

The Construction Logic and Practical Innovation of Characteristic Schools for Sino-Foreign Cultural Exchange

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Abstract: Under the guidance of the concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind, international exchanges in basic education have become a key vehicle for deepening mutual learning among civilizations. Schools with distinctive intercultural exchange programs provide important platforms for cultivating students' intercultural understanding and communication skills, while also promoting the internationalization of school education. Yet, existing research tends to highlight the general value of cultural exchange without offering a systematic analysis of how such initiatives are implemented at the school level. This study examines schools with distinctive features of intercultural communication, focusing on their educational objectives, curriculum design, and institutional support. The findings suggest that effective practices integrate cultural diversity into both classroom teaching and extracurricular activities, with institutional frameworks playing a crucial role in ensuring sustainability. This study enriches the theoretical discussion on intercultural education and provides practical guidance for schools seeking to strengthen their programs of cultural exchange. Empirical data show that the annual participation rate of students in international activities reaches 95.83%, with significant enhancement in global competence, providing a practical paradigm for conducting humanities exchanges in basic education in the new era, grounded in curriculum systems, bridged by practical activities, and aimed at cultural integration.

Keywords: Sino-foreign cultural exchange; Characteristic school construction; Internationalization of basic education

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1. Introduction

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi at its core has elevated people-to-people and cultural exchanges between China and other countries to a strategic level, gradually building a system of such exchanges with Chinese characteristics. From the first inclusion of "people-to-people exchanges" in the report of the 18th Party Congress, to the 19th Congress proposing the principle of "keeping our own culture as the foundation while drawing on others' strengths,"

and further to the 2017 approval by the Central Leading Group for Deepening Overall Reform of the Several Opinions on Strengthening and Improving People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges with Foreign Countries, which established people-to-people exchanges as one of the three strategic pillars of China's foreign relations. To implement these decisions, the Ministry of Education established the Center for People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges with Foreign Countries, innovatively launching the Plan for Developing Schools with Distinctive People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges. Using educational experimental zones as a starting point, the plan focuses on advancing seven distinctive projects, including pairing international friendly schools and "Internet + people-to-people exchanges"^[1]. In 2019, the Opinions on Accelerating and Expanding Education Opening-Up in the New Era were issued, accompanied by the Implementation Guidelines for Global Understanding Education Projects, systematically constructing a complete implementation path from central policies to grassroots practices^[2]. The 20th National Congress explicitly called for "enhancing the dissemination and influence of Chinese civilization," and the General Secretary's Global Civilization Initiative further pointed the direction for people-to-people exchanges in the new era. The General Secretary profoundly noted, "Amity between peoples holds the key to sound state-to-state relations, and heart-to-heart communication makes this amity possible," revealing the cornerstone of people-to-people exchanges. In the context of globalization, cross-cultural communication has become an essential educational goal for schools worldwide. Developing students' ability to understand and engage with diverse cultures is increasingly recognized as a core competency for success in the twenty-first century^[3]. Beyond fostering linguistic proficiency, intercultural education enhances empathy, adaptability, and critical thinking, thereby preparing students for participation in global communities^[4]. Against this backdrop, international exchanges and cooperation in basic education play a pivotal role^[5]. Therefore, the construction of "schools with distinctive people-to-people and cultural exchanges with foreign countries" begins with shared ideals, proceeds through concrete actions, and ultimately achieves enduring success through persistent and far-reaching efforts. Existing research on Sino-foreign cultural exchange in basic education has documented the positive impacts of activities like sister-school partnerships and language courses. However, most studies remain descriptive, focusing on outcomes rather than unpacking implementation mechanisms such as curriculum design and institutional support^[6]. To address this gap, this study takes a case school as an example, exploring its practice paths and refining a replicable model. This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, focusing on Chongqing Shapingba District First Experimental Primary School—a representative regional foreign cultural exchange experimental school with extensive experience in international cooperation. Data were collected from two sources: (1) institutional documents (school development plans, curriculum frameworks, evaluation reports); and (2) empirical evidence (student participation rates, competition awards, sister-school partnership records). This ensures the credibility of the analysis and conclusions^[7].

2. Practice path and analysis based on the “three-dimensional driving and six-domain linkage” model

2.1. Strategic top-level design: Constructing a coherent value system

The school has established a comprehensive value framework through top-level planning, including a shared vision with international elements, education philosophies integrating Chinese identity and global outlook, and humanistic talent cultivation schemes^[6]. Based on historical heritage and future orientation, the school's vision is to “consolidate learning-oriented organization achievements, advance high-quality school construction; integrate international understanding education, and implement the fundamental task of fostering virtue through

education.” Its development plan, formulated via extensive research, positions “civilizational exchange and educational opening-up” as core goals ^[7]. The school adopts “Looking Up at the Sky, Wisdom Travels Far” as its educational philosophy, adheres to the concept of “Every Child a Little Star, Each One Shining Brightly,” and practices “Childlike Education” (discovering childlike fun, nurturing innocence). It has built a “Child-Inspired Curriculum” system (“Chinese Sentiment + Global Vision”), a “Child-Source Lecture Hall” (showcasing individuality), and a “Child-Learning Thinking” approach (multi-dimensional exploration), promoting teacher-student co-growth. To cultivate well-rounded students, the school has defined eight key competencies—moral character, physical and mental well-being, academic ability, innovation, international awareness, aesthetic appreciation, information literacy, and life skills—and formulated the Action Plan for Enhancing Students’ Comprehensive Competencies. It has also reformed the student evaluation mechanism, laying an institutional foundation for fostering international awareness ^[4].

2.2. Parallel curricular development: Building an international understanding cluster

Adhering to broad educational and curricular perspectives of international understanding education, the school anchors the core goal of cultivating well-rounded, globally-minded youth and builds a curriculum module with “Chinese roots and global vision”—based on multi-dimensional international language courses, focused on in-depth international cultural courses, and supplemented by rich international activity courses ^[8]. Explicit courses include foundational courses (“English + Languages, EIU International Understanding”) to enhance academic skills; integrated courses (humanities-led A-STEAM) to nurture innovation; and research courses (“study tours, co-construction”) to promote communication. The school’s Model United Nations (MUN) course, developed over three years under the principles of “system grafting, dynamic adjustment, distinctive development, elite incubation,” has formed a complete framework (training, implementation, evaluation) ^[9]. Its “Star·MUN” team has achieved outstanding results: nine students won “Special Mention for International Understanding” at the 2022 World Youth MUN Chongqing Session; Tang Rongjing received the “Special Mention for World Youth Leadership” at the 2022 High-Level Session; in 2023, the team won “Outstanding Team” at Beijing Foreign Studies University’s MUN Conference; and two students qualified for the 2024 International Youth MUN High-Level Project in Singapore. Implicit courses include arts, music, drama, and sustainability activities. Students conduct domestic and international scientific experiments, participate in AI enlightenment, and refine talents in traditional music, choir, paper art, and storytelling. Through courses like “Enlightenment of All Things” and “Sharing the Planet,” they understand sustainable development. Through Sino-Malaysian co-developed courses, Sino-U.S. New Year celebrations, and “Belt and Road” field trips, they learn about the world. Explicit and implicit courses advance in parallel, forming the school’s “Children Walk the World” international understanding curriculum system, which fosters global competence through staged, multi-level participation ^[10].

2.3. Brand-oriented initiatives: Amplifying China’s cultural voice

Adhering to the philosophy of “five colors shining in harmony, eight tones blending in unity,” the school seizes the opportunity of building distinctive intercultural exchange schools, follows the path of “people as the main body, culture as the medium, exchange as the means,” and focuses on “infrastructure + distinctive development” with “international sister-school pairing” as the core project. Through “Internet + Cultural Exchange,” the school participates in major diplomatic events: students joined the “Welcoming the Winter Olympics” series (dance, folk music, chorus, skits, storytelling) organized by Sino-Foreign Cultural Exchange Young Ambassadors, and won awards at the 5th Sino-Japanese Washi Paper Art Exhibition 5. According to incomplete

statistics, approximately 1,253 students participated in district-level and above activities, 1,105 in intercultural events, and 95.83% in international understanding activities annually. These initiatives amplify Chinese culture and enhance students' cultural confidence.

2.4. Proactive multilateral engagement: Deepening reciprocal exchange

Based on a systematic cross-cultural education field, the school has expanded multi-directional connections: it established international sister-school relationships with four “Belt and Road” institutions (e.g., Malaysia’s Kuan Yu No. 2 Primary School, France’s Victor Hugo School) and Hong Kong’s Chinese Christian Church Kei Wai Primary School; collaborated with Chongqing University of Education to set up a “Children’s International Understanding Education Studio”; joined the BFSU Model United Nations Alliance; and became a “Nobel Prize Plan” experimental school. It also organizes high-profile activities: Sino-Malaysian/US New Year celebrations, Sino-Japanese traditional music exchanges, Thailand/Malaysia school visits, Chongqing-Hong Kong educational exchanges, and preparations for the “Colorful Sunshine·Davos Economic Forum.” During visits from France’s Auxerre City and Malaysia’s Kuan Yu No. 2 Primary School, it hosted student-sharing classes and interactive activities ^[5]. Additionally, it inspected the nation’s first Sino-Foreign Humanities Exchange Experimental Zone, promoting local educational opening-up. These efforts transform the school from a passive recipient to an active contributor to global educational networks.

2.5. Research-integrated practice: Advancing global competence through inquiry

The school embeds academic inquiry into intercultural practices: teachers and leaders participate in international forums (e.g., China-Australia-Canada Principals’ Cloud Forum, “School Exploration Under Global Competence Framework” Dialogue) and deliver keynote speeches at intercultural training conferences ^[11]. Its educational outputs have been widely recognized: lesson cases (Elephants Marching North, Climate Conference, Stone Carvings Guarding Millennia of Cultural Heritage) were showcased at the Ministry of Education, municipal, and district levels; instructional designs and exchange achievements were included in the Ministry of Education’s Collection of Sino-Foreign Cultural Exchange Case Studies ^[9]. Municipal and district-level research projects (key projects, general projects, teacher development projects) guide teams to explore from diverse perspectives, ensuring practice is informed by theory ^[4].

2.6. Expert-guided learning: Providing professional and theoretical support

To sustain development, the school engages external experts for guidance, participates in national and international understanding education seminars, and organizes intercultural activities and academic training lectures. This integrates diverse intellectual resources and practical platforms, enhancing the project team’s theoretical literacy and operational ability, and ensuring alignment with national policies and global educational trends.

3. Conclusion

Taken together, the six domains demonstrate how characteristic schools operationalize the “three-dimensional driving and six-domain linkage” model. Through value-oriented top-level design, curricular innovation, brand development, multilateral engagement, research integration, and expert guidance, schools achieve a paradigm shift from one-way cultural transmission to reciprocal civilizational dialogue, forming a developmental cycle of “policy guidance → characteristic cultivation → effect radiation” ^[12]. Empirical evidence shows 95.83% of

students participate in annual international activities, with significant improvements in global competence. A global community of shared future is a vivid expression of the Chinese worldview and the ethical foundation of the “Belt and Road” Initiative, fostering global values among the “new generation” ^[6]. Worldview—shaped by one’s environment—influences interaction bandwidth and connection with civilization. Today, the world is entering the “VUCA era,” facing unprecedented changes (global instability, digital disruption, AI advancement, China’s economic new layout), which bring complex global landscapes, rapid technological progress, greater social responsibility, and boundless innovation opportunities. In this context, the modernization of society, education, and individuals guides the direction of basic education international exchanges ^[13]. The school’s practices establish a new-era basic education model: anchored in curriculum, bridged by practice, and oriented toward cultural integration. This model strengthens youth connectivity and contributes to the global community of a shared future. Future research will remain grounded in communicative rationality and humanistic values, deeply analyze intercultural exchanges within the frameworks of UN multilateral governance and the global community of shared future, and continue advancing sister-school projects, curricular practice, and brand building. By promoting cross-cultural narrative reconstruction, it aims to preserve diverse civilizations, deepen contemporary intercultural exchanges, and provide theoretical and practical support for a harmonious yet diverse human civilization paradigm.

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Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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