

Comparative Analysis of Educational Goals in Higher Education in Kazakhstan and China from the Perspective of Culture and Values

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Abstract: This study explores the cultural and value foundations of the educational goals of higher education in Kazakhstan and China. Based on the historical development and cultural traditions of the two countries, this study compares the similarities and differences of the educational goals of the two countries through qualitative literature content analysis. Both countries have taken “modernization and internationalization” as one of the core development directions of higher education development, but China’s educational philosophy is rooted in Confucianism and socialist core values, emphasizing country and collectivism; while Kazakhstan, based on neoliberal orientation, draws on the European education framework, gradually integrates multicultural concepts, emphasizes national identity and attaches importance to students’ individual development. This study uses Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and postcolonial education theory to explore how different nation-building narratives affect the educational goals of higher education. By comparing value systems, institutional logics, and student training models, it helps to understand how the educational systems of the “Global South” countries seek a balance between international standards and local cultural identity. It provides inspiration for the development of education based on culture and mutual reference under the global education trend, and provides a comparative education perspective for reform localization.

Keywords: Comparative education; Higher education reform; Educational philosophy; Student development; Cultural identity; Post-Soviet transition; Confucianism

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1. Introduction

In the context of global education reform, the phenomenon of global pressure and local traditions intertwined has become increasingly prominent. In particular, the higher education system in developing countries, as an important pillar of national soft power construction and social development, faces the challenge of reconciling international standards with local cultural value recognition^[1]. As important countries in the “Belt and Road” initiative, Kazakhstan and China have launched large-scale education reforms in recent years, attempting to

improve the internationalization level of the national education system through institutional and conceptual innovation, so as to enhance competitiveness in the global market.

Although both countries emphasize the modernization and internationalization of education, their educational philosophies reflect different cultural and historical trajectories. China, based on Confucianism and the core socialist values, regards education as a tool to serve the country and cultivate morality. Kazakhstan, on the other hand, is in a post-Soviet transition period, while retaining some of the Soviet educational structure, it is transforming to a more open, diverse, and student-centered Western-style education system ^[2,3].

This study aims to explore the similarities and differences in the educational goals of higher education in China and Kazakhstan, focusing on the following issues:

- (1) How do cultural and historical legacies shape the educational philosophies in the two countries?
- (2) In what ways do their respective student development goals reflect differing cultural logics?
- (3) What lessons can be drawn for culturally grounded education reform across the “Global South”?

2. Theoretical framework and methodology

This study employs a cultural-comparative theoretical framework, drawing on:

- (1) Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory ^[4] to understand differences in collectivism vs. individualism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance.
- (2) Postcolonial education theory ^[1] to interrogate the implications of Western epistemologies on local educational values and systems.
- (3) Emerging scholarship on “Global South” education reform and identity-building ^[5,6].

In terms of methodology, qualitative content analysis was used, and secondary academic literature, official university documents, public discourse, and policy-oriented academic writing were selected as data sources. The focus was on the expression of culture and values reflected in educational discourse and academic interpretations, and no direct analysis of the national policies of the two countries was conducted.

3. China: Confucian-socialist educational logic

Chinese higher education is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture and modern political culture ^[7]. Influenced by the Confucian concept of “self-cultivation,” higher education is not only regarded as a process of imparting knowledge, but also as a process of cultivating individual moral cultivation, so that people can consciously cultivate behaviors that are in line with collective interests and social responsibilities in actual actions.

Looking at contemporary China, “moral education” has long been a core concept repeatedly emphasized in the field of education. It not only focuses on the shaping of individual character, but also deeply reflects China’s expectations for future citizens to undertake national missions and continue national rejuvenation. This value orientation runs through every detail of higher education. For example, colleges and universities have always emphasized the importance of knowledge, skills, and ideology. They generally use systematic courses and centralized education management models with Chinese characteristics, as well as a narrative system that shapes the youth of the new era as national mission bearers, to continuously consolidate students’ national identity and sense of responsibility. On the one hand, this educational logic carries forward China’s profound cultural traditions, and on the other hand, it responds to China’s urgent need for high-quality talents with all-round development in the new era.

It can be seen that China’s educational goal focuses on cultivating students with all-round development in morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor. By giving equal importance to academic literacy and

value guidance, the education system strives to shape a new generation of successors who have both professional capabilities and are loyal to the country and social mission. This training model embodies the educational logic with Chinese characteristics, which combines knowledge with faith and personal growth with national needs.

4. Kazakhstan: Post-Soviet pluralism and global orientation

Kazakhstan's higher education reform reflects a different historical and cultural trajectory. Since independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has gradually moved away from the centralized Soviet education model and widely absorbed Western experience, with multicultural citizenship and identity diversity established as core training goals^[2].

The decentralization of higher education has given universities greater governance autonomy and academic freedom, which has not only improved the internal governance efficiency of higher education institutions but also provided more favorable institutional guarantees for them to participate in international competition and achieve innovation in teaching and scientific research^[8-10]. For example, universities in Kazakhstan have gradually begun to promote the use of Kazakh, Russian, and English in teaching, which not only improves students' language skills but also lays the foundation for their integration into a multicultural exchange environment. At the same time, universities have actively responded to the country's innovation-driven development strategy, incorporated entrepreneurship and innovation into teaching courses, focused on integrating with practice, and emphasized cultivating students' practical ability and innovative thinking. In the process of focusing on the individual development of students, the education system also emphasizes the shaping of students' awareness of cultural tolerance, encouraging them to achieve self-growth and expand their global vision in respecting diversity.

Overall, Kazakhstan has actively improved the adaptability of education through the three paths of decentralized governance, cultural diversity, and innovation orientation, built a higher education system that is in line with international standards while taking into account local characteristics, and vigorously cultivated innovative talents who understand and respect different cultural traditions and value systems and have a global vision and cross-cultural communication capabilities.

5. Comparative analysis

5.1. Educational values and educational objectives

From **Table 1**, we can see that there are significant differences in the values of higher education between China and Kazakhstan. From the perspective of the value system, based on the different cultural foundations of the two countries, China's educational philosophy revolves around "educating people for the country," aiming to cultivate new people of the era who are loyal to the country and shoulder the great task of national rejuvenation; Kazakhstan's educational philosophy is more inclined to the individual development of students, with the ability of diversity and inclusion, and aims to cultivate new youth with "global learning ability."

Table 1. Comparison chart between China and Kazakhstan

Dimension	China	Kazakhstan
Cultural foundation	Confucianism, socialism	Nomadic culture, Post-Soviet identity
Student development goals	Moral agents, national contributors	Citizens with rights, global learners
Emphasis	Collectivism, loyalty, moral education	Individualism, critical thinking, innovation
Educational goals	State service, ideological alignment	Employability, diversity, personal growth

5.2. Governance and internationalization

China's higher education governance emphasizes a top-down strategy, with overall planning by the state and implementation by institutions. It is a "selective globalization" based on Confucian cultural confidence. Kazakhstan is more open to international education standards, with universities having more autonomy, and actively promoting the Bologna reform, international quality assurance benchmarks, and English teaching system^[3].

China is cautious and strategic in absorbing global elements, focusing on introducing various resources and its own culture to "go global." Kazakhstan adopts a more liberal internationalization model, focusing on integrating into the European education system and cultivating students with a global perspective.

6. Future and challenges

Based on the above comparison, it is not difficult to see that, combined with the current "China's footsteps," in the future, China's education goals will be more inclined towards scientific and technological innovation and cross-domain capabilities, and will further combine "Chinese achievements" with internationalization. However, maintaining the leading position of educational achievements among many global competitors will become a challenge. Kazakhstan will further strengthen academic freedom and drive innovation according to industry needs. As education reform continues, how to find its own development path in the global education competition and knowledge sharing will also become a major challenge for Kazakhstan.

7. Mutual learning and the influence of the "Global South" countries

In the development of educational modernization and internationalization, although the two countries have different educational goals, they face similar problems. As Tikly warns, global educational reforms often carry implicit Eurocentric assumptions that marginalize local values^[1]. So, how to promote educational modernization without sacrificing their own cultural identity?

Perhaps China could try to draw inspiration from Kazakhstan's experience in curriculum flexibility and multicultural inclusion; Kazakhstan could also learn from China's successful experience in long-term education strategy and cultural roots. Whether international or local, the fundamental task of university education should be to enhance the competitiveness of local culture. Therefore, more attention should be paid to the "dual guidance" of local culture and international culture^[11].

For the countries in the "Global South," this comparison shows that in the process of seeking modernization and international development in education reform, they should avoid blindly copying the education model of Western countries. Instead, they should reasonably combine the local knowledge system according to their own actual conditions and formulate an education development path that can empower rather than replace cultural identity. This is the way to long-term development.

8. Conclusion

Education is never culturally neutral. This study reveals the cultural roots and value integration model behind educational goals. As shown in this study, the higher education goals of Kazakhstan and China are deeply rooted in their respective cultural traditions and value orientations. Modernization and nationalization under educational reform should be understood as a process of intersection and reshaping of cultural identity. Based on the autonomous construction of "future education" on the basis of local culture, enjoy the collision of thoughts brought about by multicultural exchanges, take the essence of it, integrate it into oneself, grow in

mutual learning, expand international vision in local reflection, and adhere to the path based on local values.

In summary, comparative education research not only helps us better understand others but also prompts us to re-understand the cultural logic and future direction of our own educational development. In the current era of “South-South comparison,” this is also the modern sex education issue that all countries in the “Global South” face in common.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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