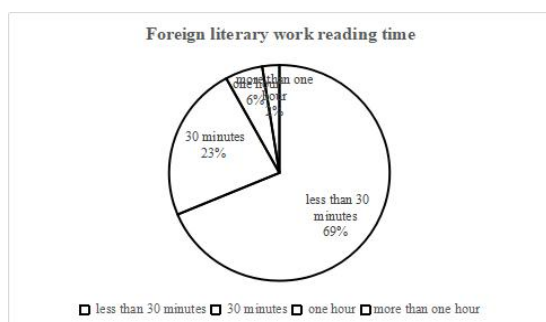


Figure1. Foreign literary work reading time

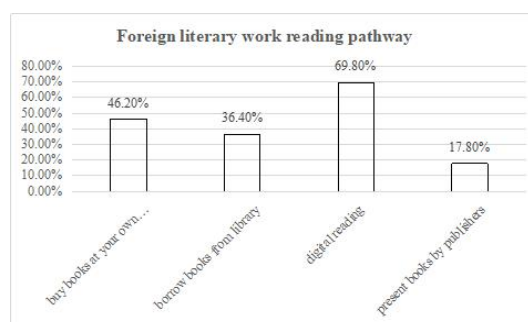


Figure2. Foreign literary work reading pathway

As for the main reading types, it can be divided into four dimensions: foreign fiction (item1-5), foreign essay (item6-8), foreign poetry (item9-11) and foreign drama (item12-17). From the overall presentation, the frequency with which college students read literary works is generally low, with the mean are lower than 3, ranging from 1.57-2.62. Thereinto, college students tend to read foreign fictions and foreign poetry, since the mean of foreign fiction are higher than 2, and the mean of foreign poetry are close to 2. In comparison, the mean of reading essay and drama are lower than 2, except reading Shakespearean comedy and tragedy. More specifically, the detailed reading situation for the four types of literary works is presented in the following. In foreign fiction, western speculative fiction and western classic fiction are more popular for college students, with the mean of 2.52 and 2.62 respectively. In contrast, other types of foreign fiction are relatively low. For foreign essay, all the three types literary works are not popular in college students, with the mean lower than 2. In foreign poetry, western fairy tale poetry are more welcome among college students, with the mean 2.33. However, other two types of foreign poetry are only 1.97 and 2.01. For foreign drama, college students are more familiar with Shakespearean comedy and tragedy, with the mean 2.13 and 2.17 respectively. In contrast, other four types of foreign drama are lower than 2.

Table 2. The reading situation of foreign literary works

Descriptive items	Number	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Item1 reading western love fiction	712	1	5	2.31	1.08
Item2 reading western satirical fiction	712	1	5	2.18	1.06
Item3 reading western magical fiction	712	1	5	2.36	1.14
Item4 reading western speculative fiction	712	1	5	2.52	1.23
Item5 reading western classic fiction	712	1	5	2.62	1.13
Item6 reading western lyric essay	712	1	5	1.79	0.92
Item7 reading western philosophic essay	712	1	5	1.73	0.89
Item8 reading western love essay	712	1	5	1.83	0.95
Item9 reading western fairy tale poetry	712	1	5	2.33	1.20
Item10 reading western love poetry	712	1	5	1.97	1.07
Item11 reading western fable poetry	712	1	5	2.01	1.10
Item12 reading western moral drama	712	1	5	1.68	0.89
Item13 reading western miracle drama	712	1	5	1.62	0.86
Item14 reading western religious drama	712	1	5	1.57	0.85

Item15 reading western mystery drama	712	1	5	1.60	0.86
Item16 reading Shakespearean comedy	712	1	5	2.13	1.08
Item17 reading Shakespearean tragedy	712	1	5	2.17	1.10

4.3 The basic situation for intercultural competence

This study adopts Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students (AIC-CCS), which is proposed by Wu et al (2013). Intercultural competence includes six main factors, three descriptive items (ic1-3) in knowledge of self (KN1), seven descriptive items (ic4-10) in knowledge of others (KN2), three descriptive items (ic11-13) in attitudes (AT), nine descriptive items (ic14-22) in intercultural communicative skills (SK1), three descriptive items (ic23-25) in intercultural cognitive skills (SK2) and three items (ic26-28) in awareness (AW). The detailed items are presented in the following.

- ic1: understanding native history
- ic2: understanding native social norms
- ic3: understanding the native sense of values
- ic4: understanding foreign knowledge of history
- ic5: understanding foreign social norms
- ic6: understanding the foreign sense of values
- ic7: understanding foreign cultural taboos
- ic8: understanding foreigners' speech
- ic9: understanding basic concepts of intercultural communication
- ic10: understanding successful intercultural communication strategies
- ic11: willingness to learn from those who differ from one's self and culture
- ic12: willingness to respect foreigners' lifestyles and customs
- ic13: willingness to learn foreign languages and cultures well
- ic14: the skill of consulting with foreigners when misunderstandings occur
- ic15: the skill of communicating with foreigners using body language or other nonverbal communication when it is difficult to communicate using language
- ic16: the skill of successfully communicating with foreigners
- ic17: the skill of treating foreigners politely
- ic18: the skill of avoiding offending foreigners with inappropriate words and behavior
- ic19: the skill of avoiding prejudice against foreigners
- ic20: the skill of avoiding violating foreigners' privacy
- ic21: the skill of having intercultural sensitivity
- ic22: the skill of understanding different perspectives when encountering different cultural affairs
- ic23: the skill of acquiring knowledge of other cultures from foreigners
- ic24: the skill of learning intercultural communication strategies
- ic25: the skill of learning how to manage cultural conflicts
- ic26: realizing cultural differences and similarities when communicating with foreigners
- ic27: realizing the differences in cultural identity when communicating with foreigners
- ic28: judging cultural situations from both one's own and the others' cultural perspective

In this research, the data are collected from participants' self-ratings of 28 descriptive items, based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much). In order to evaluate students' intercultural competence scientifically and comprehensively, Peng, Wu and Fan's (2015) fuzzy comprehensive evaluation index model (FCE model) for Chinese college students' ICC is applied in this study. Through the determining of the weight distribution for each descriptive item and the six main dimensions, the development situation of six main dimensions and intercultural competence all can be evaluated. And the described weight distribution is presented in the following, which is proposed by Peng, Wu and Fan (2015).

ICC = (KN1, KN2, AT, SK1, SK2, AW) = (0.05, 0.30, 0.19, 0.25, 0.06, 0.15)

KN1 = (ic1, ic2, ic3) = (0.33, 0.27, 0.4),

KN2 = (ic4, ic5, ic6, ic7, ic8, ic9, ic10) = (0.18, 0.18, 0.20, 0.14, 0.12, 0.06, 0.12),

AT = (ic11, ic12, ic13) = (0.5, 0.17, 0.33),

SK1 = (ic14, ic15, ic16, ic17, ic18, ic19, ic20, ic21, ic22) = (0.09, 0.18, 0.15, 0.13, 0.09, 0.09, 0.09, 0.09, 0.09),

SK2 = (ic23, ic24, ic25) = (0.34, 0.25, 0.41),

AW = (ic26, ic27, ic28) = (0.40, 0.20, 0.40).

After the weight of each items and six factors, college students' overall development of intercultural competence and the development of six dimensions are analyzed as the following table 3.

Table 3. The basic situation for intercultural competence

Factors	Number	Min	Max	Mean	SD
knowledge of self (KN1)	712	1	5	3.79	0.74
knowledge of others (KN2)	712	1	5	2.44	0.74
attitudes (AT)	712	1	5	3.84	0.87
intercultural communicative skills (SK1)	712	1	5	3.17	0.78
intercultural cognitive skills (SK2)	712	1	5	2.89	0.88
awareness (AW)	712	1	5	3.55	0.89
intercultural competence (ICC)	712	1	5	3.15	0.61

In general, Chinese college students' intercultural competence is in the medium level, as shown in table 3. The main reason is that college students have fewer opportunities to participate in the intercultural communicative activities. As for the six main dimensions, the three abilities (knowledge of self, attitude and awareness) of college students are at the higher level, with the mean 3.79, 3.84 and 3.55 respectively. By contrast, college students are at the lower level in the aspect of knowledge of others, intercultural communicative skills and intercultural cognitive skills. Thereinto, the ability of knowing knowledge of others is the worst, since the time and quantity of reading foreign literary works are not enough.

Considering the reasons of Chinese college students' intercultural competence development situation, it can be concluded as the following. Firstly, most of students all grow up with the background of Chinese culture, so they can learn and know more about the knowledge of self. Secondly, students can learn English since primary school, so they have the strong will and awareness to communicative and interact with western people. Thirdly, students have the poor reading and fewer opportunities to contact western culture actually, so they lack the accumulation of western knowledge and intercultural communicative and cognitive skills.

4.4 The correlation analysis between foreign literary work reading and intercultural competence

The correlation between foreign literary work reading situation and intercultural competence is analyzed through Pearson Correlation. As the results show that there is a significant positive relationship among them ($r=0.410$, $p<0.05$). This conclusion is also confirmed by Gómez and Fernando. Through the implementation of language project in an university of Bogotá, it demonstrates that reading literary works is an effective way to improve students' intercultural competence, especially building bridges for different culture interaction (Gómez & Fernando, 2012).

The detailed exploration of correlation analysis between the four dimensions of foreign literary work reading situation and intercultural competence is conducted in the next part. As for the foreign fiction, all of the descriptive items and intercultural competence have the significant positive relationship, which can be seen in table 4. For the knowledge of others, there is a high correlation with all of the correlation index greater than 0.3. It mainly benefits from the reading of foreign fictions, knowing something about western historical knowledge, geographical knowledge, traditional custom, traditional value, cultural taboos and so on.

Table 4. The correlation analysis between foreign fiction and intercultural competence

Foreign fiction	SK1	SK2	AT	SK1	SK2	AW
Item1 reading western love fiction	0.196**	0.322**	0.206**	0.300**	0.252**	0.224**
Item2 reading western satirical fiction	0.176**	0.319**	0.143**	0.249**	0.222**	0.166**
Item3 reading western magical fiction	0.171**	0.325**	0.175**	0.267**	0.215**	0.212**
Item4 reading western speculative fiction	0.225**	0.375**	0.180**	0.306**	0.270**	0.201**
Item5 reading western classic fiction	0.225**	0.322**	0.230**	0.341**	0.279**	0.241**

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01

As for foreign essay, it can be seen in table 5 that the three descriptive items all have significant positive relationship with the knowledge of others, attitudes, intercultural communicative skills, intercultural cognitive skills and awareness. Besides, reading western lyric essay also has a significant positive relationship with knowledge of self. However, there is a positive relationship between reading western love essay and knowledge of self. And there is no significant relationship between reading western philosophic essay and knowledge of self.

Table 5. The correlation analysis between foreign essay and intercultural competence

Foreign essay	KN1	KN2	AT	SK1	SK2	AW
Item6 reading western lyric essay	0.108**	0.292**	0.127**	0.220**	0.248**	0.187**
Item7 reading western philosophic essay	0.069	0.282**	0.116**	0.157**	0.222**	0.111**
Item8 reading western love essay	0.077*	0.282**	0.154**	0.198**	0.252**	0.170**

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01

As for foreign poetry, the three descriptive items all have significant positive relationship with the six dimensions of intercultural competence, as shown in table 6. Similar with foreign fiction, reading foreign poetry has more influence on the knowledge of others since students can strengthen the accumulation of western cultural knowledge through the knowing of creative backgrounds.

Table 6. The correlation analysis between foreign poetry and intercultural competence

Foreign poetry	KN1	KN2	AT	SK1	SK2	AW
Item9 reading western fairy tale poetry	0.111**	0.240**	0.151**	0.224**	0.228**	0.180**
Item10 reading western love poetry	0.103**	0.312**	0.123**	0.250**	0.269**	0.197**
Item11 reading western fable poetry	0.166**	0.276**	0.120**	0.222**	0.207**	0.169**

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01

As for foreign drama, the correlation analysis is presented in table 7. There is a significant positive relationship between six descriptive items and knowledge of others, intercultural communicative skills and intercultural cognitive skills. However, the correlation with the knowledge of self, attitudes and awareness is relatively weak. And the detailed analysis are as follows. In knowledge of self, only the two items reading Shakespearean comedy and tragedy can have a significant positive effect on students' knowledge of self. Nevertheless, reading western moral drama, miracle drama, religious drama and mystery drama all have no correlation with knowledge of self. In attitudes, it is similar with knowledge of self that only reading Shakespearean comedy and tragedy have significant positive relationship with attitudes. Reading western moral drama, miracle drama, religious drama and mystery drama have no correlation with attitudes. In awareness, there is a significant positive relationship between Shakespearean comedy, tragedy and awareness. For reading western moral drama and reading western religious drama, the correlation is relatively low. For reading western miracle drama and reading western mystery drama, there is no correlation.

Table 7. The correlation analysis between foreign drama and intercultural competence

Foreign drama	KN1	KN2	AT	SK1	SK2	AW
Item12 reading western moral drama	0.030	0.287**	0.031	0.160**	0.210**	0.090*
Item13 reading western miracle drama	0.047	0.270**	0.025	0.117**	0.179**	0.070
Item14 reading western religious drama	0.027	0.251**	0.023	0.116**	0.198**	0.081*
Item15 reading western mystery drama	0.002	0.252**	0.010	0.113**	0.217**	0.055
Item16 reading Shakespearean comedy	0.179**	0.338**	0.147**	0.312**	0.298**	0.237**
Item17 reading Shakespearean tragedy	0.202**	0.358**	0.145**	0.322**	0.309**	0.237**

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01

From the above presentation, the correlation analysis between foreign literary work reading and intercultural competence development can be concluded as the following. Firstly, foreign literary work reading has a high significant positive relationship with knowledge of others, with the correlation index ranging from 0.240 to 0.375. However, it has a low correlation or even no correlation with knowledge of self. The main reason is that the foreign literary work reading can enhance the accumulation of western cultural knowledge. Secondly, foreign literary work reading has a significant positive effect on intercultural communicative skills and intercultural cognitive skills, with the correlation index ranging from 0.113 to 0.341. The reason is that reading literary works can help students to acquire the western cultural knowledge, cultural taboos, non-verbal behavioral knowledge and so on, and apply these knowledge and skills in actual intercultural communication. Thirdly, there is a low correlation or no correlation between reading foreign literary works and attitudes, awareness. The reason is that the cultivation of intercultural attitudes and awareness mainly relies on the actual intercultural communicative activities, not just book learning.

5. CONCLUSION

As an important kind of intercultural contact pathway, foreign literary work can effectively improve students' intercultural competence. However, the relative studies mainly rely on teachers' and researchers' qualitative observation. So based on college students' actual reading situation and intercultural competence development situation, this research proves their relevance and effectiveness by the questionnaire data analysis. And the investigation results show that the literary work reading time and quantity are not enough for college students, and their intercultural competence generally are at the medium level. So in order to improve college students' intercultural competence, teachers should encourage students to read more literary works in their spare time.

Through the discussion above, it is of great theoretical significance to provide theoretical references for intercultural competence research. And also provide the references for colleges in setting school curriculum to improve college students' intercultural competence development. However, some limitations are also exist. Firstly, this study does not control the variable for regional difference because some regional differences may occur in the respondents, so the correlation index between the two variables may vary in some ways. Secondly, it must be better that the qualitative research method is applied for supplementary those questions that questionnaire can not cover. So future research on this area can be further explored from these perspectives to make up the researching gap. And also can deeply explore the pathway relationship and model construction between foreign literary work reading and intercultural competence through AMOS.

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