

Intercultural adaptability development for students in internationalisation at home programmes in higher education in China and Korea

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Received 19 October 2023
Revised 11 June 2024
15 July 2024
Accepted 19 August 2024

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Abstract

Purpose – This article reviews the intercultural adaptability (IA) development models for students in South Korea and China in response to the growing internationalisation of higher education. The article provides significant implications for Confucian heritage culture (CHC) countries and others that wish to enhance in higher education.

Design/methodology/approach – This scoping review systematically investigates the literature on different IA development strategies for students in higher education across these two Asian countries.

Findings – South Korea has promoted the self-growth model reflected in internationalised programmes such as English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), an international learning environment with an increasing number of international students and student exchange programmes. Through these initiatives, domestic students' identity and intercultural learning dynamics are enriched in an intercultural learning environment. Meanwhile, China has adopted the "Outward-oriented" higher education internationalisation model to attract international students to study in Chinese universities and entice Chinese returnees through its International Talent Training Programmes. In this strategy, international students are exposed to Chinese language and cultural knowledge development programmes, and Chinese students are motivated to learn the English language and cultures through interactions with their international peers.

Originality/value – Student IA development models in CHC countries remain underexplored. This article responds to the need of higher education institutions in Asian countries that wish to access and learn from effective IA models from other CHC countries. The study makes a valuable contribution by putting forward significant recommendations for developing students' IA in CHC countries.

Keywords Intercultural adaptability, Internationalisation at home, Higher education, Internationalised programmes, Confucian heritage culture, China, Korea

Paper type Literature review



Higher Education, Skills and Work-
Based Learning
Vol. 15 No. 2, 2025
pp. 421-440

© Emerald Publishing Limited

2042-3896
DOI 10.1108/HESWBL-10-2023-0284

This work is funded by the National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) under Grant No. 503.01-2021.15 (2023–2025).

Introduction

Internationalisation has been increasingly promoted in higher education (HE) throughout the world (Rumbley *et al.*, 2012). The internationalisation of higher education (IoHE) was originally defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2003, p. 2). A decade later, De Wit *et al.* (2015) expanded Knight’s definition by emphasising that IoHE is a purposeful process that aims to enhance “the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (p. 283). In many countries, internationalisation is geared towards expanding international cooperation and international student recruitment. In Vietnam, “internationalisation at home” (IaH) is a feature of university courses that assist students with the development of “international knowledge and global competence” (Tran and Marginson, 2018, p. 5). In this IaH process, intercultural adaptability (IA) has been a critically important process of self-transformation, which is the ability to establish relations or to “relate well” in an intercultural environment (Luong *et al.*, 2021). Intercultural adaptability is considered the acquisition of intercultural competence that enables individuals to effectively adjust to an intercultural environment and appropriately manage their interactions. In this sense, intercultural adaptability is a process in which individuals develop their competence by responding to patterns of cultural differences between themselves and others (Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009).

Each country has navigated its own intercultural adaptability strategies for preparing and supporting student readiness to engage in increasingly intercultural interactions. China and South Korea (Korea) have ranked amongst the top countries of Asia in terms of internationalisation in higher education (Mok *et al.*, 2014; Ge and Ho, 2022; Jeon *et al.*, 2023). Each of these two nations has developed its own intercultural adaptability model in response to IoHE in line with its educational development policy and strategy and with the specific nature of its socio-cultural context. Accordingly, there is a growing interest in understanding: (1) How Korea and China, both typical countries of Confucian heritage culture (CHC), have developed intercultural adaptability for students in higher education and (2) What are implications for students’ IA development in CHC countries. Based on these two questions, this article undertakes a scoping review of the IA development strategies employed by Korea and China in order to make recommendations about approaches and initiatives that CHC countries can consider when tailoring IA to their own contexts.

Scoping review methodology

Using the rigorous methodology described below, a scoping review of the literature on the intercultural adaptability development of China and Korea for higher education students was conducted.

Scoping review design

A scoping review was conducted to develop a comprehensive overview of the literature in the field (Peters *et al.*, 2021). On the basis of a nine-step process of a scoping review (Peters *et al.*, 2020), this article has systematically developed a database on IA of two countries with its set criteria. The results have subsequently been presented in accordance with evidence maps underpinned by a *a priori* protocol, eligibility criteria and a comprehensive search strategy (Tricco *et al.*, 2018).

Searching literature

Identifying search terms. Search terms were generated from the review questions; these helped in the search for potentially useful publications; it also enabled processes to categorize the articles found and used. The entry terms include internationalisation, intercultural adaptability, intercultural competence, culturally responsive teaching, internationalised programmes or

foreign education or overseas education, students, undergraduates or exchange students, international students or foreign students or inbound students or outbound students, higher education, university, Asian countries, China, South Korea or Korea, Confucian countries and CHC countries.

Combining search terms. Search terms have been combined in the search strategy using Boolean operators. Two main Boolean operators include “AND” and “OR”. An example of combined terms for a search string is:

(“internationalisation” or “intercultural adaptability” or “intercultural competence” or “international programs” or “foreign education” or “overseas education”) AND (“China” or “South Korea” or “Korea” or “Confucian countries” or “Confucian heritage culture countries” or “CHC countries”) AND (“higher education” or “universities” or “students” or “undergraduates” or “international students” or “foreign students” or “inbound students” or “outbound students” or “exchange students”).

Date filters have been used to restrict the search to literature from a specified period. In this way, current and potentially relevant evidence has been collected.

Information source. The databases that are the most relevant and reputable electronic academic platforms that potentially provide a wealth of academic publications on the digitalisation of teaching and learning have been accessed for searching. These include: Education Research Complete (EBSCO), Website of Sciences (WoS), Scopus, ERIC, Academic Search Ultimate, APA PsycArticles and others. The WoS and Scopus provide a broad interdisciplinary range of relevant, scientifically reviewed and high-quality journals. The chosen databases also have advanced structures that use logical operators and algorithms as well as allowing the use of specifications that are essential for a thorough and systematic review.

Moreover, Google Scholar, a programme that searches a wide range of sources such as articles, reports, conference proceedings and books, was used to make it a good resource for review (Haddaway *et al.*, 2015). Finally, the reference lists in these relevant sources can be searched. This has been known as citation searching – it has helped to quickly identify other relevant literature.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria. The articles for this study were selected on the basis of inclusion and exclusion criteria that aligned with the review questions. The literature that was included in this review is related to intercultural adaptability development in international programmes and only in higher education in China and Korea.

Selection of evidence sources

About 355 documents were collected using the search terms and final search string. Almost one-third of these articles were initially removed through automatic de-duplication and the inclusion criteria for selecting relevant literature for review. After the titles and abstracts of all retrieved documents were carefully screened for relevance, a total of 145 full-text articles were suitably obtained for the study. Subsequently, the entire contents were examined for inclusion or exclusion. On the basis of the two main selection criteria, including the IA development strategies or interventions of China, Korea and/or features of CHC countries in promoting IA for students, 92 articles were eventually included in the scoping review for this article.

Analysis of results

A deductive approach was used to cluster and analyse data in three thematic categories, including government policies and initiatives, university activities and CHC related to intercultural adaptability development. In this way, the clusters of the analysed data were developed by the emerging themes within each category that are presented as findings of the review.

Subsequently, a descriptive analysis was chosen to synthesise the findings. It consisted of (1) a within-case analysis that outlined typical features for each article and (2) a cross-case analysis that compared the selected articles for important similarities and differences (Ayres *et al.*, 2003).

Scoping review results

Given the data analysis, the findings show that the similarity in intercultural adaptability development in South Korea and China is to enhance English language proficiency and communication in an intercultural environment. However, IA development models are varied across the selected countries. With typical features of a monocultural nation over many centuries, South Korea embodies Asian-Confucian culture in a self-growth model that focuses on domestic students' improvements in English language and cultural knowledge preparation through offering internationalised programmes (i.e. EMI), international learning environments with increasing numbers of international students, and mobility exchange programmes in its universities. Although China has also implemented similar strategic interventions in terms of transnational education and internationalised learning environments by attracting international students and local returnees, it has pursued an "*Outward-oriented*" higher education internationalisation agenda that exerts its soft-power influences on international partners through its Confucian cultures and Chinese language. This has been enacted through its international talent training programmes.

Self-growth initiatives in Korea

The rising economic aspect has certainly elevated the living standards of South Korea, making it a desirable destination for many immigrants (Yeo, 2016; Asian Fund Managers, 2023). With a huge wave of expatriates, the country once proudly declared itself a monoracial and monocultural society has gradually transformed into a multiracial and multicultural one. Equipping its citizens with intercultural adaptability has become a crucial strategy of the Korean government. The government has released several policies related to this social development matter, but most of them focus on improving multicultural understanding at the primary and high school level rather than at the university level. In Korea, the government declares an interest in enhancing students' intercultural adaptability as a part of IoHE (Moon, 2016; Lee, 2022), but it is currently more interested in internationalising its university system.

At the government level

A long history of being a monoracial state and numerous conflicts with foreign forces have fostered a conservative perspective on multicultural issues amongst Koreans; some even hold a hostile attitude towards foreigners and immigrants (Yeo, 2016; Kim, 2020). Following a turmoil period, the Korean government pursued neoliberal policies for the country's development. Accordingly, globalisation was seen to bring about less of a chance to be friended and cooperate with other countries, but rather as a race to compete and assert its dominance in various aspects (Lee, 2022). In this spirit, the Korean government has passed several education policies which clearly state that schools and teachers are responsible for teaching and training migrants and international students on the Korean culture and language so that they can quickly adapt to the society. However, Korean students do not need to attend any classes to improve their intercultural adaptability (Yeo, 2016; Seo, 2022). After 2014, with the intervention of the UN, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and several non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the policies on intercultural education at primary and high school levels in Korea have witnessed some positive adjustments. Nevertheless, those at higher education levels primarily focused on internationalising Korean universities to meet international standards in order to be ranked

in the global higher education list, rather than educating their students with intercultural skills (Lee, 2022; Moon, 2016; Kang, 2018).

The Korean government has internationalised its higher education since the early 1990s by using English as the main Medium of Instruction (EMI). This policy was further enhanced by the “Study Korea” project in 2014 (Kym and Kym, 2014; Williams, 2019). Subsequently, some initiatives like Brain Korea 21 and World Class University have further promoted English as the dominant medium of instruction in Korean universities (Kang, 2018; Bolton *et al.*, 2022). Although the Korean government has never provided any official guidelines on how to design and implement EMI, each Korean university has independently formulated and enforced its own EMI strategies (Kang, 2018). As a result, in 2006, the number of EMI courses grew to 9,000 out of the total 410,000 courses taught across all Korean universities, which is roughly 2.2% (Macaro *et al.*, 2017). This proportion rose to 3.1% in 2010 and nearly 30% in 2014 (Yu *et al.*, 2023). The implementation of EMI policies nationwide was not only merely aimed at upgrading the quality of international programmes in Korean universities but also at improving the English proficiency of Korean students and lecturers (Williams, 2019). The Korean government strongly believes that the acquisition of English as a global language improves citizens’ employability and communication skills, including intercultural adaptability, in the international labour market (Kang, 2018; Williams, 2019).

Another strategy endorsed by the Korean government has been to attract international students to study in Korea. The Global Korea Scholarship (GKS) scheme has awarded thousands of scholarships worth millions of US dollars, for example, 1,500 scholarships offered in 2023 (KGSP, 2023). This initiative has greatly induced a high number of international students to Korea for studying. Specifically, 60,000 international students pursued study in this country in 2010, marking a 400% increase compared to that number in 2005 (Palmer and Cho, 2011). This number was estimated to rise to 200,000 in 2023 (Gupta, 2023). The influx of international students not only improves Korean universities’ ranking but also offers an international environment on campuses (Lee and Bailey, 2020; Jeon *et al.*, 2023). This provides domestic students with more opportunities to communicate with foreigners, which enhances their intercultural adaptability (Lee and Bailey, 2020).

At the university level

The enforcement of EMI courses has varied dramatically across Korean universities due to the lack of the government’s guidelines (Kang, 2018; Bolton *et al.*, 2022). The Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) has taken a leading role in the EMI implementation, with over 50% of its major courses taught in English in 2011 (KAIST, 2022; Bolton *et al.*, 2022). Meanwhile, the most prestigious university in Korea, Seoul National University (SNU), has lagged far behind, with only 12% of its major courses delivered in English in the same year (Kang, 2018). This discrepancy stems from the difference in autonomy between these institutions. KAIST, as a private university, owns higher autonomy that allows responsive decisions related to EMI. In contrast, SNU as a recently privatised public university operates on the principle of participatory decision-making that requires collecting the voices of numerous stakeholders to make any important changes (Kang, 2018). Despite variations amongst universities, there has been consistent growth of EMI programmes across the country. According to a government report in 2011, out of 190 Korean universities surveyed, 99 provided EMI courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Yu *et al.*, 2023). This trend has led to an increase in international lecturers at Korean universities and higher English proficiency standards for all lecturers (Byun and Kim, 2015). In spite of a strong emphasis on English competency, intercultural education knowledge and skills are not yet required in lecturer recruitment (KRIVET, 2001; Williams, 2019).

Korean universities have developed a collaborative partnership with foreign institutions, promoting the offering of student exchange programmes. For instance, Korea University (KU)

has collaborated with 1,000 educational institutions in 98 countries to develop the KU exchange scheme. By 2022, these programmes have provided more than 1,000 students with opportunities to study abroad so as to experience diverse cultures (Korea University, 2022). Apart from sending Korean students abroad, the programmes also aimed at attracting students from foreign universities to Korea (Mok *et al.*, 2014; Jeon *et al.*, 2023). Owing to these efforts, Korean universities have built intercultural learning environments for domestic and international students.

In order to assist the integration of international students into Korean society, universities have prioritised teaching them the Korean language and culture. This strategy has predominantly been favoured over initiatives aimed at improving domestic students' intercultural understanding (Yeo, 2016; Seo, 2022). Thus, many intervention programmes have been offered to support international students studying in Korea. For example, the "Korea University Buddy Assistants" programme has assigned domestic students as "buddies" to assist their international peers to adapt to life and study in Korea (Korea University, 2023). These buddies have met regularly for one year to discuss and complete intercultural assignments designed by the university (Korea University, 2023).

Moreover, international students have also been encouraged to participate in the University Centre of Cultures and Languages, where they have been offered opportunities to practice their Korean language and connect with domestic friends (Jon, 2009). Through these programmes, Korean students have been educated to sympathise, respect and communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds. At the same time, their knowledge of Korean culture and pride in national identity have been reinforced. Consequently, such programmes have virtually strengthened domestic students' self-identity, intercultural understanding and adaptability (Lee and Bailey, 2020).

Developing students' IA through teachers' culturally responsive teaching

A lack of official guidance and training courses on intercultural skills for Korean students has been recognised to challenge students' IA in higher education (Kang, 2018). Although there have recently been some pilot projects in a few selected Korean universities, such as the intercultural stimulation-based learning course for Korean nursing students, these initiatives remain extremely scarce in the country (Shin *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, neither the government nor universities have provided professional development (PD) on intercultural competency, culturally responsive teaching or even English proficiency for academics despite strong investments in implementing EMI courses (Kim, 2016; Park *et al.*, 2022). For instance, a 2021 study found that over 80% of 117 interviewed Korean lecturers at higher education levels had never attended any training sessions regarding English proficiency (Kim *et al.*, 2021). Recently, such professional development has only been introduced for Korean primary and high school teachers (Lee, 2022). This lack of institutional support has drawn considerable criticism from experts (Moon, 2016; Cioffi, 2023).

Markedly, Korean institutions have offered exchange opportunities for teachers with an aim of reinforcing their experience in new cultures and intercultural competency (AKSE, 2020; Korea University, 2022; KNOU, 2024). In practice, Korean teachers encounter huge difficulties in communicating with international colleagues and students, though some of them achieve their doctoral degrees abroad. They tend to be more conservative than open-minded (Moon, 2016). Local-mindedness, biased attitudes and a lack of professional development challenge many Korean teachers to teach in culturally diverse classrooms and to support students in intercultural settings (Gu and Kim, 2012; Williams, 2019). As such, inadequate support from teachers and institutions has hindered both domestic and international students from developing their intercultural adaptability (Cioffi, 2023).

Overall, the government and universities of Korea have developed their self-growth policies and initiatives in response to internationalisation. At the macro level, the government policies on IoHE have primarily focused on improving universities' global rankings and

students' employability. At the micro level, though intercultural education has not adequately been promoted in Korean universities' programmes, the initiatives (i.e. EMI, attraction of international students to Korea and academic exchange) have contributed to developing domestic students' intercultural adaptability (Kang, 2018; Williams, 2019).

China's "outward-oriented" higher education internationalisation

"Reform and Opening Up" policy has been key to the rising status of China as the world's second-largest economy (Lou *et al.*, 2014; Wu, 2018b). Coupled with it, the impacts of globalisation have stimulated China's education reform, leading to a series of policies introduced to encourage the promotion of transnational education and provision, increase the number of international students and boost student learning and exchanges (Hong, 2018).

At the government level

In earlier stages, the development of transnational programmes was strictly controlled and regulated by the government, with the development of the "incidental, informal, and laissez-faire phase" until 1995 (Huang, 2007). Nonetheless, the government decentralisation has fostered institutional restructuring, human resource preparation, curriculum development and the teaching and learning process, which have aligned with current movements of education in the world (Hong, 2018; Xu, 2005). Hence, thanks to the issuance of the "Contemporary Regulation on Operation of Higher Education Institutions in Cooperation with Foreign Partners" of the former State Commission of Education in 1995, China has witnessed rapid developments in the number of international programmes amongst Chinese higher education institutions, especially those given authority to confer foreign degrees (Huang, 2007). Also, the country has become more open and outward-looking towards global talents, who are overseas Chinese or non-Chinese learners, resulting in a growing competition amongst large top-notch cities (Zhao and Zhu, 2009).

According to Tian and Lu (2018), China has been considered a "buying" nation for international education since 1985. International students conventionally moved from less advanced Asian nations to countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (Pan, 2013). Nevertheless, since the beginning of the century, China has become an increasingly significant host nation in international education, demonstrated through its growing capacity to attract international students to China from the region or beyond (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007; An and Chiang, 2015). As an increasing number of Asian students choose to continue their higher education studies in Asia, China appears to be one of their popular destinations.

While Western universities place emphasis on economic rationales, Chinese ones exert soft power worldwide, aiming to attract incoming international students (Hong, 2018). As Chinese leaders (i.e. Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao) emphasized the significance of human talent in China's modernisation project, the country has established and executed a policy of nationwide human resources development (Zhao and Zhu, 2009). It has been so important that the 10th Five-year Plan (2001–2005) dedicated a special chapter on human resource development for the first time, officially allowing and stimulating China to deploy necessarily relevant measures to enhance human resources through education, training and research and development (Wu, 2018a; Zhao and Zhu, 2009). This momentum leads China to an openness of outward-looking towards global talents, both overseas Chinese and non-Chinese ones.

Throughout the four historical periods [1] of IoHE in China, the nation has been in the period of regularisation of the internationalisation of higher education from 1976 to now. The understanding of "international education," hence, seems to be different basically depending on the execution of each period. According to An and Chiang (2015), before the 1990s, the term "international education" meant a one-way dispatch of Chinese students to the Western

world and importing programmes from the West. This period can be named “inward-oriented” internationalisation, implying the learning process from foreign knowledge, culture and higher education models through IoHE (Wu, 2018b). Nevertheless, the same term now changes its meaning because of the rapid influx of international students in Chinese higher education institutions, turning the whole picture of Chinese universities into a new (more international) look. In other words, from a “traditional supplier” exporting considerable numbers of international students, China has now become an active contributor/competitor for international students with Western partners (Wen *et al.*, 2014; Wu, 2018b). Such significant changes have been achieved thanks to necessary reforms initiated by China’s central government (An and Chiang, 2015; Tian and Lu, 2018). Particularly, China’s “Belt and Road” policy has been creating soft power not only in the region but also in the world (Wu and Liu, 2022), especially in the field of education because furtherance of academic exchanges and collaborations has been promoted (Zhou and Zeng, 2021). The statistics from China’s Ministry of Education show that 207,746 students came to study in China in 2021 from 64 countries, a 13.6% increase year on year, which is considered a higher rate than other nations (Wu and Liu, 2022).

Moreover, China has adopted a government-regulated approach to enact a consistent nationwide system, resulting in systematic execution of national policies and practices (Huang, 2007). Therefore, the recruitment and management of international students appears to be more effective, leading to China’s further attraction in recruiting and hosting more international students (Zhou and Zeng, 2021). Considered as an ambitious plan initiated by the Chinese government, “Study in China”, aimed to attract enrolment of up to 500,000 international students by 2020, turning China into the leading host nation in Asia (An and Chiang, 2015; Tian and Lu, 2018; Wu and Liu, 2022).

China is keen to become an export of Chinese knowledge and culture (Nguyen *et al.*, 2016) by deploying its strategic goals, initiating the new era for “outward-oriented” higher education internationalisation period with three focus dimensions (Figure 1): (1) the Confucius Institute initiative, a cultural diplomacy programme based on Sino-foreign higher education partnership, (2) international aid in higher education towards developing countries and (3) international student recruitment at higher education level (Wu, 2018b). Notably, being aware of its power in the culturally rich environment, the Chinese government constantly promotes the global expansion of the Confucius Institutes (CI), which is recognised as a “cultural diplomacy” project to conduct both receiving and sending of students (Wu, 2018b) in general and as a “key justification for the recruitment of international students in China” (Xu, 2023,



Source(s): Figure by Wu (2018b)

Figure 1. Chinese government’s “outward-oriented” higher education internationalisation

p. 1). There were 516 CI and 1,076 Confucius classrooms in 142 countries in 2017 (Xinhua, 2017). However, concerns about the Chinese government's use of CI to serve its political interests have resulted in tight scrutiny of CI in a range of countries, including Australia, the UK and the United States (Marklein, 2020; Ren and Wilhelm, 2020).

Through the soft power projection and enhancement, exchange diplomacy activities have been carried out by sending the nation's citizens overseas and reciprocally hosting overseas citizens. Accordingly, China is conducting an on-going implementation of a strategy in which more international students have been recruited and trained as future generations of intellectuals, technicians and political elites from other countries (Wu, 2018b). Moreover, to strengthen its national image and geopolitical interests, since 1949, China has been providing aid to developing nations, of which higher education is one of its major foci (Wu, 2018b). Besides, with the implementation of the "para-diplomats" frequently cited in national policy, including the outline of medium- and long-term education reform and development planning (2010–2020) and the Ministry of Education announcement of "the Study in China" plan, China has fostered positive interactions between international students and the society through drawing on alumni who *tell China's story well and positively* (Xu, 2023). This, in turn, contributes to boosting international student recruitment.

On the other hand, China has seen a rapidly increased number of Chinese students studying abroad, with an annual growth rate of 18.9% from 2000 to 2015 (Hong, 2018). This impressive figure has been achieved thanks to the remarkable economic development of the nation (as aforementioned discussion), coupled with the one-child policy, resulting in parents' willingness to invest in their children's overseas education (Hong, 2018). The government believed that sending students abroad, especially to study in high-ranking universities in the world, was the means of education quality provision and improvement (Petruk, 2018). The annual number of Chinese students studying abroad rose to 608,400 in 2017, compared with 134,000 in 2006 (Zha *et al.*, 2019). From a "learner" to a "player", China has been dramatically growing to change its national images.

At the university level

In response to the aforementioned governmental policies, Chinese universities have emerged at the forefront of internationalisation by incorporating international-oriented content and activities into their institutional strategy and practices, resulting in the increasing number of international students (Huang and Fang, 2023).

During the inward-oriented higher education internationalisation in the early days, Chinese universities were aware of the fact that they apply their strong conformity to Western standards and practices (Zha *et al.*, 2019), coupling with recruiting numerous international students, especially ones arriving in China under the Chinese government's scholarship investment (Larbi and Fu, 2017), which witnessed two-folds in the number of government scholarships since 2010 (Zhao, 2016, cited by Tian and Lu (2018)). Particularly, an unprecedented proliferation of national higher education has accelerated in 2016, with 2,596 universities and colleges enrolling a student population of 27 m, compared to 1,022 institutions and 3.4 m students in 1998, with up to 89% self-financed students in 2017 (Zha *et al.*, 2019).

In the context of government-initiated internationalisation, increasing numbers of Chinese universities have been responding and following the government strategy, and implementing different approaches to manage to rise in the internationalisation landscape. One of these is that Chinese universities offer bilingual courses taught in both English and Chinese to their students. To highly compete in this context, according to Huang and Fang (2023), one of the policy initiatives of China's Ministry of Education (MoE) in 2001 aims to stimulate universities to develop bilingual undergraduate courses in key disciplines, consisting of finance and law, biological engineering and information technology. From five to ten per cent of such courses shall be taught in the three-year programmes in leading institutions. Because the number of EMI programmes is considered a significant criterion for HEI assessment

regulated by the MoE, some Chinese universities provide instrumental incentives (e.g. monetary rewards or promotional opportunities) to encourage their teaching staff while delivering EMI courses (Huang and Fang, 2023). EMI programmes appear to be a magnet for attracting international students to China. An increase in the number of international students has driven higher-quality EMI programmes at Chinese universities, resulting in Chinese universities' greater success in their desired outcome of recruiting more international students.

According to Bodycott (2012), besides financial resources brought to the country by international students, they play an active factor in enriching local domestic students' knowledge and competence, and Chinese students are beneficial in the process of social integration and intercultural communication as well. Moreover, as one of the most popular destinations, which is much more international than ever before (Shen *et al.*, 2021), it is indispensable for China to place its focus on recognising the importance of intercultural communicative competence so that culture shock can be mitigated for its domestic students. The study of Ou and Gu (2018) offers this association as "reciprocal language socialisation" (p. 12) when Chinese participants proactively socialise with their international peers to experience and obtain linguistic knowledge and culture while inspiring such peers into "Chinization". During this process, Chinese students are able to identify their own values, empowering them to construct and mobilise multilingual and cultural resources to effectively interact with international interlocutors (Ou and Gu, 2018).

The studies conducted by Zhou and Griffiths (2011) and Chen and Wang (2018) revealed that Chinese students may be active in intercultural communication occasionally but overall do not possess a high level of intercultural communicative competence; they seem to lack knowledge of common western customs and values and cannot differentiate between Chinese and western culture, resulting in their avoidance of communication and little confidence. Furthermore, students considered inhibiting factors of their smooth communication over cultures were due to poor listening comprehension, teachers' grammar-focused teaching methods and their habit of thinking in Chinese (Zhou and Griffiths, 2011). Considering the issue of Chinese students' intercultural weaknesses and international students' socio-cultural and psychological adaptability, Zhou and Zeng (2021) propose that the building-up of cultural consensus can be promoted to help international students accelerate their cultural adaptation, which can be done "through cooperation and practice activities" (p. 650). In other words, frequent interactions amongst native and non-native students can be enhanced through multicultural festivals to foster their emotional connection and mutual understanding; otherwise, international students may feel the separation of international and Chinese students (Larbi and Fu, 2017).

It seems the two focuses of the promotion of bilingual programmes and the increase in the number of international students become the significant leverage for the outflow of Chinese students studying overseas, who have adapted more effectively to the new learning settings if their intercultural communication has been fostered. However, according to Huang and Fang (2023), intercultural communication amongst EMI teachers is quite superficial and instrumental. Moreover, the study on pre-service English teachers by Lei (2020) shows that teachers possess a low level of intercultural communicative competence.

Though there has not been a uniform and coherent way of representing intercultural communication in departments and faculties of Chinese higher education institutions (Simpson *et al.*, 2022), local universities have developed students' intercultural adaptability through culturally responsive teaching. Shen *et al.* (2021) disclosed that teachers of hospitality and tourism academic programmes are aware of the importance of intercultural communication, so they have promoted adapting in-class discussions of cultural concepts, case studies, site visits, etc. to local labour market trends. Moreover, the study of Guo *et al.* (2022) highlighted that internationalisation of higher education in China attaches importance to both de-Westernization and indigenous Chinese epistemology, language and culture. In this spirit, instead of placing emphasis on native speakerism, the more local culturally responsive contents have been developed to benefit both Chinese native and non-native students. To