

# Analysis on Chinese Multicultural Education System Modelling After American Multicultural Education and Suggestions

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## ABSTRACT

In the past few decades, the development of marketization, modernization and globalization in the People's Republic of China has led to conflicts between economic prosperity and the protection of ethnic minorities' cultures. The main issues studied in this paper are the problems and suggestions for implementing China's multicultural education. Through literature review and comparison with the situations in the United States, this paper finds that compared with the United States, China's multicultural education is still in its primary stage due to its cultural background, large population base, and national condition. In response to this problem, it proposes that schools should hire more teachers with different cultural backgrounds; education departments should train teachers how to teach in multicultural classrooms; the government should balance the educational resources between the urban and remote areas.

**Keywords:** *Multicultural education, ethnicity, ethnic minority, China, United States*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, globalization including population mobility, immigration, and economic integration is the most visible feature of the world. The People's Republic of China and the United States are also deeply affected by the trend of globalization. As a "cultural melting pot," the United States has received hundreds of millions of immigrants throughout its history, as well as students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. As one of the countries that has well implemented multicultural education, there are many advantages that the world can learn from it. For China, since its Opening Up policy was enacted in the late 1970s, it has also integrated into the trend of globalization. However, with the development of this trend, many problems in education have arisen. One of the most well-known aspects in China is that the official education system ignores the cultures of ethnic minorities, leading to the gradual disappearance of the ethnic minority cultures. Therefore, how to effectively enact multicultural education and construct a multicultural education environment have been attracting more and more attention.

This article is divided into three major parts. The first is to analyze some of the current major issues and dilemmas of China's current official education system

under the national conditions. The second is to take the United States as a successful case for implementing multicultural education to analyze its five key dimensions and some of its strengths. The third is to discuss some problems existing in the multicultural education system of the United States and point out some aspects that should be paid attention to and put forward some practical suggestions when introducing this educational model in China.

## 2. FEATURES AND PROBLEMS IN CHINA'S CURRENT OFFICIAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

With a history of more than 5,000 years and comprised of 56 ethnic groups, China is a country with rich cultural deposits. However, for China, multicultural education, generated based on the diversified culture between different ethnic groups, is still in its primary stage because of China's cultural background, huge population base, and national conditions [8]; [15].

First of all, for a country with more than 1.4 billion people, China's most important policy is to ensure the unity and harmony of the country. Even though the Ministry of Education believes that cultural diversity is essential in education, genuine multiculturalism may lead

to discrepancies in political views and thus undermine the unity of the nation. [6]; [10]. Besides, although China is a multicultural country, almost all the major dynasty in its history followed the concept of "unity". This concept makes Chinese policies more oriented towards a unified mainstream culture rather than multiple different minor cultures. At the same time, the concept of multiculturalism is also not familiar to many Chinese scholars [11]. As a result, the country chooses the latter between pluralism and solidarity.

However, this form has brought very serious harm to the minority groups. Firstly, mandarin is the lingua franca in the country's official education system, and minority language education is completely excluded from it. At the same time, the country's official textbooks give only a superficial introduction to the knowledge of ethnic minorities. For the dominant group, they only have very few opportunities to learn the culture of minorities [14], which can easily lead to ethnic stereotype and foster distorted images about the ethnic minority people among them [13]. For minority groups, their culture would be naturally regarded as inferior and backward due to the lack of detailed introduction. Simultaneously, China's ethnic minorities are mostly concentrated in the remote areas of the west. In Yunnan Province, for example, there is a severe imbalance of educational resources, both culturally and physically, between the villages where minority groups concentrate and modern cities, which leads to poor academic performance by ethnic minority students. The differences of academic performance caused by the resource inequality of ethnic minority groups may directly lead to the sharp decline of their competitiveness in the job market. Therefore, in order to survive, minority groups have to give up their own culture and accept the mainstream culture, which is one of the fundamental reasons for the loss of minority culture.

China's education system serves to incorporate the cultures of 56 ethnic minorities. However, in order to achieve national unity and harmony, China's current official education system, mainly taught in Mandarin, almost excludes the education of ethnic minority cultures. This system, viewed from another angle, has resulted in cultural assimilation, which has led to the gradual disappearance of the cultures of China's ethnic minorities. The exclusion and assimilation of culture also greatly reduces the competitiveness of minority groups and limits the opportunities for mainstream groups to learn minority cultures. Therefore, China's education system should focus more on improving the recognition and status of minority cultures in the mainstream culture and promoting the establishment of multicultural education.

### **3. MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES AND FIVE KEY DIMENSIONS**

The United States is known as the "melting pot", and is recognized as a multicultural country. Multicultural education in the United States originated from the civil rights movement in 1962 [3]. At that time, African Americans worked hard for their economic, political, and social freedom and equality. Simultaneously, many people from all over the world immigrated to the United States due to the wars in their own countries and good job opportunities in the United States. Studies show that over the last few decades alone, about one million people per year want to immigrate to the United States [12]. Immigration is one of the main reasons that made the United States a multicultural country. Due to the large number of the immigrants, the school education also takes the multicultural backgrounds of students into consideration. Thus, the United States is the right choice as the main object of study in multicultural education.

Multicultural education is a very broad study field, but earlier educational scholars have proposed several key dimensions that constitute a good multicultural education system. Banks and Banks [5] put forward five dimensions regarding the issue. First, content integration, that is, how should teachers integrate knowledge and how many examples from different cultural backgrounds should be incorporated into their curriculum system [1]. When teaching students from different cultural backgrounds, the teacher should give examples of multiple cultural contents for a teaching topic or knowledge point. At the same time, students from different cultural groups should also be invited to express their opinions during the discussion. This allows students to respect each other's culture, and at the same time gives students more opportunities to learn and appreciate the culture of others.

The second dimension is the construction of knowledge, which requires students from different ethnic groups to transform and construct knowledge with the help of teachers when learning the new knowledge [4]; [5]. For example, one lecture is about presidents/monarchs from a previous era. The answers given by the students from China are definitely different from those given by the American students. At this time, teacher should explain to individual students particularly regarding the teaching content. Teacher should also pay attention to confirm students' answers first, and then help students transform and construct knowledge.

The third is about the reduction of prejudice, which helps students be able to accept their uniqueness and the differences of others and to establish the correct values [1]. In this process, teachers should show their sense of cultural identity to minority cultures, so as to cultivate students' attitude towards accepting different cultural knowledge.

The fourth dimension is about equity pedagogy, which requires teachers to develop different teaching strategies according to the different students. This also requires teacher-training programs to train pre-service and in-service teachers on how to teach in multicultural classrooms [5]. Teachers should bring students from different ethnic groups together in the teaching process so that students can exchange different opinions and views with each other on the particular topic, which may allow students to learn from each other by different thoughts and create an engaging classroom climate.

The fifth dimension requires a fusion of school culture and social structure [5]. This requires schools to minimize the gaps between each ethnic group and be as consistent as possible in each ethnic group's acceptance ratio. At the same time, when schools organize activities such as sports meeting, they should also organize students from different cultural backgrounds to fight against each other instead of separating them, which can develop friendship and confidence among students.

Multicultural education is composed of many factors. Banks [5] also explained that the five dimensions are interrelated and inseparable in order to form an effective multicultural education system. As a multicultural country, the United States is diversified not only in some educational policies, but also in life. In terms of education, the optional courses and minors in higher education provided by the American education system can well meet the needs of different students. In terms of daily life, the right of free speech in the United States is also reflected in various aspects, such as the presidential election process.

#### **4. CURRENT ISSUES OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE US**

Although the multicultural education in the United States has been relatively mature, there are still some serious problems in the schools. One is that different cultural groups should sacrifice their own cultures and thus be accepted by the dominant society [2]. For example, when a teacher assigns an exam or measures a student's performance, he or she usually may be measured by a single standard. Students who fail to build or transform their cultural knowledge in time may behave more poorly than the majority students. Therefore, teachers should adopt different standards when teaching different ethnic students to ensure that students from each race have equal opportunities. Another problem is that some schools in the US still carry out a unified teaching mode [9]. Many teachers even do not realize the diversity and difference between students. As a result, minority students cannot learn and receive the knowledge in the classroom well.

Regarding the issues, there are some suggestions and insights for implementing the multicultural education system in China according to the national conditions.

China's multicultural education is still at an initial stage. Besides, the multicultural education in China has a large discrepancy from the multicultural education in western countries due to the different cultural backgrounds and national conditions. In terms of the cultural backgrounds, the United States is born with the multiculturalism, that is, the multicultural education is necessary for the development of the United States politically and economically. Furthermore, the US is a multicultural country. The fundamental difference between America and China is that people of different races in the US have completely different cultures, histories, beliefs and habits, and there is a lot of racial discrimination in the United States. However, in China, the racial discrimination is not that serious. But the problem is that many ethnic groups are greatly affected and assimilated by the culture of Han, which is the dominant group in China. The cultures of many ethnic groups—the languages, characters, and artistic skills—are facing extinction. Thus, one of the main purposes of multicultural education in the United States is to promote ethnic harmony and reduce discrimination. But for China, the main goal of multicultural education is to develop the recognition and cultural identity of ethnic minority groups in mainstream group. Given the different national conditions and purposes between China and the United States, China's goal in introducing a multicultural education system should be to model the fundamental ideas and theories of multicultural education in western countries and to integrate and develop the advantages of the American education system according to the actual national conditions of China rather than accepting all of its characteristics. The implementation and construction of multicultural education should be different in different countries and at different historical stages [8].

#### **5. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SYSTEM IN CHINA**

Considering that the implementation of China's multicultural education should be formulated according to its national conditions, the following are some suggestions for the construction of China's multicultural education system.

First of all, schools, especially those in areas where ethnic minorities gather, should gradually hire teachers with different cultural backgrounds [1]. In China, Han people make up the majority of the Chinese population. As a result, most of the teachers are Han. Teachers with different cultural backgrounds can provide students with different examples and perspectives, which may effectively improve the problem of a unified teaching mode, especially in the areas where ethnic minority students concentrate. A teacher with the same cultural

background as a minority student can better understand his ideas and explain the conceptual differences in knowledge. At the same time, teachers from different ethnic minorities can teach students, both mainstream students and minority students, different ideas and perspectives. As a result, mainstream students can better learn about minority cultures and increase their sense of identity with minority cultures.

At the same time, education departments should train teachers on how to teach in a multicultural classroom [7]. Teachers should include more examples of ethnic minority cultures in their teaching curriculum, especially in history and literature subjects. Students from different ethnic groups should also be encouraged to express their own different views, which may enhance the cultural identity and respect other students' cultures among students. At the same time, teachers should always recognize, appreciate and share the cultures of students from minority groups. Schools may also encourage diverse social ethnic groups to form their own unions and organizations to help improve the solidarity between diverse students.

Thirdly, governments should try their best to balance the educational resources, both culturally and physically, between remote areas and modern cities. Because ethnic minority groups are mostly concentrated in economically underdeveloped areas, the inequality of educational resources can directly lead to a poor academic performance of ethnic minority students. This is one of the most serious problems in China, because in this way, they may be less competitive in the labor market. If the problem of unequal educational resources can be improved, minority students may feel more identified with their cultures and may not abandon their own culture to cater to the mainstream culture.

## 6. CONCLUSION

China's multicultural education is still in the initial stage. Chinese official education system excludes most of the knowledge of minority cultures and reduces the opportunities for mainstream students to learn about minority cultures. At the same time, the inequality of educational resources also restrains the development of multicultural education. As a more mature country in multicultural education, the United States has several key dimensions and useful education policies that China should learn from. However, the American education system also has some concerns and dilemmas. While integrating the strengths of the American system, China should not accept all of the characteristics of the US education system, but should make educational policies according to its national conditions. In this way, the effectiveness of implementing a multicultural education system can be maximized.

However, since the internal logic of the multicultural education system between China and the United States is different for the two countries' political and economic developments, more research could be done to investigate the specific path of the implementation of China's multicultural education according to different historical stages and different national conditions.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This article is supported by Professor Nasar Meer FAcSS FRSE at the University of Edinburgh, UK.

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