Chinese and Irish Students: An Investigation of Their Intercultural Competence and Second Language Learning Motivation in the Process of Integration

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Abstract
This paper presents the initial results of ongoing PhD research, which investigates the perceived intercultural competence and second language (L2) learning motivation of Chinese and Irish students in higher education in Ireland. Literature shows that the integration level can be determined by students' intercultural contact frequency and L2 motivation. The main findings of this research show that i) integration between Irish and Chinese students is limited as their intercultural contact is restricted to academic environments; ii) intercultural contact does not necessarily imply an increase in perceived intercultural competence; iii) L2 learning promotes intercultural competence in the integration process and iv) while instrumental motivation is high among both groups of learners, Chinese students show more socio-cultural motivation than Irish students, and v) the level of self-determined motivation influences the success of the integration process of Chinese students. The paper concludes with an outline of further research to be undertaken which will contribute to recommendations on how the academic, social and intercultural opportunities of a diverse student body can be maximised.

Keywords: Chinese Students; Irish Students; integration; Intercultural Competence; L2 Motivation

1. Introduction

Increased numbers of Chinese students in Irish higher education present challenges for integration of these students, but also bring opportunities for intercultural contact and language learning for Irish and Chinese students. In parallel to this development, the rise of China's economy has led to the introduction of courses in Chinese language and culture at five Irish HE institutions, typically as electives on business-related courses.

Over the past decade, research involving Chinese students in Ireland and Britain has focused

on how they integrate into the host society and academic life, and has identified the main linguistic, social and cultural obstacles to integration. This paper will start by providing an overview of this research, and will assess the specific role played by intercultural competence and language learning motivation in promoting integration of Irish and Chinese students. This will be followed by an overview of research on intercultural competence in language learning. Then language learning motivation relevant to the groups in question will be explored. The context of the research is Chinese and Irish students studying at five third level universities or institutes of technology, taking courses that typically have high numbers of Chinese students. Qualitative and quantitative research will be conducted in order to answer the research questions. While the total number of participants in each institution is small, the five institutions and courses involved are representative of the situation in higher education in Ireland.

Initial research findings show that contact between students is restricted to the academic environment. Where this contact does take place, students self-assessment show that they do not perceive themselves as being more interculturally competent because of this contact. However, there is evidence to suggest that second language (L2) learning does promote development of intercultural competence. Language learning motivation was also self-assessed and shows that while instrumental motivation is high among both groups of learners, Chinese students show more socio-cultural orientation than Irish students. These initial findings will be explored in the subsequent stage of this research. The paper concludes with an outline of further research to be carried out.

2. Integration of Chinese Students in Ireland

2.1. Challenges and Difficulties in the Integration Process

This section will explore the issues relating to integration of international and Chinese students in Britain and Ireland. Many of the issues relating to international students in general relate to Chinese students and similar issues are raised for Chinese students in Britain as in Ireland. Factors which inhibit social integration of Chinese students in Ireland, both inside and outside the institution, include language difficulties, racial discrimination, difference in attitudes towards alcohol, lack of social contact, different food, money and banking.[1] These

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[1] Wang Ying Yun: *Chinese Students in Ireland*. For the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI)'s Community Profiles Series. NUI Maynooth: Department of Sociology, 2006.

[1] Yvonne Turner: 'Chinese Students in Europe: the influence of culture and society'. In: Wendy Cox and David Cameron (eds.): *Chinese Students in Ireland: New Opportunities, New Needs, New Challenges*. 2001, p. 12-21.

factors also inhibit their ability to make friends in the host society.[2] Language difficulties are also a challenge in the academic context,[3] where differences in approaches to education and learning and lack of institutional support structures also cause problems for Chinese students.[4]

Apart from language and cultural problems, international students are also under pressure in other areas. This includes "pressures to succeed academically, financial pressures to pay high tuition fees and meet the high cost of living in Ireland," as well as pressures to meet personal and parental expectation.[5] Immigration status and visa renewal problems can inhibit Chinese students' long-term planning, which may discourage interaction with local people or fellow students.[6] What has emerged in recent research is that food-related problems are no longer a major challenge.[7]

The difficulties that international students typically encounter are likely to change over time. For example, students may struggle to understand local accents or to eat food they are not used to at the very beginning of their sojourn.[8] After a few months, they are more concerned about problems related to academic matters, such as completing assignments in English and improving their academic writing.[9] At a later stage, once the academic problems are less acute, they become more conscious of the need to find friends.[10]

2.2. Socio-cultural Integration

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[2] Chen Yea Wen: Intercultural Friendship from the Perspectives of East Asian International Students, In: *China Media Research* 2/3, (2006), accessed on 20th February 2013 on http://www.chinamediaresearch.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=39&Itemid=2. Joanna K.L. Tan and Jonathan W.P. Goh: "Why do they not talk?" Towards an understanding of students cross-cultural encounters from an individualism / collectivism perspective. In: *International Educational Journal* 7/5 (2006), p. 651-667. Jacqui Campbell and Mingsheng Li: Asian Students' Voices: An Empirical Study of Asian Students' Learning Experiences at a New Zealand University. In: *Journal of Studies in International Education* 12/4 (2008), p. 375-396. Wenli Wu and Michael Hammond: Challenges of university adjustment in the UK: a study of East Asian Master's degree students. In: *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 35/3 (2011), p. 423-438.

[3] Wang, *Chinese Students in Ireland*.

[4] Yvonne Turner: 'When an Unstoppable Force Meets an Immovable Object: Chinese students in the UK university system'. In: Cox and Cameron, *Chinese Students in Ireland*, p. 39-78.

[5] Ciarán Dunne: Host Students' Perspectives of Intercultural Contact in an Irish University. In: *Journal of Studies in International Education* 13/2 (2009), p. 222-239, p. 226-227.

[6] Da-Wen Sun: 'The Experience of Chinese Postgraduate Students: Academic Advantages and Disadvantages: Practical and Personal Difficulties'. In: Cox and Cameron, *Chinese Students in Ireland*, p. 36. Cf. Wang, *Chinese Students in Ireland*, p. 53.

[7] Wu and Hammond, Challenges of university adjustment, p. 431.

[8] Yuefang Zhou and John Todman: Patterns of Adaptation of Chinese Postgraduate Students in the United Kingdom. In: *Journal of Studies in International Education* 13/4 (2009), p. 467-486, p. 475.

[9] Wu and Hammond, Challenges of university adjustment, p. 432.

[10] Zhou and Todman, Patterns of Adaptation, p. 481.

International students expect to have contact and develop friendships with host students.[11] Yet, numerous researchers have shown that the reality is quite different: the actual frequency and quality of contact remains on a superficial level.[12]

While international students have the impression that host students hold "relatively favourable perceptions of international students, they [are] largely uninterested in initiating contact," so that international students have to make an effort to form friendships.[13] For some Chinese students, the part-time workplace is the first and also the only place where contact can be initiated with Irish people.[14]

There can also be a lack of motivation to integrate among Chinese students, particularly if they are participants in a university exchange project. These students normally come with a number of classmates, which can reduce the motivation to seek out intercultural contact with the host community, and can mean that it takes longer to adjust to the local accent than it does for students who come as individuals.[15]

Although physical contact may be limited, virtual contact through MSN and Facebook provides more opportunities for interaction beyond the classroom between host and international students. Students indicate that the informality of this kind of relationship minimises cultural differences.[16] Chinese students also use virtual contact to maintain relationships with friends and family at home. These personal exchanges play a very important role in giving them a sense of connection and encouraging them to continue their study.[17] However, virtual contact, whether with host students or with family may inhibit Chinese students' motivation to develop direct contact with the host community, which may have implications for their L2 development.

From a different perspective, the arrival of Chinese students in Irish third level institutions is bound to have some impact on Irish students. Research carried out from the perspective of

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[11] Prem Ramburuth: The Internationalisation of Education: Implications for Student Learning and Socio-Cultural Adjustment. Paper presented at the 15th Australian International Education Conference: Developing Global Capacity through International Education, 26-28 September, 2001, University of New South Wales, Sydney, accessed on 9th April 2011 at http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/23566/20020424-0000/www.idp.com/conference/conf2001/papers/26_1100_IntStudSocCult_IntEd__paper_Ramburuth.pdf.

[12] Wang, *Chinese Students in Ireland*. Cf. Neil Harrison and Nicola Peacock: Understanding the UK student's response to internationalisation. In: UKCISA, 2007, accessed on 12th September, 2011 on http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/files/pdf/world_views/uk_student_response.pdf.

[13] Wu and Hammond, Challenges of university adjustment in the UK.

[14] Wang, *Chinese Students in Ireland*, p. 46.

[15] Zhou and Todman, Patterns of Adaptation, p. 480.

[16] Catherine Montgomery: A Decade of Internationalisation - Has It Influenced Students' Views of Cross-Cultural Group Work at University? In: *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13/2 (2009), p. 256-270, p. 266.

[17] Wu and Hammond, Challenges of university adjustment in the UK, p. 432.

Irish students involved with international students indicates that host students find intercultural contact both complex and problematic, raising issues of uncertainty associated with intercultural contact, language barriers and differences in communication style. The current research project will build on existing research by providing data relevant to both perspectives, Chinese and Irish students.

2.3. Academic Integration

According to Dunne, there are differences in how Irish and Chinese students spend their time on campus.[18] Irish students perceive international students to be more engaged in academic subject matter and to have a stronger study ethic than they themselves, who consider the social aspect of university life to be more important. In the academic environment, mixed-culture group work is the most frequent contact opportunity that students have. Therefore, students' attitude towards group work can be used as a likely indicator of their frequency and quality of contact.

In studies of the role of group work, Montgomery reported that students in the UK generally regard work in international groups as an opportunity and an experience that is enjoyable, and gives them the chance to "gain important transferable skills." UK students regard international students as "holders of knowledge" and as "an opportunity to get different perspectives on the subject."[19] However, host students have also found that their stereotypical images of international students and problematic interaction limited their contact.[20] Apart from these difficulties, peer pressure was found to discourage Irish students from engaging with out-group members, so that they prefer to be assigned to groups rather than to select their own groups.[21] Fear that the challenges and complexities of working in multicultural groups may affect their marks in the subject also discourages contact with international students.[22]

It has to be pointed out that all the research referred to above noted that low levels of language competence and use have a definite impact on student's ability or efficiency to work together. Host students have the impression that Chinese students use broken English, don't

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[18] Dunne, Host Students' Perspectives.
[19] Montgomery, A Decade of Internationalisation, p. 263.
[20] Harrison and Peacock, Understanding the UK student's response to internationalisation.
[21] Dunne, Host Students' Perspectives.
[22] Glauco De Vita: Fostering intercultural learning through multicultural group work. In: Jude Carroll and Janette Ryan (eds.): *Teaching International Students: Improving Learning for All*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005, p. 75-83.

like to contribute to group work and don't like to express their opinion.[23] While this will be further explored when interviews are conducted as part of the second phase of this PhD research, one explanation for Chinese students' reluctance to participate in group work could be that they compete with others for a place in higher education, so students tend to view the education experience extremely competitively and from an individualist perspective. As a result, Chinese students prefer to work on their own, as they don't consider group work to be a formal way of learning.[24] This limits their contact with host students and is a further obstacle to integration.

3. Intercultural Competence and its Role in the Integration Process

Although there is no unified definition of intercultural competence, a number of frameworks have been developed which help to understand its components and provide guidance for assessment. In her Process Model of Intercultural Competence, Deardorff builds on Byram's '*savoirs*' and details the components of intercultural competence: attitude, knowledge, skills, awareness, as well as internal outcomes and external outcomes.[25] The first four elements of this model were adapted for the questionnaire used to assess Chinese and Irish students' perceived intercultural competence. Each of the components will be reviewed in this section and the role of intercultural competence in integration will also be discussed.

3.1. Attitude

Attitude is defined by Byram as *savoir être*, meaning a person has an "attitude of curiosity and openness to look at one's own culture and value other cultures."[26] According to Deardorff, these attitudes include *respect* (valuing cultural diversity), *openness* (to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures), *withholding judgment* and *curiosity and discovery* (tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty).[27] While respect involves showing interest in others, the other three all involve risk-taking and moving outside of one's comfort zone. Curiosity pushes one to explore similarities and differences, while openness allows the

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[23] Simone Volet and Ang Cheng Guang: Culturally Mixed Groups on International Campuses: An Opportunity for Inter-Cultural Learning. In: *Higher Education Research and Development* 17/1 (1998), p. 5-23. Cf. Harrison and Peacock: Understanding the UK students response to internationalisation.Cf. Montgomery: A Decade of Internationalisation, p. 267.

[24] Turner, 'When an Unstoppable Force Meets an Immovable Object', p. 51

[25] Darla. K. Deardorff: Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization. In: *Journal of Studies in International Education* 10/3 (2006), p. 241-266.

[26] Michael Byram: *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1997, p. 34.

[27] Deardorff, Identification and Assessment.

possibility of seeing from more than one perspective, which is invaluable when negotiating and mediating cultural difference.[28] Attitude is the most difficult component of intercultural competence, both in terms of acquisition and measurement.[29] It is both affective (being able to relinquish ethnocentric attitudes) and cognitive (being able to establish and maintain relationships).[30]

3.2. Knowledge

Seeking knowledge follows positive attitude as the next step in responding appropriately to the unfamiliar culture. Byram defined *savoir* as "knowledge of conventions of communication and interaction" or "knowledge of social distinctions and their principal markers."[31] In Deardorff's model, knowledge is understood as showing cultural self-awareness (of your own identity and world view), culture-specific knowledge (beliefs, values and norms), deep cultural knowledge, including understanding other worldviews, and sociolinguistic awareness.[32] Although cultural knowledge is one of the most important components, it does not equal intercultural competence, nor is it sufficient on its own in developing intercultural competence.[33]

3.3. Skills

Skills relate to the acquisition and processing of knowledge, which requires the ability to listen, to observe and to interpret.[34] This is in accordance with Byram's *savoir apprendre / faire (*skills of discovery and interaction). At a higher level of ability one would be required to analyse, to evaluate and to relate, equivalent to Byram's term *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating).[35]

3.4. Awareness

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[28] Michelle LeBaron and Venashri Pillay: *Conflict across cultures: A unique experience of bridging differences*. Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, 2006.

[29] Fionnuala Kennedy, Jenny Bruen and Juliette Pechenart: 'Using an e-portfolio to facilitate the self-assessment of both language and intercultural learning in higher education: a case study approach'. In: Joachim Fischer, David Little (eds.) and Fiona Dalziel (guest editor): *Language Learning in Higher Education* 1/1, The role of the CEFR and the ELP in Higher Education. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012, p. 229-247, p. 236.

[30] Michael Byram and Genevieve Zarate: *Definitions, objectives and assessment of sociocultural competence*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1994.

[31] Byram, Teaching and Assessing, p. 35.

[32] Deardorff, Identification and Assessment.

[33] Darla. K. Deardorff: 'Synthesizing Conceptualizations of Intercultural Competence: A Summary and Emerging Themes'. In: *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2009, pp. 264-269.

[34] Deardorff, Identification and Assessment.

[35] Byram, Teaching and Assessing, p. 37.

While attitudes, knowledge and skills are considered by many researchers to be the main components of intercultural competence, awareness is also one of the important requirements that appear in many models of intercultural competence. Byram uses the term 'critical cultural awareness' *(savoir s'engager)* and defines it as "an ability to evaluate critically and, on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries."[36] Fantini configured a pinwheel to illustrate the relationship between positive attitudes, knowledge, skills and awareness. He believes the first three dimensions promote one's awareness through introspection and reflection, while enhanced awareness, in turn, stimulates the development of the other three dimensions.

In this research project, the perceived intercultural competence of Chinese and Irish students will be measured by responses to statements that are relevant to the dimensions reviewed above. The survey will be carried out in two stages, at the beginning of the research project and one year later, as intercultural competence is "a longitudinal and ongoing developmental process."[37] This paper will explore the findings of the first stage of the research.

3.5. Language and Experience

Apart from the four dimensions outlined above, language ability and intercultural experience are necessary to build intercultural competence, but neither of them is sufficient on its own.[38] Intercultural competence can be developed through "adequate preparation, substantive intercultural interactions, and relationship building."[39] In order for intercultural interaction to develop into intercultural competence the role of language is crucial:

> Lack of a second language – even at a minimal level – constrains one to continue to think about the world and act within it, only in one's native system, and deprives the individual of one of the most valuable aspects of the intercultural experience.[40]

Wen emphasizes that an interculturally competent student should not only have knowledge of a language but also have the competence to identify underlying linguistic principles, awareness of how to use the language in a social context in order to fulfill a particular communicative function, and most importantly, the competence to use proper and effective

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[36] Byram, Teaching and Assessing, p. 90.
[37] Alvino. E. Fantini: 'Assessing Intercultural Competence: Issues and Tools'. In: *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2009, p. 459.
[38] Deardorff, Synthesizing Conceptualizations of Litercultural Competence.
[39] Deardorff, *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, Preface, p. xiii.
[40] Alvino Fantini: 'About Intercultural Communicative Competence: a Construct'. In: Alvino Fantini and St. Louis Tirmizi (eds.): *Exploring and Assessing Intercultural Competence*, Final Report. Missouri: Washington University, 2005, appendix E, p.2.

strategies to accomplish an actual communication purpose.[41] Noels, Pon and Clément investigated the relationship between identity, interethnic contact, linguistic self-confidence, and psychological adjustment of 179 Chinese university students in Canada. The research results showed that greater self-confidence in the second language (English) is related to more frequent contact with the host community (Canadians) and less involvement with their own cultural community (Chinese); they concluded that better quality of contact with natives is associated with less anxiety while speaking the second language.[42] These results are echoed by Rubenfeld, Clément, Lussier, Lebrun, and Auger's findings, which show that second language acquisition depends largely on the learners' confidence; they conclude that students with high levels of confidence possess the skills and experiences necessary to seek active contact with host students than the students who closely communicate with their home community.[43] These findings suggest that L2 proficiency directly affects one's intercultural communication ability.

3.6 Intercultural Competence and the Integration Process

In the integration process of international students, intercultural contact frequency and quality as well as psychological adjustment to the new culture are quite often used to indicate the level of integration.[44] Berry describes the four models of acculturation: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization, and proposed that integration is the preferred mode of acculturation.[45] His research has shown that regular intercultural contact does affect an individual's identity, language behaviour and psychosocial adjustment. The change of cultural identity is a consequence of one's intercultural interaction: The higher the level of contact, the greater the likelihood of adjusting one's behaviour to that of the host culture. This supports the idea that increased intercultural contact leads to greater competence in intercultural situations.

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[41] Wen Qiufang: *Spoken English Teaching and Assessment*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Teaching Press, 1999.

[42] Kimberly A. Noels, Gordon Pon and Richard Clement: Language, Identity and Adjustment: The Role of Linguistic Self-Confidence in The Acculturation Process. In: *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 15/3 (1996), p. 246-264.

[43] Sara Rubenfeld, Richard Clément, Denise Lussier, Monique Lebrun and Réjean Auger: Second Language Learning and Cultural Representations: Beyond Competence and Identity. In: *Language Learning* 56/4 (2006), p. 609-631.

[44] Glenn A. Melnick, Gurvinder Kaur, Joanna Yu: Social Integration and Academic Outcomes: The Case of an International Public Policy and Management Program. In: *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 17/4 (2011), p. 569-584.

[45] J. W. Berry: 'Psychology of Acculturation'. In: J.J. Berman (ed.): *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation 1989: Cross-cultural Perspectives*. London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990, p. 201-234.

4. The Role of Second Language Motivation in the Integration Process

Second language acquisition depends largely on the learners' self-confidence and motivation in using the second language (L2). This is related to more frequent contact with the host community, less involvement with one's own cultural community, and less anxiety while speaking the second language.[46] Students with high levels of confidence possess the skills and experience necessary to seek active contact with host students to a greater degree than students who remain in close contact with their home community.[47]

Gardner and Lambert conducted pioneering work in the 1950s to explore the nature of motivation specific to language study.[48] Two different types of motivation were identified: integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to a favourable attitude toward the target language community, possibly a wish to integrate and adapt to a new target culture through use of the language.[49] Instrumental motivation refers to the desire to learn a language because it fulfills certain utilitarian goals, such as getting a job or passing an examination.

Empirical research conducted by Gardner and MacIntyre in 1991 demonstrated that both integrative and instrumental motivation facilitated language learning.[50] Instrumentally motivated learners study longer than non-instrumentally motivated learners when there is an opportunity to profit from learning, but this distinction disappears when the incentive is removed. In later research, based on social motivational theory and Gardner's research, Dörnyei and his colleagues worked on a series of studies in 1993 and 1999 to investigate the motivation that influenced L2 learning of 8,593 Hungarian learners of English and German, aged 13 to 14 years. When learning of English was compared with learning of German, they concluded that integrativeness was the single most important factor in shaping the students' L2 motivated behaviour.[51]

Students with high integrative motivational orientation are more likely to seek out opportunities for intercultural contact so that they have more chance to learn the linguistic

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[46] Noels, Pon and Clement, Language, Identity and Adjustment.

[47] Rubenfeld, Clément, Lussier, Lebrun and Auger: Second Language Learning and Cultural Representations.

[48] Robert C. Gardner and Wallace E. Lambert: Motivational Variables in Second-Language Acquisition. In: *Canadian Journal of Psychology* 5 13/4 (1959), p. 266-272.

[49] Robert C. Gardner: *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning - The role of attitudes and motivation.* London: Edward Arnold, 1985, p. 54.

[50] Robert C. Gardner and Peter D. MacIntyre: An instrumental motivation in language study: Who says it isn't effective? In: *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 13 (1991), p. 266-272.

[51] Zoltán Dörnyei and Kata Csizér: The Effects of Intercultural Contact and Tourism on Language Attitudes and Language Learning Motivation. In: *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 24/4 (2005), p. 327-357.

and cultural knowledge needed for socio-cultural competence.[52] However, research also indicates that intercultural contact can also be a precursor to increased L2 motivation.[53]

Self-determined motivation is also an important factor in predicting students' cultural adjustment when they study abroad. In a study of the role of self-determined motivation among international students at three Canadian universities, Chirkov, Safdar, Guzman, and Playford conclude that the students who feel that they initiated their decision to study abroad and who stood behind it are likely to be happier, less distressed and more successful in adjusting to a new country in comparison to those who feel they were pressurised by other people or circumstances to move abroad. This result raises questions in relation to the motivation of Chinese students to study abroad. As *filial piety* is a central value in Chinese society, children respond respectfully and obediently to their parents. This suggests that Chinese students are inclined to follow their parents' wishes rather than their own interests when they need to make decisions regarding study abroad. In this paper, the level of self-determined motivation among Chinese students who come to Ireland will be reported.

Conclusions from the literature reviewed above can be summarised with the following three main points which illustrate the inter-relationship between intercultural competence and L2 in the integration process: i) integrative motivation promotes intercultural contact, while intercultural contact, in turn, leads to stronger L2 learning motivation; ii) stronger self-determined motivation will lead to better cultural adjustment, less stress, and more positive intercultural interaction; iii) better cultural adjustment and more intercultural contact indicate higher intercultural competence and better integration. The research methodology used in the current study is designed to determine to what extent these findings relate to Chinese and Irish students in Ireland.

5. Research Methodology

The primary research tools (both qualitative and quantitative methods) are questionnaires, interviews and case studies. This paper will focus only on findings available to date from the questionnaire survey used to gather initial findings. The context of the research is students

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[52] Stephen F. Culhane: An Intercultural Interaction Model: Acculturation Attitudes in Second Language Acquisition. In: *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching* 1/1, 2004, p. 50-61, accessed on 8th February, 2010 on http://e-flt.nus.edu.sg/v1n12004/culhane.htm.
Cf. Kata Csizér and Judit Kormos: The Relationship of Intercultural Contact and Language Learning Motivation among Hungarian Students of English and German. In: *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development* 29/1 (2008), p. 30-48.
[53] Dörnyei and Csizér, The Effects of Intercultural Contact and Tourism.

studying in five higher education institutions in Ireland. Questionnaires were designed and distributed to 35 Chinese and 120 Irish students, with a different questionnaire for each of these groups. All the 35 Chinese students learn English as a second language. Among the 120 Irish students, 23 of them has learned Chinese as part of degree course, the rest never did. All participants share a similar academic profile, as they are currently studying on business-related courses involving mixed nationality classes including Chinese and Irish students. The purpose of the questionnaire is to allow the students to self-assess their intercultural competence, to reflect on the frequency and quality of their contact with members of the other culture, and to rate their perceived L2 learning motivation. Throughout the questionnaire, 5-point Likert scales were used to elicit participant responses to statements based on the research questions. The questionnaire aimed to establish initial findings for the following research questions:

1) How do Chinese students perceive their level of integration into Irish society?

2) How do Chinese and Irish students rate their intercultural competence?

3) What are the affective factors that influence students' learning and integration?   4) What motivated the students to learn Chinese or English as a second language? This section will summaries the approach taken.

To answer the first research question, i.e. how do Chinese students perceive their level of integration into Irish society, participants were asked to rate the frequency and quality of interaction with their Irish classmates, neighbours, workmates, and friends in their academic and social environment using 5-point Likert scales. For example:

Contact with Irish classmates

Not at all frequent   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)   Extremely frequent

Not at all pleasant   (1)   (2)   (3)   (4)   (5)   Extremely pleasant

To answer the second research question, i.e. how Chinese and Irish students rate their intercultural competence, the questionnaire included thirty *'can do'* statements in four dimensions based on Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence.[54] Examples of statements in each of the four categories are "I can understand and interpret the type of body language and non-verbal communication that Irish people use (*Knowledge*)"; "I'm willing to interact with Irish people rather than spending all my time with Chinese people (*Attitude*)"; "I can use appropriate strategies to adapt to the Irish culture and help reduce my stress levels

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[54] Deardorff, Identification and Assessment.

(*Skill*)"; "I realise the importance of cultural and language diversity in today's world and their effect on social and work situations (*Awareness*)." The average scores of each group were used to compare their perceived level of intercultural competence and how they rated the frequency and quality of interaction with the other group in the academic environment and daily life.

To answer the third research question, i.e. the possible affective factors that may influence students' learning and integration, students were asked to respond to statements related to the following factors:

i) Difficulties that they might encounter in the process of integration, related to food, religion, language, circle of friends;

ii) Anxiety when using the second language. Students responded to statements such as "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English in class."

iii) The factors that affect participation in group work. Attitude and perspectives towards group work in class were rated on statements such as "the experience of working with mixed-nationality group members is enjoyable." "I prefer doing group work with people from my own culture when I can communicate through my own language."

The aim of the fourth research question, was to ascertain what motivated the students to learn Chinese or English as a second language. To do this, the research devised a a list of nine statements suggesting possible motivational factors, which students were asked to rank. These statements are based on those used in research by Gardner[55] and Gao et al.[56] Each of these is related to one of the following factors: instrumental (e.g. "I may need it later on for my job or studies"), integrative (e.g. "Because it gives me a better understanding of how Irish people behave and think.") or socio-cultural motivation (e.g. "So that I can understand English speaking films, videos, TV, radio, or pop music)."

Questionnaire data was collected using Survey Monkey in students' own time.[57] Data was then converted to SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions) for analysis.

6. Findings and Discussion

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[55] Gardner, *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning*.
[56] Gao Yihong, Zhao Yuan, Cheng Ying, Zhou Yan: Relationship Between English Learning Motivation Types and Self-Identity Changes Among Chinese Students. In: *TESOL Quarterly* 41/1 (2007), p. 133–155.
[57] http://www.surveymonkey.com/

The four main findings of this first-stage research will be presented in this section. These relate to how Chinese and Irish students perceive their own intercultural competence, their level of integration, the difficulties and obstacles that hinder intercultural competence development and inter-group interaction. The results will also cover the role of L2 learning in development of intercultural competence, and the relationship between students' intercultural competence development, and L2 learning motivation in the integration process.

Finding 1: Intercultural contact is limited to academic environments and does not necessarily imply an increase in perceived intercultural competence. As stated in the literature review, students' integration level is indicated by the frequency and quality of intercultural contact. The following table shows students' self-assessment of their frequency of intercultural contact in a number of possible situations.
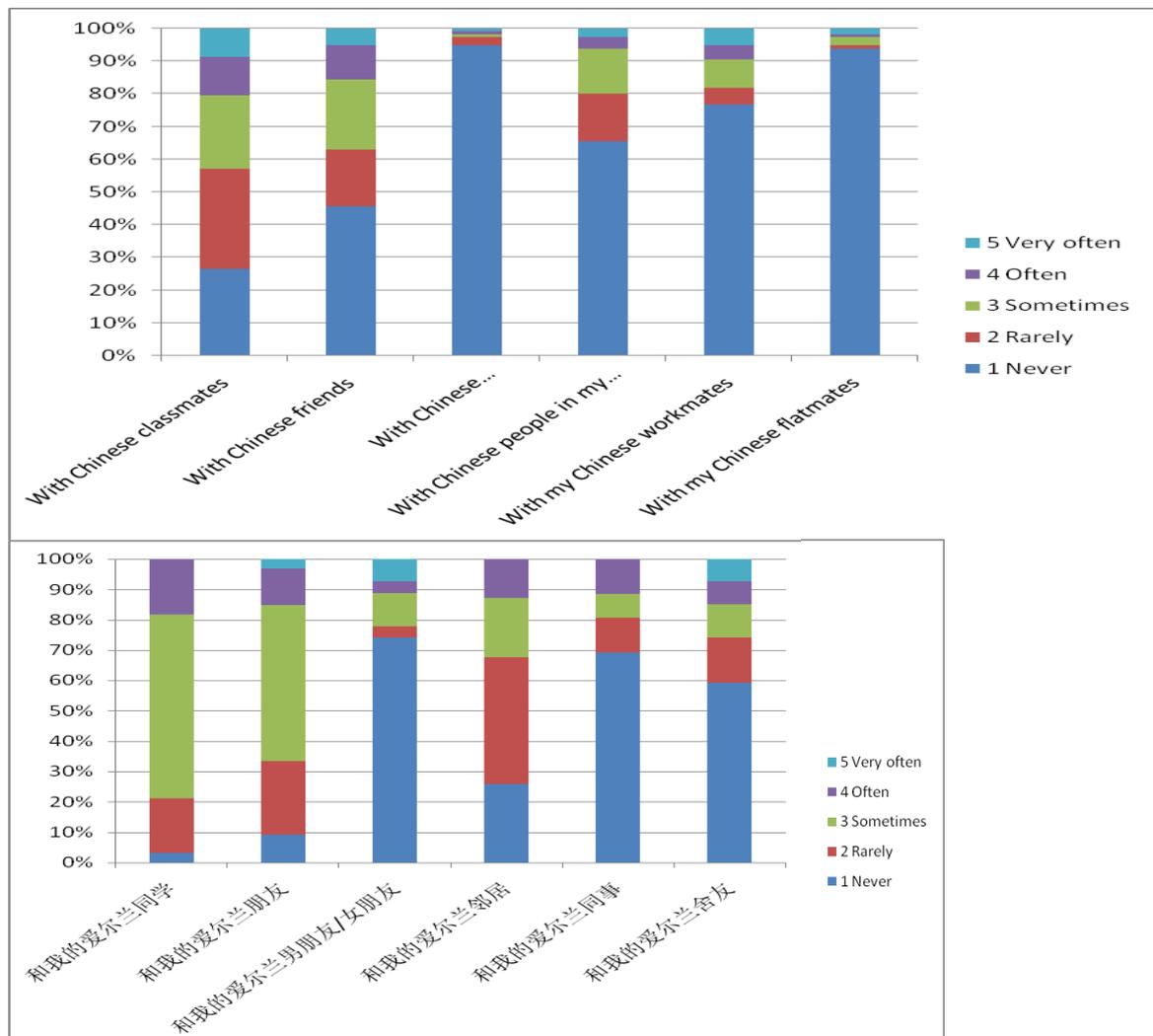

Table 1: Irish students' interaction with Chinese students (Table 1a) and Chinese students' interaction with Irish students (Table 1b)

It has to be noted that the categories in Table 1a are the same as those in table 1b, except that they are in Chinese.

From this chart we can see that the percentage of students who have chosen "very often" for the different situations is very low, but "never" or "rarely" has been selected by the majority of respondents in each case; The highest level of positive responses is for interaction with "classmates" rather than "friends" or "workmates", i.e. contact is part of their academic rather than their social life. Findings from these data show that Chinese students' perceptions are that they integrate better in an academic environment than in their social life, while the majority of Irish students report that they have practically no social contact with Chinese students outside of the classroom. Therefore, we can conclude that intercultural contact is limited to academic environments. The major reason given by both groups of students was that they have a different circle of friends. This was one of the factors that inhibited intercultural contact.

Data analysis also shows that there is no significant connection between the frequency and quality of contact in academic environments and perceived intercultural competence or language proficiency. As this was an unexpected finding, further study at interview stage will focus on seeking reasons why there is no connection.

Finding 2: L2 learning promotes development of intercultural competence. Data collected from Chinese and Irish students on their perceived intercultural competence is shown in the following table:
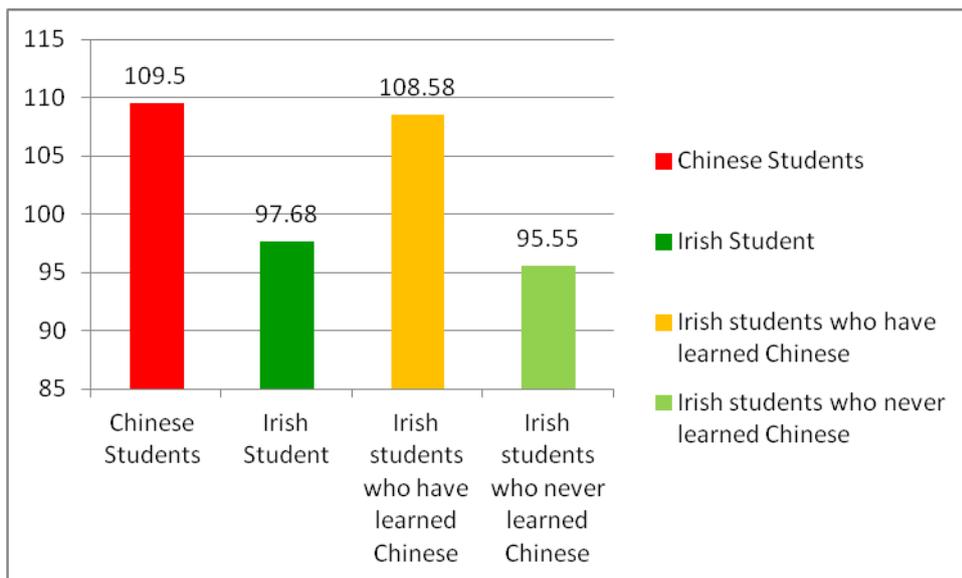

Table 2: The Average Score for Chinese Students' and Irish Students' perceptions of their Intercultural Competence

Students were asked to rate their perceived level of intercultural competence on a 5-point Likert scale. This table shows the average score for each group. At first glance, the Chinese students had a higher average score than Irish students. However, if the Irish students are considered as two separate groups, *i.e.* those who study Chinese and those who do not, the former group shows scores comparable to those of Chinese students when they rate their intercultural competence. This was higher than results for the group of Irish students who have never studied Chinese. This evidence would suggest that language learning is an important element in promoting intercultural competence. We can conclude that second language learning plays an important role in promoting the open attitude and awareness necessary for development of intercultural competence and hence, is an important element of integration between both groups of students.

The above finding also emerges from other, more specific evidence, when both groups of students self-assess the attitude and awareness dimensions of intercultural competence:
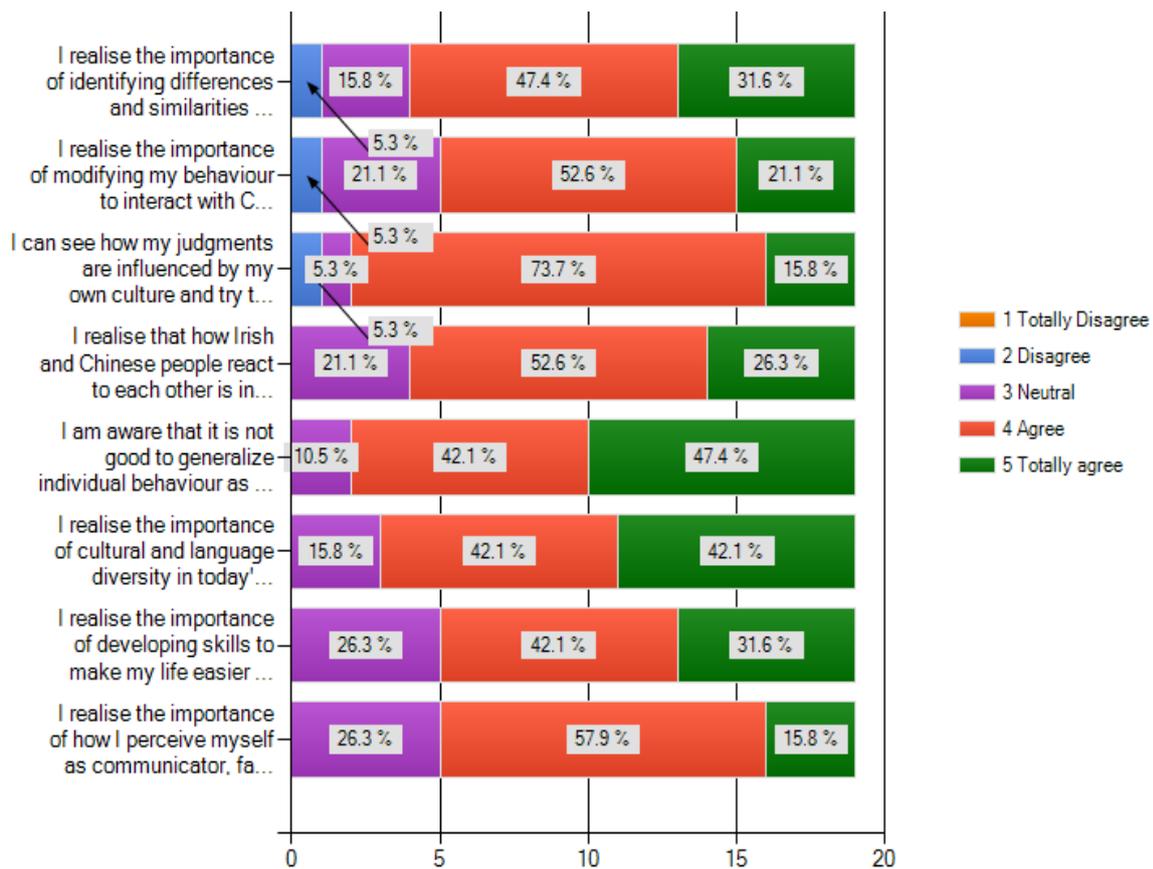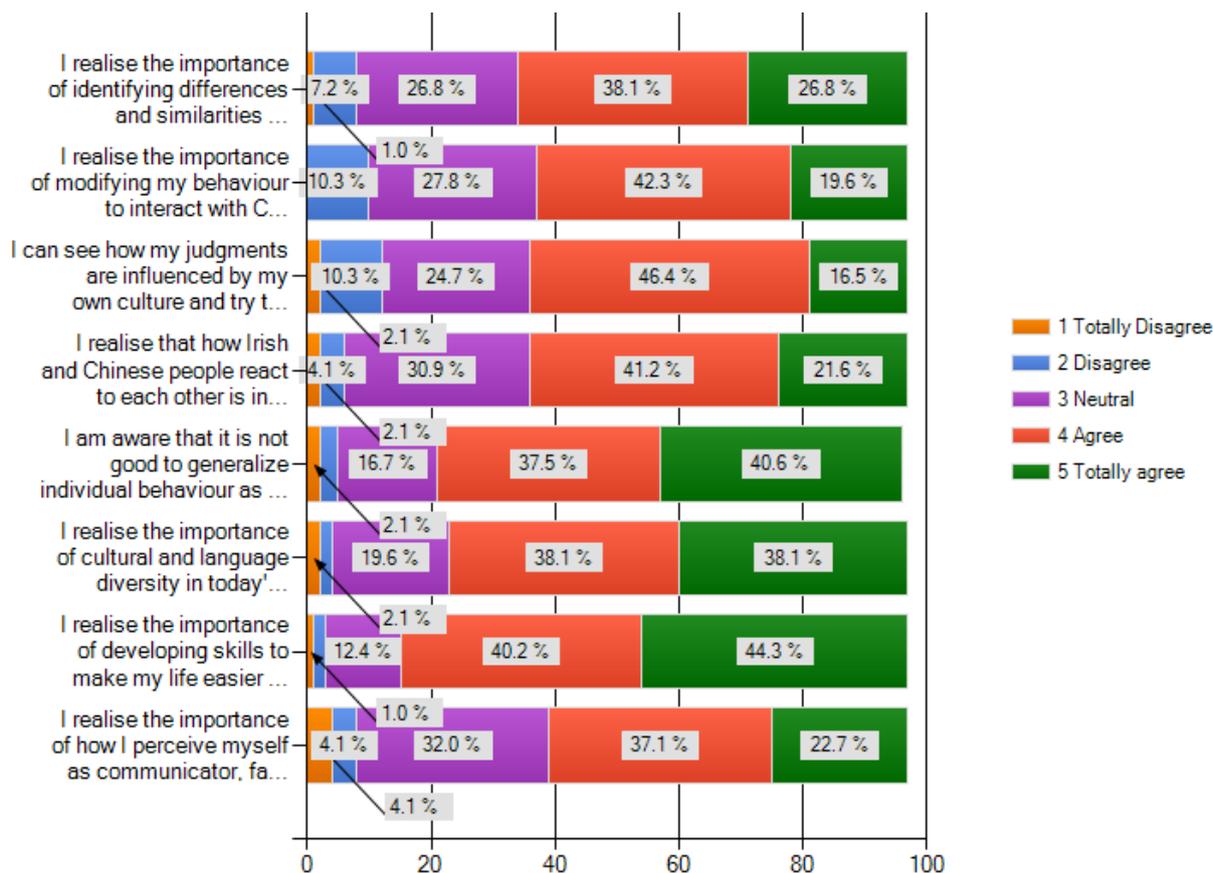

Table 3a

Table 3b

Table 3: Comparison of *Awareness* between Irish students who learned Chinese (Table 3a) and Irish who did not (Table 3b)

From the chart, we can see that Irish students who have learned Chinese have a more open attitude towards, and higher awareness of Chinese culture. However, more than half the group who does not learn Chinese holds a positive and active attitude towards Chinese language and culture. This is evident especially in relation to statements such as "I'm willing to understand and accept differences in the behaviour, values, and attitudes of Chinese people" and "I realise the importance of developing skills to make my life easier when I am in another culture." In response to these two statements *Agree* or *Strongly Agree* was selected by 70% of students who do not learn Chinese.

Finding 3: Language proficiency is an essential component of efficient intercultural interaction. Findings from the data indicate that language barriers are still the most complex factor affecting interaction, as this has been chosen by a very high percentage of students (see Table 4, the statements on the Table 4a and Table 4b are equivalent to each other). This finding echoes research results presented by Schlepper,[58] Wang and Dunne.[59]

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[58]Almut Schlepper: *"They Don't Really Want To Know Us" - Experiences and Perceptions of International Students at the Dublin Institute of Technology*, Unpublished MA Thesis: Trinity College Dublin, 2003.
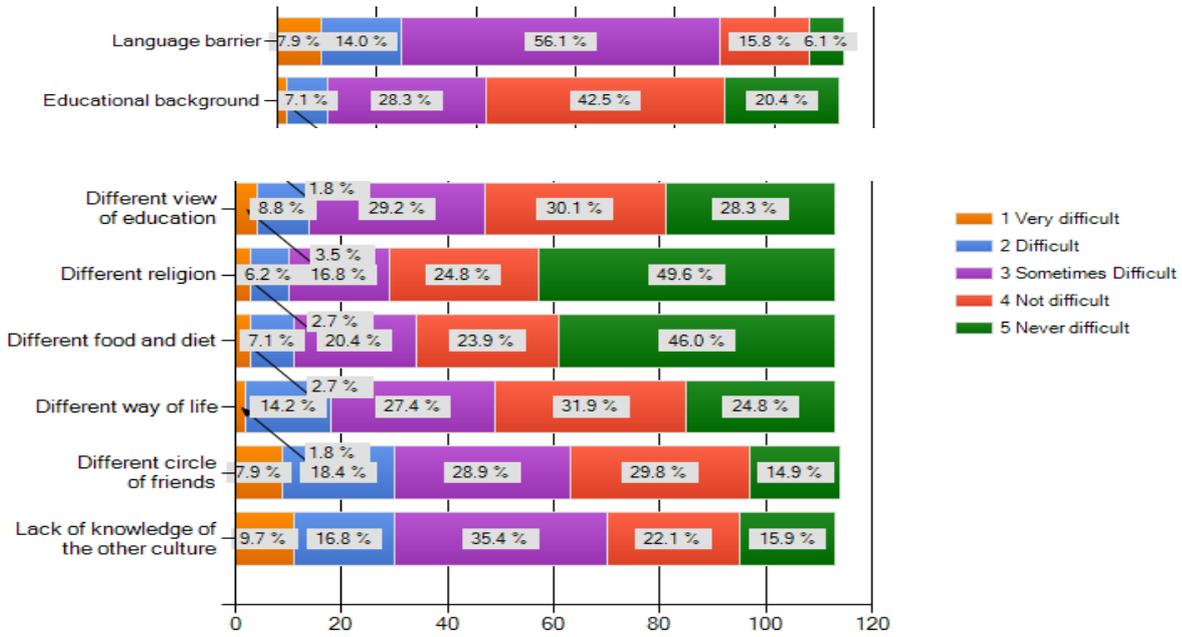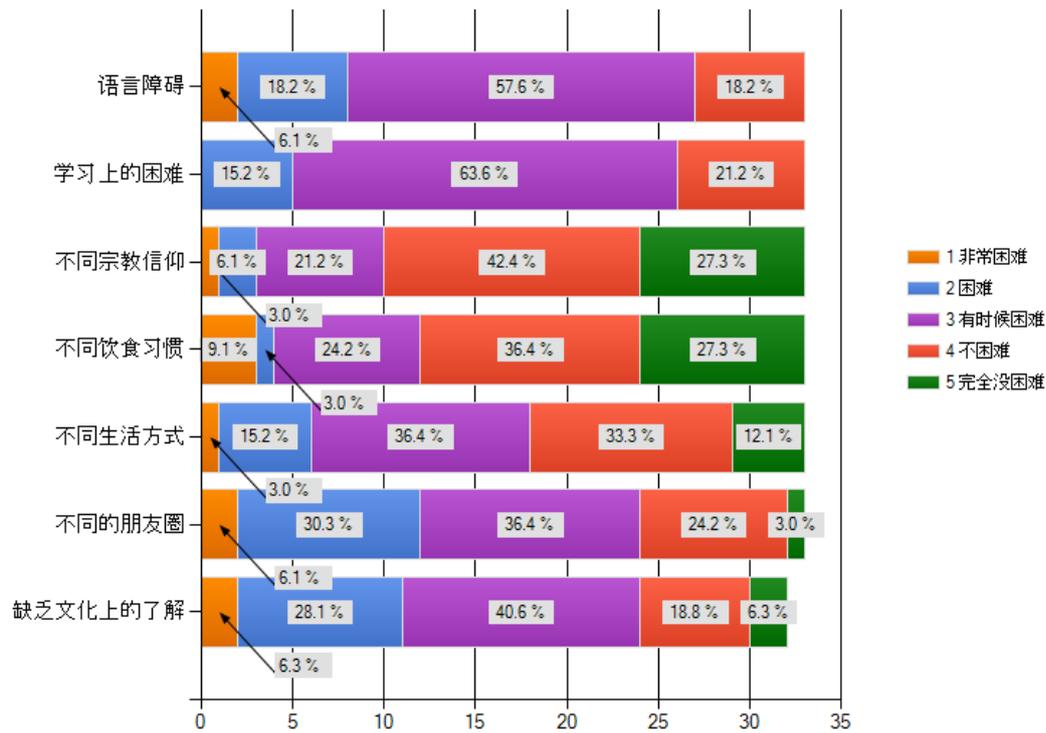
Table 4a

Table 4b

Table 4: Difficulties that Influence Irish (Table 4a) and Chinese (Table 4b) Students' Learning and Integration

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[59] Dunne: Host Students' Perspectives.

The following table shows the data collect from students' attitudes towards group work:

Attitudes towards Group Work (based on "*Agree*" and "*Totally Agree*")	Irish	Chinese
1. The experience of working with mixed nationality group members is enjoyable.	58.5%	65.4%
2. I think mixed nationality group work is important when studying a business course.	64.7%	72.4%
3. The experience of working with Chinese group members is enjoyable.	56.4%	58.6%
4. I think Chinese students prefer to work with other Chinese students.	52.6%	64.3%
5. I prefer doing group work with people from my own country when I can communicate through my own language.	47.4%	25.0%
6. Sometimes students can't participate adequately in group work because of poor language skills.	70.1%	41.4%
7. I think some people feel left out for some reason when we do group work with Chinese and Irish students.	33.1%	41.3%

Table 5: Chinese and Irish Students' Attitudes towards Group Work

From the above table, we can see that more than half of Irish and Chinese students think mixed-nationality groups are enjoyable and important. However, more than half of both groups think their counterparts prefer to work with classmates from their own country. Concern about language ability leads the majority of respondents to prefer working in groups with members of their own in-group. There is also some contradiction between their positive attitude towards group work and their actions to engage in group work. On the one hand, students express the view that working with students from another culture is important for the study of business. On the other hand, almost half of Irish students and a quarter of Chinese students prefer doing group work with people from their own culture when they can communicate through their own language.

We can also see that although 70.1% of Irish students think "sometimes students can't participate adequately in group work because of poor language skills", more than one third of Irish students think there are more factors than language problems that affect their group work. Clarification of what these other factors are will be sought at interview stage.

Finding 4: Instrumental motivation is high among all language learners and Chinese students show more socio-cultural orientation than Irish students. Data collected from the questionnaire on their L2 learning motivation from Chinese and Irish students who have learned Chinese are presented in the following table:

"*Why learning English/Chinese is important to you*" (respondents who selected "*Agree*" or "*Totally Agree*")	Chinese students	Irish students who have learned Chinese
1 Because it allows me to know and understand Irish/Chinese people and their life.	69%	65%
2 Because it gives me a broader knowledge of the world. I can get to know different cultures and people and learn more about what is happening in the world.	82.2%	89.5%
3 Because it gives me a better understanding of how Irish/Chinese people behave and think.	69%	45%
4 Because it allows me to think and behave like Irish/ Chinese people.	34.4%	n/a
5 So that I can understand English/Chinese speaking films, videos, TV, radio, or pop music.	82.7%	31.6%
6 Because I may need it later on for my job or studies.	72.4%	95%
7 Because I don't want to get bad marks in English exams.	64.3%	40%
8 Because it can help me be successful in my future career.	89.6%	80%
9 Because it is expected of me.	41.3%	15%

Table 6: The Motivation of Learning English and Chinese

The table shows that the majority of all students surveyed think learning English or Chinese will help them to succeed in their future study and subsequent career (instrumental motivation). Among the Chinese students, 89.6% show very strong instrumental orientation towards second language learning; 82.7% of Chinese students learn English to enable them to access and understand English-speaking media, i.e. "to understand English speaking films, videos, TV, radio or pop music." Integrative motivation orientation is ranked third for Chinese students, i.e. 82.2% of them selected the statement "Because it gives me a broader knowledge of the world. I can get to know different cultures and people and learn more about what is happening in the world."

The result for Irish students shows that 95% of those who learn Chinese do so for their future work and studies, which shows a very high instrumental orientation motivation; 89.5% of these students learn Chinese for integrative purposes. A significant difference between the Irish and Chinese students is that only one third of Irish students learn Chinese for the purpose of accessing Chinese media, compared to 82% for Chinese students.

Findings above show results which are quite different from Dörnyei and his colleagues' finding that "integrativeness was the single most important factor in shaping the students' L2 motivated behaviour."[60] In this study, for Chinese and Irish students, instrumental motivation

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[60] Dörnyei and Csizér, The Effects of Intercultural Contact and Tourism.

is the most important motivator. This may be related to the fact that the majority of students surveyed take business courses. If these students choose to learn a second language, they are likely to do so to broaden their future employment options.

As for the differences between Chinese and Irish students on socio-cultural motivation, the researcher suggests that it is because the current research is carried out among Chinese students learning English in an English-speaking country. This may account for their relatively high level of socio-cultural motivation. Irish students, on the other hand, are learning Chinese in their home country, which could be the reason why their socio-cultural motivation is very low. It could also be related to the universal appeal of English-language film and popular music. The result might be different if a similar study were carried out on Irish students who study in a Chinese university.

Parental or family wishes seem to continue to have a huge influence on Chinese students. Almost half of them agree that studying English is the wish of their family; by comparison, only 15% of Irish students selected "it is expected of me." All of these issues relating to motivation will be explored further at interview stage, in order to establish reasons for differences in instrumental, integrative and socio-cultural motivation.

7. Conclusion and Further Research

The initial findings presented above show that there are connections between L2 learning and development of intercultural competence. Intercultural contact seems to take place only in the academic, and not in the socio-cultural environment, and there is a contradiction between students' self-assessment of their desire for integration and their actual behaviour. Although more work needs to be done in subsequent stages of the research to shed further light on these issues, these findings already suggest a need for more engagement by academic institutions to improve the experience and maximise the benefits for both Chinese and Irish students, and by consequence for the diverse student body in general. Qualitative research involving interviews with a smaller number of students, as well as lecturers who teach these students and staff in international offices who deal with Chinese students will further explore the issues raised in this paper. Similar research on Irish students studying in Chinese universities would also add to the validity of this research.