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A Review of Intercultural Communication Competence Assessments in China
(2013-2022)

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ABSTRACT

The rapid pace of globalization necessitates the acquisition of intercultural competence by individuals. Scientific assessment of intercultural competence serves as a guide to develop this competence and provides an important criterion for identifying talented individuals. This paper utilizes content analysis methodology to review research on intercultural competence assessment in China from 2013 to 2022. The study reveals that intercultural competence assessment has garnered significant attention in the academic community in China. The predominant assessment methods are self-assessment questionnaires and testing, with a diverse target population that tends to be specialized. Assessment subjects primarily consist of undergraduate students. However, compared to international studies, there is a need to enhance the diversity of assessment forms and the breadth of assessment subjects in China. Additionally, a more refined assessment method that aligns with the Chinese context should be developed.

Keywords: intercultural competence; assessment; review; China

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Research background

Since Hymes first introduced the concept of communicative competence, the discussion of intercultural communication competence has been ongoing in academic circles both in China and around the world (Xu, 2000). In the context of rapid globalization and increased political and economic exchanges worldwide, intercultural competence has become an essential skill for international professionals. As a result, it is a key training objective for many colleges and international companies in China. Today, intercultural competence is a critical measure for contemporary students and employees, both domestically and internationally. It is widely recognized as one of the key competencies required for success in the 21st century, and the cultivation of citizens with intercultural competence is a shared goal for all countries seeking to participate in international affairs and promote domestic harmony (Zhang & Yao, 2020). The demand for individuals with intercultural communication skills is increasing rapidly. College English programs should prioritize the cultivation of intercultural talents with a global perspective (Li, 2022). As China's "circle of friends" expands on the world stage, it is crucial for the country to enhance its international communication and dialogue. Many national educational guidelines and standards, such as the *Guidelines on College English Teaching*, the *National Standard of Teaching Quality for Undergraduate English Majors*, the *China Standards of English*, and the *Key Competencies for English*

as a Foreign Language, recognize the importance of intercultural competence as a learning objective. For example, the *Guidelines on College English Teaching* (2020) emphasize that intercultural education is a vital component of the humanistic college English curriculum (Yu, 2022). The *National Standard for Quality of Undergraduate Teaching of Foreign Languages in Higher Education Schools* also includes intercultural competence as a core competency indicator for foreign language majors (Jiao, 2017). The latest *Guidelines on College English Teaching* emphasize the importance of both instrumentality and humanity in the college English curriculum. Instrumentality pertains to the universal and specific nature of the English language, while humanity refers to its cultural aspects, particularly in terms of intercultural communication (Gu, 2017). The concept of intercultural competence is a key consideration in the ongoing reform of foreign language education, with a particular focus on second language acquisition and foreign language teaching.

Assessment and evaluation play a crucial role in leading educational reform and promoting innovation in education. In the trinity pattern of “education, science and technology, and talents”, assessment has been implemented from start to finish. The reform of the assessment of “education, science and technology, and talents” has always played a significant role in China (Liu, 2023). Therefore, assessing intercultural competence is also a necessary and important topic. Scientific assessment methods for intercultural competence point towards the direction of developing talents with intercultural competence and provide essential criteria for distinguishing talents for colleges and businesses.

2. Research significance

Currently, there is a plethora of articles in domestic journals that review intercultural competence, including Xie (2022), Guan and Liu (2021), Cong and Wang (2013), and Wu (2008). However, there are relatively fewer academic papers that study intercultural competence assessment (Zhang et al. 2018). Furthermore, there is a dearth of review articles about intercultural competence assessment, with most existing studies in this field being research papers rather than review articles. While existing review studies on intercultural competence assessment mainly focus on foreign intercultural competence assessment, such as Jiao’s (2017) multi-perspective analysis of foreign intercultural communication competence assessment tools and the characteristics of foreign intercultural communication competence assessment studies. Caution must be exercised when using foreign intercultural communication competence scales in Chinese contexts. This is because the compatibility of the items with Chinese subjects, as well as the validity and reliability of foreign measurement, must be taken into account (Jiao, 2017). Therefore, there is a pressing need for a review of the assessment of intercultural competence in China, which is both necessary and urgent.

Providing an overview of intercultural competence assessment in China is beneficial for enriching research related to intercultural competence assessment and promoting the development of localized intercultural competence assessment. It also facilitates an objective assessment of intercultural competence, which can serve as a reference for decision-making by relevant national departments and employers. Furthermore, it points out the direction for cultivating intercultural competence talents in China, contributing to the enhancement of China’s cultural soft power.

In summary, the purpose of this paper is to conduct a comprehensive review of research on the assessment of intercultural competence in China from 2013 to 2022, using the content analysis method. Firstly, an overview of intercultural competence is provided to summarize its definition and different dimensions. Secondly, the paper reviews the overall trend of intercultural competence assessment, highly cited literature and authors’ contributions, assessment methods, and subjects of intercultural competence assessment. Finally, the paper will identify the insights and shortcomings of existing studies and suggest directions for future research. This paper aims to answer the following research questions.

- 1) What is intercultural competence?
- 2) What is the current status of research on intercultural competence assessment in China between 2013 and 2022?

- 3) What are the emerging research trends in intercultural competence assessment in China during the same period?

II. Definition and dimensions of intercultural competence

1. The definition of intercultural competence

When it comes to the study of intercultural competence, scholars both at home and abroad have used various terms and phrases to refer to the concept. These include intercultural competence, intercultural adaptability, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural communicative competence, global competence, international cognition, international citizenship, and intercultural regulation (Wu, 2014). Some scholars consider intercultural communicative competence and intercultural competence to be equivalent (Yang & Zhuang, 2007), while others believe that intercultural communicative competence encompasses intercultural competence (Wen, 2004). In most of the relevant domestic research, intercultural competence and intercultural communication competence are generally regarded as the same concept (Hu, 2013). Therefore, in this study, they are also considered to be the same concept.

The academic community has not yet provided a clear and uniform definition of intercultural competence. This interdisciplinary concept involves linguistics, psychology, communication, cultural anthropology, and other fields, making it complex. Furthermore, the meaning of intercultural competence varies among different regions, industries, and groups (Zhang et al.2018). While there is no consensus on the definition, some scholars recognize and acknowledge Byram's definition. Byram's general idea is that intercultural competence involves foreign and domestic cultural knowledge, intercultural communication and language skills, cognitive and interactive skills, valuing and respecting different cultures' values, beliefs, and practices, critical cultural awareness, and self-awareness. These competencies play a crucial role in enabling individuals to communicate and interact effectively and appropriately with people from different cultures in a given intercultural context (cited in Wu, 2013). D. K. Deardorff (2006) has defined intercultural competence as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on an individual's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Domestic scholars such as Sun (2016) have described intercultural competence in terms of its core content, which includes respecting cultural diversity, having intercultural empathy and critical cultural awareness, mastering theoretical knowledge and analytical methods of intercultural studies, understanding the history and current situation of the target language country, and having the ability to interpret and evaluate different cultural phenomena, texts, and products. Additionally, intercultural competence involves the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively, as well as help people with different cultural backgrounds to communicate effectively. Sun (2019) further emphasizes that intercultural competence requires interactive, sensitive, reflective, and creative communication with individuals or groups from different cultures. In summary, specific context, effectiveness, and appropriateness are the three key words of intercultural competence (Yang, 2009; Wu, 2013).

2. The dimensions of intercultural competence

Scholars have presented varying perspectives on the dimensions of intercultural competence, each with its own unique emphasis. Byram (1997) asserted that intercultural communication competence encompasses four key areas: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and intercultural competence. While intercultural competence comprises attitudes, knowledge, interpretation/association skills, discovery/interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness. Meanwhile, Chinese scholars Xu and Mei (2002) posited that intercultural learning is comprised of four main components: value system, nonverbal behavior, pragmatic rules, and cultural vocabulary. Bi (2005) further expanded on the concept of intercultural competence, stating that it includes linguistic communicative ability, nonverbal communicative ability, the ability to transform linguistic rules and communicative rules, and cultural adaptability. According to Hu (2013), intercultural communication competence encompasses three essential aspects: cognitive aspect, affective or attitudinal aspect, and behavioral aspect. The cognitive aspect involves not only general knowledge of culture, but also specific knowledge of politics, economy, geography, history, humanity, religion, customs, and other aspects of one's own country and other countries to facilitate successful intercultural communication. The

affective or attitudinal aspect includes communicators' sensitivity to cultural differences, their tolerance for different cultures, deep understanding of their own culture, and respect for other cultures. The behavioral aspect mainly refers to communicators' various abilities, such as language proficiency, non-verbal communication skills, flexibility, interpersonal skills, psychological adjustment, adaptability to the environment, and ability to work or achieve goals in different cultural settings. Zhang (2020) proposed a comprehensive and multi-perspective framework for intercultural competence called the "four-three-two-one" theoretical framework. This framework consists of four perspectives, three dimensions, two contexts, and one platform. Zhang argued that intercultural communication competence involves three dimensions: cognition and understanding, emotion and attitude, and behavioral skills. Among these dimensions, enhancing cognition and understanding serves as the foundation, cultivating emotion and attitude is the focus, and developing behavioral skills is the ultimate goal. With this framework, Zhang provides a detailed and holistic understanding of intercultural competence.

III. A Review of intercultural competence assessment in China

This article utilized CNKI as its database and employed “跨文化能力” (intercultural competence) and “测评” (assessment) as the keywords. The time range was set from January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2022, resulting in the retrieval of 65 articles. The literature types included journals, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations. To analyze the retrieved information, a content analysis approach was adopted. This section provides an overview of the overall trends in intercultural competence assessment, along with the highly cited literature and their corresponding authors' contributions. Additionally, the assessment methods and target population of intercultural competence assessment are discussed.

1. The overall trends of intercultural competence assessment in China from 2013 to 2022

In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on intercultural competence assessment in the Chinese academic community, particularly within the field of foreign language teaching. Analysis of the number of publications per year over the past decade reveals a slight fluctuating trend, as illustrated in Figure 1, with a generally steady growth and a peak of 11 publications in 2021. This upward trend reflects the growing interest and recognition of the importance of intercultural competence assessment as a core topic in academic research within the field of foreign language teaching. Figure 2 shows that in the last decade, the majority of literature on this topic has been published in the foreign language and literature discipline, accounting for 43.21% of the total publications, indicating that intercultural competence assessment is primarily discussed within the context of foreign language education.

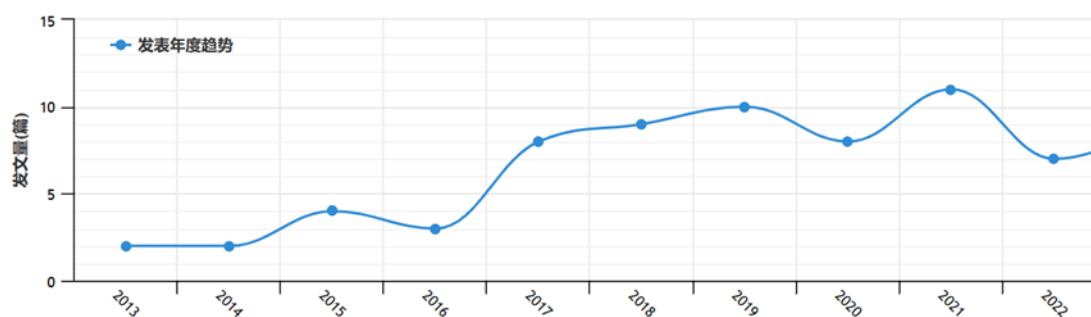


Figure 1 Annual Number of Publications of Intercultural Competence Assessment Research

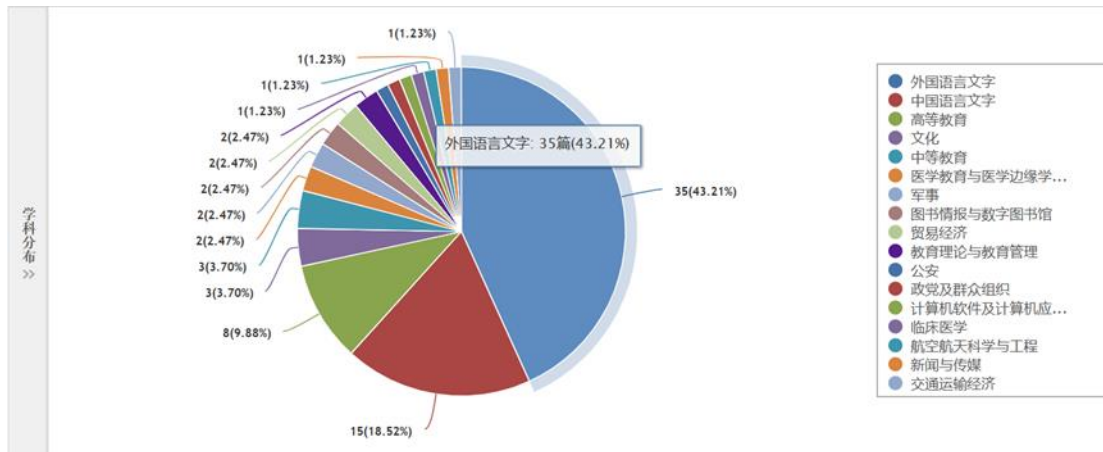


Figure 2 Discipline Distribution of Intercultural Competence Assessment Research

2. Highly cited literature and corresponding author(s)

Table 1 presents the top 5 highly cited literature on intercultural competence assessment, including the corresponding author(s), source, publication date, database, and cited frequency. The table indicates that Chinese scholars such as Gao Yongchen, Wu Weiping, and Zhang Hongling have made significant contributions to this field.

Table 1 Highly Cited Literature on Intercultural Competence Assessment Research

| S.No | Title | Author(s) | Source | Publication date | Database | Cited Frequency |
|------|--|---------------------------------------|---|------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 1 | A theoretical framework for the assessment system of Chinese college students' intercultural communication competence | Gao Yongchen | Foreign Language World | 2014-08-25 | Periodical | 218 |
| 2 | The Survey and Analysis of the Current Situation of Chinese College Students' Intercultural Communication Competence | Gao Yongchen | Foreign Languages and Their Teaching | 2016-04-15 | Periodical | 119 |
| 3 | A Study on the Construction of a Scale for Assessing Chinese College Students' Intercultural Communication Competence Based on the Knowing-Doing Model | Shen Juming; Gao Yongchen | Foreign Languages in China | 2015-05-15 | Periodical | 68 |
| 4 | A Comprehensive Evaluation on Chinese College Students' Intercultural Competence | Wu Weiping | Huazhong University of Science and Technology | 2013-12-01 | Dissertation | 37 |
| 5 | Research on the Evaluation of Intercultural Competence Based on Competition—Take the SFLEP Shanghai Intercultural Competence Contest as An Example | Zhang Hongling; Yu Yida; Shen Xingtao | Foreign Language World | 2018-02-25 | Periodical | 27 |

Gao Yongchen is a highly regarded professor in the School of Foreign Languages at Soochow University. Drawing on both domestic and international intercultural communication competence models, Gao (2014) developed a comprehensive conceptual framework for assessing the intercultural communication competence of Chinese college students. This framework comprises two interdependent dimensions of knowing and doing, which are integrated with theory and practice. Building on this work, Shen and Gao (2015) created the Intercultural Communication Competence Inventory for Chinese College Students (ICCICCS). To construct the scale, several small seminars were held, inviting experts, scholars, and graduate students to participate. The scale was developed using a Likert five-component scale form. The ICCICCS scale consists of two systems: the knowledge system and the behavior system. The knowledge system includes the knowledge module, the awareness module, and the critical-thinking module. The behavior system includes the attitude module, the intercultural communication skills module, and the communication strategies module. In a subsequent study, Gao (2016) used the ICCICCS to assess the intercultural communicative competence of 2300 college students from 16 colleges across China. The results indicated that the overall intercultural communicative competence of Chinese college students was in a relatively ideal state, and that the ICCICCS scale was a useful tool for assessing intercultural competence in this population.

Wu Weiping is a distinguished professor in the School of Foreign Languages at Wuhan University of Technology. In 2014, Wu developed a comprehensive set of dimensions and evaluation scales specifically designed to assess the intercultural competence of Chinese college students, a comprehensive index of intercultural competence, as well as a fuzzy comprehensive evaluation model, all of which have significant theoretical implications for the study of intercultural competence. The scale consists of six key factors that influence intercultural competence: (1) knowledge related to national culture; (2) knowledge related to foreign culture; (3) attitude; (4) intercultural communication skills; (5) intercultural cognitive skills; and (6) awareness. The six factors mentioned above can be summarized into four main dimensions: knowledge, attitude, skill, and awareness. The knowledge dimension includes an understanding of national and foreign lifestyles and values, basic knowledge of culture, and concepts of intercultural communication and dissemination. The attitude dimension includes the willingness to tolerate different values, food habits, taboos, etc. of foreigners. The skill dimension includes the ability to communicate with body language or other non-verbal means when language communication barriers arise, avoiding prejudice against foreigners in communication, avoiding mentioning private topics about foreigners in communication, being sensitive to intercultural differences, and looking at events in other countries such as political, economic, religious, etc. from different cultures and multiple perspectives. The awareness dimension includes being aware of the differences between one's own cultural identity and that of the other in communication. Wu et al. (2013) conducted an empirical investigation for their scales, including exploratory and validation factor analysis, and found that the localized ICC Evaluation Scale for Chinese College Students was reliable and valid. Chinese college students' intercultural competence is multidimensional.

Zhang Hongling, a professor at Shanghai International Studies University, specializes in intercultural communication, intercultural foreign language education, and intercultural education and training. In 2018, Zhang and her team developed an evaluation index system for intercultural competence competition based on the "affective-cognitive-behavioral" framework of intercultural communication competence (Zhang, 2007). They designed the SFLEP Shanghai Intercultural Competence Contest according to this index system. The evaluation index system includes three primary components of intercultural competence: culture and knowledge, emotion and attitude, and behavior and skill, which are further divided into sub-indexes. The main items of the contest include sharing cultural stories, developing, presenting, and analyzing intercultural conflict cases, cultural knowledge quizzes, scenario commentaries, and telling Chinese stories. The contest aims to promote the cultivation of innovative high-end talents in international communication in China and meet the demand for foreign language talents with intercultural communication ability, Chinese sentiment, and international vision.

The comparison of the constructs of the three scholars reveals both similarities and differences in their studies. Firstly, in terms of similarities, all three scholars place a high value on four key components of intercultural competence, namely knowledge, attitude, awareness, and behavior. Gao's scale measures both the knowledge

system and the behavior system, with the former including knowledge, awareness, and critical thinking, and the latter including attitudes, intercultural communication skills, and communication strategies. Similarly, Wu's scale comprises four main dimensions, namely knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness. Zhang's contest, on the other hand, assesses students' culture and knowledge, emotion and attitude, and behavior and skills. Furthermore, all three scholars focus their research on Chinese college students, indicating that this group remains the primary target of intercultural competence assessment. However, there are also differences in their studies. Zhang's intercultural competence contest is more authentic in form, with subjective questions that assess students' understanding of authentic intercultural scenarios and accumulation of different cultural knowledge. In contrast, the evaluation scales constructed by Wu and Gao are more academic, based on different theoretical frameworks and index systems, and test students' intercultural competence through a series of objective questions in a questionnaire format.

3. Assessment method

The Chinese assessment method for intercultural competence is rapidly developing. However, according to Yu (2022), the tools developed by non-western scholars are limited, particularly in the evaluation of intercultural attitude and awareness. These studies utilized various research methods, mainly in the form of self-assessment questionnaires and testing, both of which belong to the quantitative research paradigm. The primary advantage of quantitative research is its conciseness and persuasiveness. The questionnaires were mostly in the form of five-point Likert scales, which used the following descriptors: 1 = disagree, 2 = disagree somewhat more than agree, 3 = disagree some and agree some, 4 = agree somewhat more than disagree, and 5 = agree. The Likert scale is characterized by several aspects, such as its ease of design and widespread use across various domains and subjects. Additionally, it has high reliability, and it enables respondents to easily mark their options, as demonstrated by Gao (2015), Wu (2014), and Zhang (2019). Several Chinese scholars evaluate intercultural competence through testing methods, including the Intercultural Competence Test (ICT) (Peng et al., 2022) and the Database of Intercultural Proficiency Test (Zhang, 2019); Li, 2019; Zhang et al., 2018. The purpose of these assessments is to promote teaching by evaluating intercultural competence. Some scholars utilize pre-test and post-test combinations to measure changes in subjects' intercultural-related abilities or the effectiveness of intercultural training programs. Peng et al. (2013) used a BP neural network method to construct a model for evaluating the intercultural competence of college students, which is an effective and applicable method for assessing intercultural competence. Additionally, Gan et al. (2018) developed a multimodal intercultural communicative competence assessment model that advocates for assessment to correspond with teaching modality. This model employs text, image, auditory, and body gesture modalities, as well as their reasonable combinations, to test the intercultural communicative competence of college students at different levels.

4. Assessment subject

The assessment of intercultural competence is a complex process that requires specific situations and contexts. In China, the subjects of intercultural communication competence assessment are diverse, with the assessment primarily applied in the field of education. College students are the main targets of assessment, as evidenced by studies conducted by Wu (2013), Gao (2015), and Zhang (2020). Chinese scholars have developed specialized assessment tools for college students in different majors or regions, including English majors (Long, 2020), non-English majors in higher vocational college (Li et al., 2019), flight attendant majors in higher vocational college (Li & Tian, 2021), public security majors (Yu, 2020), and western Chinese college students (Zhang, 2021). The intercultural competence assessment subject in China is becoming increasingly specialized and targeted. For some assessment subjects, such as flight attendant majors and public security majors, the assessment is part of their general education curriculum. It aims to evaluate teaching effectiveness and the overall situation of students' mastery of intercultural competence, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and pave the way for their career development by improving their vocational skills. Besides, the College English Curriculum Evaluation Survey (CECES) (Liao & Li, 2018) has been designed to assess the course. Furthermore, intercultural competence assessment has been applied to the field of national defense construction in China, such as peacekeeping troops (Pang & Zhang, 2021). Jiao (2019) has studied the intercultural competence assessment scale of the United States Marine Corps and made suggestions for the construction of the Chinese

military. Additionally, intercultural competence assessment has been applied in the field of journalism, targeting Chinese foreign language talents in the field of journalism and international communication (Meng & Tang, 2020). It is evident that intercultural competence assessment plays an indispensable role in China's education, national defense construction, and journalism and communication, contributing to China's development and stability in numerous ways.

IV. Shortcomings and insights of intercultural competence assessment research in China

From 2013 to 2022, research on intercultural competence assessment in China has yielded fruitful results and has made significant progress in terms of assessment methods, assessment subjects, and assessment contents. Chinese research has departed from the Western mindset and is in line with the country's national conditions. However, compared to research abroad, China's intercultural competence assessment research started later, and there is still a gap in the diversity of assessment methods and the range of assessment subjects.

One limitation of intercultural competence assessment in China is the narrow range of assessment methods available. Self-assessment questionnaires and testing are the primary methods used to evaluate intercultural competence in China, while foreign studies offer a wider range of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Western scholars, for instance, combine self-assessment, peer assessment, facilitator assessment, and superior assessment to evaluate intercultural competence quantitatively. Qualitative assessment methods commonly used by foreign scholars include case study and interview, followed by narrative journal analysis, self-assessment reports, observations of others or people of the target culture, and self-judgment or other's judgment (Jiao, 2017). Qualitative research methods are more subject-centered and offer a more open and flexible research process compared to quantitative research methods (Cao, 2013). The Intercultural Competence Assessment Project (INCA) is a notable example of a mixed research method that introduced a set of assessment tools, including questionnaires, scenario-based tests, and role play, in collaboration with 14 European industry organizations and research institutes, with the help of Byram, Kuhlmann, and Muller-Jacquier (Jiao, 2017). Therefore, China can learn from foreign scholars and develop more diverse intercultural competence assessment methods that are suitable for the Chinese context.

Another limitation of intercultural competence assessment research in China is the relatively narrow scope of assessment subjects. Currently, research in China mainly focuses on undergraduate students, while Western researchers have developed a variety of specialized assessment tools in fields such as medicine, education, management, psychology, and communication. In particular, foreign scholars have focused on intercultural competence assessment in the business field, including the selection of overseas project managers, intercultural teams, and overseas personnel. The second most researched field is intercultural education, which includes international university leadership, intercultural adaptation of international students, intercultural teaching, and management. Finally, the third most researched field is intercultural medical communication, which includes the development of intercultural competence among medical students and communication between doctors and patients (Jiao, 2017). Therefore, in order to promote the overall improvement of citizens' intercultural competence in all fields, it is necessary to design more specialized intercultural competence assessment tools in China. This will help to guide the development of citizens' intercultural competence and provide direction for future research in this area.

V. Conclusion

After analyzing the information presented, it is evident that intercultural competence assessment has gained significant attention in China in recent years. This concept is a core topic in academic research, particularly in the foreign language field. In China, the most notable assessment methods are the ICCICCS designed by Shen & Gao, the ICC Evaluation Scale for Chinese College Students by Wu, and the SFLEP Shanghai Intercultural Competence Contest by Zhang. All three of these scholars incorporate four key elements in their intercultural competence assessment content, namely knowledge, attitude, awareness, and behavior. The current intercultural competence assessment methods in China mainly use self-assessment questionnaires and testing, with a diverse range of assessment subjects that are becoming increasingly specialized and targeted. However, compared to foreign studies, China needs to improve the diversity of assessment forms and the

breadth of assessment subjects, and develop more refined assessment methods that are better suited to the Chinese context.

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