

Using translated Chinese literature to develop multidimensional intercultural competence

A practical case in Barcelona schools

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This article examines how translated literature can foster intercultural competence in primary and secondary education. Viewing intercultural competence as a core educational objective, it draws on research from foreign language teaching and comparative literature. The study presents a school contest promoting translated Chinese literature in Barcelona, a city with a significant population of Chinese origin. Held in 2023, we received 411 student submissions across four educational levels from 12 schools. Using a multidimensional model of intercultural competence, the article analyzes the activities designed for the contest and the students' creative outputs, such as short stories and book trailers. All submissions were manually coded by the four authors according to five intercultural dimensions (cognitive, affective, procedural, critical, and identity) and the analysis was triangulated through group discussion. Results indicate that while all dimensions were present, the critical dimension was least developed, underscoring the need for targeted activities and collaboration with educators.

Keywords: literary translation, Chinese literature, intercultural competence, education

1. Introduction

Today's societies are increasingly intercultural, involving everyday interactions amongst people with different cultural backgrounds. In this context, the development of intercultural competence has emerged as an essential component for edu-



cation policy worldwide. Literature, too, serves as a gateway to different cultures, introducing readers to feelings and ideas that would otherwise remain unknown to them (Kunešová 2020). Literature has the power to call into question readers' perceptions and conventions, sometimes provoking discomfort while simultaneously triggering a learning effect, as it requires readers to adjust their vision to the narrated events (Rivera Jurado and Romero Oliva 2017, 6). The very act of reading literature can therefore be viewed as an active engagement in intercultural dialogue.

Considering this approach, our study adopts literary texts as the point of departure to develop various dimensions of intercultural competence building on a well-established tradition (see works by Burwitz-Melzer 2001; Gonçalves Matos 2012, 2014; Nemouchi and Byram 2019; Rivera Jurado and Romero Oliva 2017). The purpose of this study is to test the use of translated Chinese literature as a tool to mobilize intercultural competences among the students through the design of learning materials and activities.

Our approach differs from typical foreign language pedagogy: the activities were not confined to language classes but integrated translated literature into any subject chosen by instructors, emphasizing the value of reading non-Western works. Although such literatures remain largely absent from school curricula, recent initiatives in Catalonia have sought to introduce "heritage languages and cultures," such as Chinese, through extracurricular programs (Fidalgo Piña 2016). To this end, we organized two contests for primary and secondary school students in Barcelona to promote Chinese and Sinophone literature in translation and introduce works beyond the Western canon into the classroom. Despite Barcelona's large Chinese-heritage community, local students rarely encounter Chinese culture in formal education. The contests therefore encouraged participants to engage with this culture through literary texts designed to prompt reflection on their own perceptions and preconceptions. This article shows how such activities can foster intercultural knowledge and competence in a specific intercultural space (Arasaratnam 2011) — namely, primary, secondary, and heritage schools in Barcelona — and analyzes how students' contest submissions reveal the mobilization of their cultural competences.

Intercultural competence is a contested concept with numerous definitions and models developed mainly in European and North American academia since the 1950s, making it culturally contextual and often ethnocentric (Spitzberg and Chagnon 2009, 43; Bolten 2020, 56). More precisely, Spitzberg and Chagnon (2009, 35) have identified a variety of models with a diversity of specific conceptual components. Here, we adopt a holistic-structural model that integrates cognitive, behavioral, affective, critical, and identity dimensions, viewed as interconnected and dynamic (González Plasencia 2022; Byram 2012; Risager 2011).

Deardorff (2006, 248) defines intercultural competence as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes.” Similarly, Bennett (2008, 97) describes intercultural knowledge as “a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction across cultural contexts.” Guided by these definitions, our goal was to enhance intercultural knowledge through translated literature, as a means of strengthening intercultural competence.

As detailed later, participants created book trailers, drawings, and stories inspired by Chinese-language literary works translated or adapted into Catalan: an excerpt from Taiwanese writer Sanmao’s novel and two folk tale adaptations. We also organized a discussion of Sanmao’s work with two of her translators in a public library, created infographics and hosted an exhibition of the students’ works at a local cultural center. The contest helped us build a relationship with teachers by offering them classroom materials and resources. Held in 2022–2023, the contests coincided with teacher strikes in Catalonia following the Education Department’s unilateral calendar changes, staff reductions after the end of Covid measures, and the rollout of a new curriculum mandated by the 2020 education law. These circumstances prompted us to adjust our plan. Instead of classroom observations and requesting the teaching community’s direct involvement – requirements we sensed might be met with resistance from the teachers – we opted to coordinate extracurricular activities (the contests) and provide related resources.

In this paper, we contribute to previous scholarship on intercultural competence (e.g. Gonçalves Matos 2012, 2014; Rivera Jurado and Romero Oliva 2017; Nemouchi and Byram 2019) by arguing that translated literature can effectively foster intercultural competence in primary, secondary, and heritage school settings. Heritage schools refer to extra-curricular institutions primarily attended by children of Chinese descent to improve their Chinese language and cultural skills. While literary texts are well established as tools for intercultural pedagogy (Heggernes 2021), most studies focus on major languages such as English (González Rodríguez and Borham Puyal 2012; Nemouchi and Byram 2019; Hoff 2013, 2019), French (Arévalo 2019; Abdelouhab 2019; Li, Gao, and Ma 2023) and Spanish (Rivera Jurado and Romero Oliva 2017). Research has also largely examined literature within foreign language learning (Aguilar, Stewart and Santiago 2008; Porto and Zembylas 2020) and in the specific context of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) model (González Rodríguez and Borham Puyal 2012; Fernández-Fernández and López-Fuentes 2023). In that sense, this article expands the field by focusing on literatures from non-European languages and by showing how, from a methodological perspective, a multidimensional

view of intercultural competence enables a richer analysis of student outputs. More specifically, we draw from González Plasencia's (2022, 113) five-dimension model, which comprises the cognitive, affective, procedural, critical, and identity dimensions.

Section two outlines the legal framework for intercultural competence in the Spanish education system, the contests, selected texts, and the study's demographic context. Section three presents the methodology and data collection, while section four discusses the findings across five dimensions. The article concludes with remarks on challenges and directions for future research.

2. Background

2.1 Interculturality in the Spanish educational legislation

As early as 2006, Spain's Organic Law of Education (LOE) explicitly stated that one of the goals of education was to promote learning based on the respect and understanding of language and cultural pluralism within Spain, and of interculturality as an enriching element of society (MEFP 2006, art. 2). Article 17 emphasized fostering understanding and respect for diverse cultures in primary education, while Article 23 urged secondary students to develop tolerance, cooperation, and solidarity through dialogue, respect for human rights, and the rejection of stereotypes.

The Organic Law Amending the Organic Law of Education (LOMLOE, MEFP 2020b), effective January 19, 2021, updates and broadens the LOE's provisions. Its preamble stresses integrating sustainable development and global citizenship into all compulsory education programs, in line with the UN 2030 Agenda. This includes promoting international understanding and intercultural education to foster social empathy (MEFP 2020b). The Ministry of Education's *Background Paper on Curriculum Reform* also cites UNESCO's *Intercultural Competences Framework* as a key reference for the new curriculum (MEFP 2020a).

The new legal framework for compulsory education in Spain places diversity at its core, reinforcing the growing importance of intercultural competence in schools. It is worth noting that this increasing relevance is reflected in a transversal treatment of intercultural competence. Traditionally confined to the study of foreign languages, intercultural competence is now incorporated into various subjects within the curriculum. Furthermore, the new law envisions a progressive deepening of competence learning, departing from the recognition of diversity,

to consequently attaining affective and critical positions and developing related strategies, as González Plasencia (2022) notes.

Parallel to the recent regulatory amendments, numerous studies underscore the importance of cultivating intercultural competence within the Spanish educational context (Baches Gómez and Sierra Huedo 2017; González Monteagudo and León Sánchez 2020; Mancila 2011; Rivera Jurado and Romero Oliva 2017; Vilà Baños 2010). These studies reveal prevailing deficiencies in students' intercultural competence, emphasizing the necessity for a methodical approach to integrate intercultural competence into curricula and a more proactive engagement from educators.

In this regard, a comprehensive study by Torrelles Montanuy, Cerviño Albeledo, and Lasheras Lalana (2022) highlighted a conspicuous imbalance between the recognition of the significance of intercultural education in schools and its actual implementation. The outcomes of that study also indicate a prevalence of superficial actions aimed at promoting acceptance of “different” cultures, often leaning towards folklore, rather than stimulating substantive transformation. The design of the contests and the creation of resources developed by our group must be understood in this context as a first attempt to offer students and teachers an opportunity to develop intercultural knowledge.

2.2 Interculturality in the Barcelona metropolitan area

As with many other European cities in recent decades, Barcelona has witnessed a considerable increase in its foreign-origin population, from 2.7 per cent in 1999 to 23.6 per cent in January 2023 (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2023). According to the 2023 municipal census, Chinese citizens numbered 20,206, representing 5.6 per cent of Barcelona's foreign population. They are primarily concentrated in the Arc de Triomf area – home to six of the twelve participating schools – with other significant clusters in Sant Antoni, Sant Martí de Provençals, and Plaça Ildefons Cerdà (ibid.).

Barcelona stands out for the proactive role of municipal and regional institutions in promoting intercultural and diversity policies. In recent years, the city council and Catalan government have framed linguistic and cultural diversity as “urban social capital” that provides social, economic and cultural advantages for the local society (Climent i Ferrando and Solé Sanosa 2015). Within this framework, migrants and their descendants are viewed as carriers of intercultural knowledge, potentially acting as cultural mediators. For instance, the Programa de Llengües i Cultures d'Origen (Heritage Languages and Cultures Program)

incorporates students' heritage languages and cultures into the official curriculum, highlighting their value (Fidalgo Piña 2016).¹

2.3 The contests

The contests organized by our team can be viewed as an impact action that sought to establish a relationship with schools in Barcelona and begin a collaboration with educators. The contest had four categories: a book trailer contest for high school students (ages 12–16); a short story contest for upper-primary school students (ages 10–12); a drawing contest for middle-primary school students (ages 8–10); and a drawing contest for initial-primary school students (ages 6–8). Named together as “Concursos Lletres Xineses” (Chinese Literature Contests), the contests were addressed at primary and middle schools in the province of Barcelona.

The outputs for the contest were assigned in consideration to the age of participants and the need to offer activities that were appealing to them, as well as in attention to the skills being developed for their respective educational levels (such as reading, writing or drawing at the different stages of primary education, and the use of digital tools at a more advanced age). As for the relation of the outputs with the dimensions of intercultural competence, we have previously referred to the value of fiction for the development of cultural competence; besides, Brauer (2024) has argued how creative writing in secondary education can, among other things, foster the critical production of and engagement with cultural representations. Regarding the value of video assignments, recent studies such as Wang and Hu (2025) and Szecsi, Rivera and Szende (2025) have shown how digital and video storytelling as pedagogical tools can impact students' meaning-making process of culture and enhance different dimensions of intercultural competence.

Collaborating with projects and institutions that were already in place in the city was a productive strategy. During the design stage, the group's Principal Investigator invited an intercultural mediator and Chinese interpreter who has been working for the Barcelona city council for more than twenty years to be part of the organization. This mediator is part of the *Xeix* project funded by the Barcelona city council that promotes the social inclusion of the Chinese community in the Fort Pienc area. She was key in engaging schools to participate in the contests. Other institutions that helped the organizers with resources, connections and funding include the Barcelona Confucius Institute Foundation, the *Eix*

1. More than half of the students in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools participating in the program chose to study Mandarin Chinese in the 2021–2022 academic year (Departament d'Educació de la Generalitat de Catalunya 2022).

Fort Pienc, an association of neighborhood business owners, the Department of Education of the Catalan government, a local public library (Biblioteca Arús) and a cultural center (Centre Cívic Fort Pienc).

The contest opened in November 2022 and the deadline for submissions was February 28, 2023. In order to provide timely information to teachers and students, the organizers created a website with the contest's rules and didactic resources.² We received a total of 411 submissions in all four categories (193 drawings from first-primary school students, 134 drawings from middle-primary school students, 56 short stories from upper-primary school students, and 28 book trailers from middle school students). Students hailed from 12 different schools in the Barcelona area, with eight schools participating in the primary school contests and six schools in the middle school contest (two institutions participated in both the primary and middle school categories). Regarding the type of school, five were public centers and five private or semi-private, plus one Chinese-heritage weekend school, and one school of Chinese as a second language. This article will focus its analysis on the short stories and book trailers. In the first case, the number of individual participants was 56 and in the case of book trailers, individual participants amounted to 70, including group submissions of up to five students. To facilitate the process and to avoid discouraging teachers from participating in the activity, every school was given autonomy to manage the production of the works for the competition, adapting it to their possibilities and integrating the activity into whichever subject the teachers deemed suitable.

The jury was made up of Chinese-Spanish translators and literature scholars, intercultural mediators, cultural managers, graphic and audiovisual designers, as well as the author of the short stories used for the contest. The jury awarded the prizes after several rounds of voting. Book trailers were published on a YouTube channel, short stories on Instagram, and drawings on the contests' official website. A "Public Prize" was decided via an online public vote. Prizes were announced on April 23, 2023.

We organized an award ceremony at the Fort Pienc Cultural Center in Barcelona and invited students, their families and teachers, as well as representatives of the collaborating institutions and schools. The ceremony was followed by a one-week exhibition of the submitted works at the cultural center.

In selecting texts for the contest, we drew on the positive value of literature in developing intercultural skills, as highlighted by Quesada Villalobos (2017). She emphasizes that literary experiences should create meaningful encounters, allowing students to connect with characters, their contexts, emotions, struggles, and dilemmas. Children and young adult literature, she argues, should foster commu-

2. The contest website was: <https://concurso2023.wixsite.com/lletres-xineses>.

nication, imagination, cultural transmission, artistic appreciation, and a love of reading (Quesada Villalobos 2017, 69). These qualities, along with additional criteria outlined below, guided our selection process.

For primary school students, we selected two tales, “The Fish-Dragon” (*El drac peix*) and “The Monkeys and the Chestnuts” (*Les mones i les castanyes*) from the book *The Fish-Dragon (El drac peix)*, edited by Liao Yanping (2005), writer, essayist, translator and cofounder of Maguregui, a publishing house specialized in children’s books and textbooks for Chinese learning. The texts were translations into Catalan. Several characteristics made them suitable for our purposes. First, the stories included the Chinese character of the animal around which the plot of the story revolved. For example, in the first story, the author used the Chinese character for “dragon” (龍) instead of the Catalan word every time this animal was mentioned. This visually exposes elements of another culture to students, potentially leading to considerations on the diversity of languages. Second, the stories were traditional Chinese stories adapted to young readers, transmitting traditional cultural values from Chinese classics such as *Zhuangzi* or *The Analects*. It is worth noting that in the questionnaires addressed to teachers, one respondent emphasized that the stories were well-selected as they were adapted to the children’s age and were able to capture and hold their attention.

For middle school students, we selected works by Taiwanese author Sanmao (1943–1991), especially popular among Chinese and Taiwanese young readers. In her writings, she recounts her unconventional experiences as a Chinese woman living with her Spanish husband in Europe, the Western Sahara and the Canary Islands during the 1970s and 1980s. We selected two stories from her book *Diaris del Sàhara*, translated into Catalan by Sara Rovira and Irene Tor-Carroggio in 2016. This choice was based on several criteria. Firstly, following Kunešová (2020), we argue that the diary format and first-person narrative, common in young literature, fosters empathy, a key aspect in intercultural studies. Secondly, the narratives themselves, in which the author immerses herself in another culture, inherently provide an intercultural experience, as students not only engage in dialogue with a foreign author but also delve into an experience of coexistence and exchange between two cultures. In this regard, we followed Gonçalves Matos’ idea that “text selection should look beyond the conventional procedure of locating a text’s identity by trying to establish a clear relationship between the author of the text and a nation or a geographic area” (2012, 105). Finally, the light-hearted and adventurous nature of this memoir could trigger Catalan students’ interest in exploring other cultures.

3. Methodology

When analysing the outputs of the contest, we adopted González Plasencia's (2022, 113) five-dimension model to examine how they reflected different dimensions of intercultural competence (see section four). This analytical approach is relatively new, as it shifts the focus from evaluating students' self-reported statements or observable behaviors to examining their creative outputs – stories and book trailers – as evidence of intercultural engagement. By treating these artifacts as primary data, the study introduces a more ludic and creativity-based methodological lens, highlighting how different intercultural dimensions are expressed, explored, and negotiated through playful narrative and visual forms. In this article, the analysis focuses only on short stories and book trailers, since the analysis of drawings would require a visual semiotics framework that falls beyond the scope of this article.

Manual coding of all outputs was conducted individually. Each researcher carried out a close reading of the textual narratives and a content-focused viewing of the book trailers, tracing one specific intercultural dimension they had been assigned. Only the critical dimension was coded by all authors, given its interpretative complexity. Coding categories were deductively derived from González Plasencia's five-dimension model and applied to the materials allocated to each coder. This procedure follows established qualitative approaches in which predefined analytical categories guide systematic and theoretically grounded interpretation (Saldaña 2021; Schreier 2012).

Following individual coding, we performed triangulation to enhance the reliability of the analysis. First, each researcher's coded set was reviewed collectively to identify convergences, discrepancies, and potential gaps. Second, group discussions were held to refine interpretations in ambiguous cases – particularly regarding the critical dimension, for which multiple coders' insights were compared. Triangulation thus served both to validate individual coding decisions and to ensure that interpretations were not overly dependent on one single researcher's perspective. This process aligns with widely recognized strategies for reinforcing trustworthiness in qualitative research (Denzin 1978).

González Plasencia's (2022, 113) five dimensions of intercultural competence are:

1. Cognitive dimension: factual knowledge related to both one's own culture and foreign culture. Keywords: to know, to compare, to interpret, to infer.
2. Affective dimension: attitudes towards otherness, including individuals, societies or cultures. Key terms: respect, empathy, openness, interest.

3. Procedural or behavioral dimension: skills that involve action on the part of the individual. Key terms: to analyse, to relate, to detect, to identify.
4. Critical dimension: explicit positioning towards other cultures, their members or discriminatory phenomena. Key terms: to engage, to appreciate, to reject, to critically consider.
5. Identity dimension: shaping or awareness of students' identity. Keywords: identity, personal construction, self-concept, personal enrichment.

When planning the activities for the contests, we intended all dimensions to be potentially covered in students' output. We expected the affective dimension to be one core dimension in participants' engagement with Chinese culture. Authors such as Chen and Starosta (2000) have emphasized the affective dimension as the primary dimension of intercultural sensitivity. In that vein, Tschakert et al. (2018) have pointed to the role of emotions and affective engagements in the construction of the 'Other' and in personal encounters with cultural otherness. Therefore, the affective dimension can be relevant at primary level, when the images and representations of the cultural 'Other' are yet to be constructed. Besides, the cognitive dimension was also expected, as we aimed at transmitting facts about a Chinese writer and her literary production (in middle schools) and about traditional mythology (in primary schools). The procedural dimension was intended to be part of the activity as students had to understand and reinterpret the stories, which requires capacity to relate and identify various cultural elements. The critical dimension aimed at discovering how students position themselves in relation to situations that raise ethical concerns, whereas the identity dimension could be expected in how participants positioned themselves regarding the "Other". We were also aware that some dimensions, e.g. the cognitive and behavioral dimensions, could appear at all levels (primary, secondary), while we expected students to display the critical dimension at the middle school level. This is consistent with the progressive acquisition of intercultural competence, which places cognitive aspects in earlier stages of the curriculum, whereas critical evaluation is introduced in more advanced courses, as shown by González Plasencia (2022).

It is important to clarify that our aim was not to assess the degree of achievement of intercultural skills, which would require access to students' conditions before and after the activity and a specific intervention activity in the classroom. Our aim was to examine how the works submitted by students could reflect different intercultural dimensions.

Along with their submissions, participants (teachers and middle school students) were initially asked to complete a questionnaire through Google Forms. The questionnaires were designed to collect both basic profile information and evaluative data concerning the proposed activities. The instrument had both

closed and open-ended questions and covered various details, including the languages spoken in their daily lives, their prior interest and exposure to Chinese culture and literature, the inclusion of curricular content related to China in their schools, and the resources used during the preparation of the activity. In the case of primary schools, we asked educators to complete a questionnaire about their students' previous contact with Chinese culture and literature, the presence of Chinese background students in their respective classrooms, the inclusion of classroom activities related to China in their courses, and their feedback on the contest. However, the number of questionnaires received was very low compared with the total number of participants: 15 from middle school students and five from primary school teachers. This poses a problem for extrapolating profile information to the entire participant pool. However, these limited answers still provide valuable qualitative assessments concerning the students and teachers' experiences with the activity. Some of these answers are therefore referenced in the following section, solely in relation to their evaluation of the contests.

Regarding ethical issues, in the case of primary students, the drawings and short stories were submitted under a pseudonym. To facilitate the issues related to the personal data of minors, only the teachers were responsible for collecting the students' names and pseudonyms, as well as for submitting the drawings and stories via the online form. As a consequence, we had very limited access to data about the students' profile (age, family background). As for middle-school students, their book trailers were submitted directly by them, using their real name and with their explicit consent to publish their work online as part of the project.³ In this case, we had access to information about the students' background that has been consigned in Section 2.3 of this article.

Another aspect we would like to emphasize regarding the analysis of outputs is that we found intercultural dimensions (e.g. attitudes towards otherness) portrayed through characters, often depicted as animals like the ones in the proposed stories. The symbolic role of animal characters in children's literature to promote different values, including intercultural tolerance has been well documented (Suvilehto 2019). In our analysis, we have taken into account children's familiarity with this symbolic interpretation and their ability to incorporate the promotion of values through animal characters into their own storytelling.

3. Book trailers are available in the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkUm2qeSpVDacWyV2wjhryNRSgjU7wASe>.

4. Results and discussion

This section analyses the works submitted by students to identify different dimensions of intercultural competence. Before we will briefly comment on the evaluation of the activity itself by educators and middle school students as reflected in the questionnaires. The responses from teachers indicate that the activity attracted significant interest. When asked to highlight aspects of the contest, the educators mentioned the appeal of learning about Chinese culture and literature. They also noted that using stories was an effective means of engaging students and capturing their attention. From a pedagogical perspective, educators emphasized the opportunity to promote intercultural learning and the use of literary materials. However, several of them raised concerns such as the short deadline, the length of the reading materials, and the limited duration of book trailers, while one teacher mentioned the lack of a clear aim in the activity as a main problem.

Concerning students, submitted questionnaires indicate a genuine interest in Chinese culture. Out of the 20 collected questionnaires, 12 reflect a prior personal interest in Chinese culture, and eighth acknowledged previous readings of Chinese literature. Students raised concerns such as time constraints, technical limitations for video editing, filming locations, script writing, and voiceover work. Notably, students expressed that they gained insights into Sanmao's personal story and expressed a desire to delve deeper into Chinese legends, history, and culture. Two students mentioned an interest in classical Chinese poetry, while one student expressed willingness to learn more about Chinese food.

Regarding the submitted outputs, we analyzed how each of the five dimensions of intercultural competence — as defined by González Plasencia (2022) — were reflected in the works produced by students. We will offer various examples from short stories and book trailers. Discussions hereof revealed the ambiguity of the definitions of the different dimensions and their porosity, as we will discuss below.

Two categories stood out due to their cross-cutting nature and consistent presence in all groups and activities. These categories were the cognitive and behavioral dimensions, which are inherent to the design and requirements of the primary- and middle-school contests. Firstly, the cognitive dimension was emphasized from the outset, with the provision of materials and factual information, in line with the main goal of the contests, which was to encourage learning about Chinese culture. In addition to the literary works provided (i.e., Liao Yanping's stories and Sanmao's book), we organized a conference with Sanmao experts to provide a deeper contextualization of Sanmao's writing. As shown below, the resulting works capture factual knowledge of Chinese culture. Secondly, the behavioral dimension, involving processes such as analysis, compar-

ison and identification, was central to the actions that the contest sought to promote. Students were required to read and discern the relevant source materials, reflect on them, and create something new based on their interpretation.

In the following subsections, we provide examples of how the various dimensions of intercultural competence were reflected in the contest's outputs. As previously stated, our analysis concentrates only on short stories and book trailers.

4.1 Cognitive Dimension

González Plasencia's definition of this dimension implies factual knowledge related to culture, including capacities such as comparison and interpretation of such knowledge. This dimension is the most common among the participants' works. Students show a notable capacity to mobilize knowledge about Chinese culture beyond the elements that appear explicitly in the stories. This dimension relates to the LOMLOE's stress on "factual knowledge on 'high' and 'low' culture, as well as communicative culture" (González Plasencia 2022, 108).

As instances of this dimension, we find references to cultural tropes related to traditional Chinese culture, such as the moon, present at *The Mystery of the Red Moon* (*El misteri de la lluna vermella*), or the rural background of some stories (villages, forests or mountains). A remarkable aspect is the use of recognizably Chinese names for characters and objects in some stories. For instance, the main character in *The Grateful Dragon* (*El dragón agradecido*) is called Mr. Long ("Sr. Long") and the story's location is called "Fanrong" village; the story *The Mystery of the Red Moon* includes a place named "Hong" and character names such as "Mei Ling" and "Qiang".⁴ Notably, the authors of these stories are not from Chinese-heritage schools, but show familiarity with the Chinese language.

We can also observe the activation of knowledge related to daily elements such as food, like the pitaya seeds ("semillas de pitahaya") that the main character in *The Grateful Dragon* plants as an homage to the dragon, which suggests that the student is aware of the existence of this fruit, despite not being common in Spain.

Another interesting aspect is the presence of elements of Chinese mythology, such as the heavenly horse ("caballo celestial") in *The Grateful Dragon*, or the *shengshou* (holy beasts) enumerated in *The Qinglong* (*El Qinglong*), including Chinese names of different beasts, such as "Baihu" (White Tiger), "Xuanwu" (Turtle-Snake), "Zhuque" (Phoenix) and "Qinglong" (Dragon), as well as the "Bad Beasts" (*xiongshou*), named Taotie, Qiongqi, Hundun and Taowu. At this

4. We have translated the Catalan or Spanish titles and quotations from the stories into English. Both the translation and original are provided.

point, it should be noted that *The Quinglong* is the story that offers a higher number of references to Chinese culture and it was written by a student who attends a Chinese heritage school. Finally, although not disconnected from the previous elements, some stories show the students' awareness of different religious beliefs, for instance, when the main character in *The Grateful Dragon* cries out "For all Gods!" (¡Por todos los dioses!) in plural.

4.2 Affective Dimension

The affective dimension is the second most detected category. It is found in attitudes, frames of mind and outlooks that show empathy and interest in other cultures.

We saw examples that illustrate the affective dimension both in stories (primary school students) and book trailers (public middle school students and heritage schools). For instance, *The Mystery of the Red Dragon* tells the story of a girl named Mei Ling and a boy named Qiang. Halfway through the story, when they must join forces to free a dragon from a spell, the girl states: "although they were very different, they would have to work as a team" ("per molt diferents que fossin haurien de treballar en equip"), highlighting the importance of teamwork and cooperation in the face of difficulties even with those who are different. The ending of this same story points to the need for transcending prejudices and respecting others: while the two characters took for granted that the dragon was a dangerous creature and that they should run away from it, they ultimately discover that the dragon was actually a kind and grateful creature seeking human help to be freed from a spell.

In the case of book trailers, many students highlight the adventurous nature of Sanmao. The students show empathy (which obviously belongs to the affective dimension) towards her, focusing on the challenges she faced when living in the Sahara. They highlight values such as her determination to improve her life and perseverance (see, e.g., videos 3, 4, 8 and 9 in the YouTube channel).

In video 3, the students showcase the affective dimension in relation to intercultural matters, such as respecting other traditions. The students commend Sanmao's willingness to assimilate into the local culture, embrace local traditions and cultivate friendships with the locals. At the same time, they notice the character's attitude and engagement towards other cultures, which can also be considered as part of the critical dimension. This overlap between the affective and critical dimensions is an example of the porosity between categories that will be discussed later.

4.3 Behavioral Dimension

As described in section three and the opening of section four, the behavioral dimension is inherent to the activities featured in the contest, which encouraged information analysis, deliberation, identification, and ultimately, action. Significantly, as noted by González Plasencia, the behavioral element comprises an array of strategies that assist students in effectively and adequately navigating all the other dimensions (2022, 115). However, as González Plasencia points out, the behavioral is the only dimension for which the LOMLOE does not include any explicit objectives (2022, 108).

Regarding this dimension, the undertaking of the activity itself by students can be considered as an indicator of the behavioral dimension, in the sense that students had to undertake the reading of the stories and identify meaningful content to create a new textual, graphic or audiovisual product. In the case of book trailers, which were team works, students had to deliberate and reach agreements about the content and design of the video.

4.4 Critical Dimension

The critical dimension points to explicit positioning towards other cultures, members of other cultures or discriminatory phenomena (González Plasencia 2022, 113). In the stories, positioning is reflected by characters, whereas in book trailers students express their own opinions openly.

In *Cian the Dragon* (*Cian el dragón*), a dragon that hates human beings gets mad at a fisherman and abducts him. The fisherman cries and pleads for his liberation for the sake of his family. Despite initial reluctance, the dragon shows empathy toward the fisherman and ultimately chooses to set him free and take him back home. The dragon gets to know the fisherman's family, and they finally become good friends. The story portrays themes of initial rejection based on prejudices, while suggesting that embracing diversity and understanding others can foster mutual respect and appreciation. It concludes with the message: "Sometimes, we should give opportunities to all beings we know, without judging anyone" ("A veces, hay que dar oportunidades a todo ser que conocemos, sin juzgar a nadie").

The topic of discrimination and rejection (often motivated by the appearance of the characters) feature frequently in the stories. In *Shenlong the Dragon* (*Shenlong el drac*), the dragon protagonist faces rejection due to the colors of its body. Ultimately,

[T]he dragon looked at itself in the glass of an office and saw its own head. In that very moment, it went back to the sky at great speed, he felt sad and realized that,

before descending again, he had to become more self-confident and leave shyness behind to confront those who used to laugh at his physical appearance.

(El drac es va mirar en el vidre d'una oficina i va veure el seu cap. En aquest moment va tornar al cel a tota velocitat, es va posar trist i va aprendre que abans de baixar havia de tornar-se més segur de sí mateix, deixar la timidesa a un costat i plantar cara a aquells que reien d'ell pel seu aspecte físic.)

Similarly, in *Piro the Dragon* (*Piro el drac*), the main character cannot control the fire that comes out of its mouth, and this makes other people run away, unwilling to play with this dragon. In the story *A smart dragon* (*Un dragón inteligente*) we meet a dragon who judges humans by their physical appearance, which brings him criticism from others. The animal reflects and comes to the following conclusion: “Next time, instead of judging people solely on their physical appearance, he would consider getting to know them first” (“Otro día, en vez de juzgar a las personas únicamente por su aspecto físico, se plantearía conocerlas antes”).

As stated above, examples of the critical dimension can be found in later stages of development, such as in the case of secondary education students and their outputs. In video no. 5, two students summarize Sanmao's experiences in the Sahara and express that “inevitably” in that culture men are superior to women. In this example, we not only find a strong judgement on a different culture, but they also emphasize the “inevitability” of that situation. Another example of direct criticism is found in video 17, in which the narration of the wedding of a Sahrawi girl is described as “cruel”. In this case, the quote is taken from the book but from a different chapter than the one selected for the contest, which allows us to observe a clear intention to criticize the customs of another culture, regardless of whether they are justified or not. These two examples show problematic stereotypes that could be addressed in the classroom, revealing the need to further guide the students (and teachers) in the development of intercultural skills.

4.5 Identity Dimension

The identity dimension encompasses the formation and consciousness of students' identity (González Plasencia 2022, 113). Interactions with other cultures, approached with respect, openness, and curiosity, foster cultural self-awareness and a more profound comprehension of culture-specific knowledge (Deardorff 2006). Moreover, the journey towards intercultural sensitivity involves integrating diverse cultural perspectives into one's own experience (Bennett 2017).

Some of the pieces produced by the students indicate signs of a multicultural identity, understood as their contact with and internalization of two or more cultures (Nguyen and Benet-Martínez 2010). This is primarily reflected in the book trailers submitted by students from the Chinese School of Barcelona (Escuela

China de Barcelona, a heritage school), which shift between Chinese, Catalan, and, to a lesser extent, Spanish in their audio descriptions, subtitles, and text inserts within the images.

Further to this general tendency to use multiple languages in the book trailers, the internalization of cues from different cultures can also be traced in other outputs of the contest. For instance, the story *El Quinglong*, already discussed, is written in Catalan and includes a significant number of Chinese words and well-informed references to Chinese mythology. Interestingly, words in Chinese and cultural references are translated or explained, showing the recognition of an audience that may not necessarily be acquainted with them. We believe that these examples illustrate a smooth transition across languages and, consequently, cultures. To measure the real impact of the activity on the students' identity or self-awareness, we would require personal interviews that were not possible to conduct at this stage.

In other outputs, we can recognize specific signs of identification with one predominant culture. Video 22 is narrated in Chinese and subtitled in Chinese and Spanish. At one point, the authors of the video include a short description of the two main characters of the book, Sanmao and José, adding that “due to the foreign status of José, there will be many moments in their married life in which they will not be able to communicate” (“*danshi yinwei Hexi de waiguo shenfen, suoyi tamen de hun hou shenghuo haishi hui you xuduo wufa goutong de difang*”). Here we can see that the authors recognize José (and not Sanmao) as the “foreign” member of the couple, and that this foreignness leads to communication problems. Following this, though, the authors proceed to explain that their perseverance resulted in happy love.

5. Concluding remarks

This article presents an applied case of translated literature used to foster intercultural competence. Our analysis of the students' stories and book trailers demonstrates that González Plasencia's five-dimensional model can be productively applied to determine the extent to which participants have mobilized different intercultural skills in these outputs.

They reveal a certain porosity in the categories typically used to describe intercultural competence. By *porosity* we refer to the fluid and overlapping nature of the five dimensions, which – despite being analytically distinct – often resulted in difficulties to separate clearly in practice. While the five-dimensional model has proven to be useful in characterizing the various components of intercultural competence and in analyzing the contests' outputs, the identification of each cat-

egory was not always straightforward. Group discussions among the four authors during the analysis stage showed that some of the examples could be attributed to more than one competence. For example, in the story *The Fish Dragon and his Friend Forever* (*El Drac Peix i el seu amic per sempre*), a dragon befriends a foreign girl who visits China as a tourist and bears a pin with the sentence in Chinese “*Lüxing zongshi jili*” (“Travelling is always stimulating”). The student shows knowledge of the Chinese language (cognitive dimension); a sensitivity to others not necessarily acquainted with Chinese language, as shown by the fact that she translates the sentence (identity dimension); and a positive stance toward travelling as an activity that usually involves contact with peoples, places and cultures different from our own (critical dimension) and the desire to get to know them (affective dimension). Such instances illustrate the permeability of the model’s analytical categories and the extent to which students’ creative outputs often mobilize several dimensions at once.

The affective dimension has proven to be one of the most prominent categories in the analyzed outputs, after the cognitive and behavioral dimensions. Students frequently highlight aspects related to a shared humanity that transcends culture, including values like love, friendship, tenacity, and a quest for adventure. This becomes particularly visible in the short stories submitted by students aged between 10 and 12, where the main characters often express their attitudes towards these values. Besides, attitudes toward otherness are represented by scenes of interaction among various species that cooperate in harmony despite their differences. By comparison, the critical dimension was evasive in the outputs. Positioning towards other cultures was often expressed in an implicit way, while explicit examples were hard to find, even in the book trailers created by secondary students. Some of the works, while echoing or quoting passages found in the original book, do reinforce stereotypes and prejudices.

Several challenges were encountered during the development of this study. Firstly, the participants in the contests were a highly diverse group. Many of the participants were members of migrant families and were fluent in the Chinese language, although not necessarily familiar with Chinese literature. This posed challenges when considering what learning about “other” cultures meant for a significant number of students. Secondly, the relatively low participation of secondary school students and primary school teachers in the questionnaires that accompanied the submissions made it difficult to obtain a clearer picture of the participants’ profiles, despite the relatively high number of total submissions, which can be considered a success.

Pettigrew (1998, 70) proposes four interrelated processes that stimulate attitude change: “learning about the outgroup, changing behavior, generating affective ties, and ingroup reappraisal”. In that sense, as stated above, the project in its

entirety was designed to advance intercultural competence via knowledge of Chinese culture and language. Now, when considering the concepts of “ingroup” and “outgroup”, we must not forget that many of the contest participants were second- and third-generation Chinese migrants, who defy the boundaries between “ingroup” and “outgroup”, and exemplify the plurality and complexity that define today’s multicultural societies and characterize most school settings. Consequently, and regarding the varying starting point of participants in terms of intercultural sensitivity, it is important to highlight the significant differences between students who may not necessarily have prior knowledge of Chinese culture and those who belong to migrant families, predominantly represented (though not exclusively) at the Chinese School of Barcelona. The worldviews of these two distinct groups, as well as their knowledge and experiences in terms of interculturality, necessarily differ. If we were to measure or assess the level of intercultural skills, further research should be conducted to collect specific personal data on the students’ demographic and cultural background.

Our future research endeavors should further incorporate classroom observation and intervention by the research team in additional collaboration with the teaching community. As outlined in the introduction, we considered the contest as an initial step toward establishing links with teaching teams and to provide materials and resources aimed at fostering intercultural competence using translated Chinese literature. Future research should also consider the different student backgrounds to observe eventual differences in the development of intercultural competence. As shown by some book trailer examples we presented in the discussion, activities with literary texts can also be used to identify prevalent cultural prejudices among students, so that they can be addressed by teachers in the classroom.

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