

Study on the Differences Between Chinese and American Education from the Perspective of Cultural Differences

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Abstract:

This thesis examines the different manifestations of the educational systems in China and the United States under the cultural diversity background, exploring how culture influences educational objectives, teaching methods, teacher-student relationships, family expectations, and social mobility. By analyzing these differences, the study can provide valuable references for educational policymakers to enhance educational equity, innovative ability, and the comprehensive development of students, adapting to the challenges brought by globalization and technological change. Based on the objective reality of the differences in cultural backgrounds and educational models between China and the United States, the education systems of China and the United States have their advantages and disadvantages. Chinese education emphasizes respect for teachers and academic achievement, while United States education emphasizes freedom and equality, and pays more attention to creativity and personalized development. Therefore, based on integrating the educational advantages of the two countries, this paper argues that future education should balance academic achievements and innovation, pay attention to mental health, narrow the gap in educational resources, and cultivate interdisciplinary talents with global competitiveness.

Keywords: Education; China; American; culture

1. Introduction

The educational systems of China and the United States have deep historical roots and cultural backgrounds. China's educational system is deeply influenced by Confucianism, emphasizing collectivism, respect for authority, and academic achievement. In

contrast, the American educational system is based on Western liberalism, emphasizing individualism, creativity, and critical thinking. These cultural differences are not only reflected in educational goals and teaching methods but also the expectations of students and parents, as well as the social perception of education. The significance of studying these differ-

ences lies in understanding the impact of different cultures on education, enhancing cross-cultural communication and cooperation, and providing reference for educational reform. This research topics include the differences in educational concepts and methods, comparisons of educational systems and policies, teacher-student relationships and classroom culture, family education and social expectations and educational outcomes, and the social impact of education.

2. Differential Analysis

2.1 Differences in Teaching Philosophy and Methods

2.1.1 Teaching goals

The primary goal of education in China is to equip students with a vast amount of basic knowledge, especially in core subjects such as math and science. The curriculum in China is often designed with exams in mind, and teachers and parents place a heavy emphasis on exam scores [1]. The educational goals of the US place a greater emphasis on cultivating students' creativity and critical thinking. In American schools, students are encouraged to ask questions and think of different solutions, rather than simply memorizing and copying knowledge. The American concept of "general education" aims to develop students' comprehensive abilities to cope with the changing society in the future [2].

2.1.2 Teaching methods

The traditional teaching method of China in classrooms is usually "teacher-centered." The teacher stands on the podium and is responsible for explaining, while the students mainly listen and take notes. The teaching process is mainly about imparting knowledge. The students' task is to follow the teacher's pace and complete a lot of homework and exercises so that they can achieve good grades in exams [1,3].

In the US, the teaching method in class is more centered on students, with teachers playing the role of guides, encouraging students to participate in discussions, express their own opinions, and ask questions. This approach aims to cultivate students' ability to think independently and solve problems [2].

2.1.3 Classroom interaction

In China, classroom discipline is strict, teachers have a high degree of control over students' behavior, and students' classroom behavior is relatively uniform, with raising hands to answer questions and sitting upright

being common classroom requirements. This disciplined classroom environment helps ensure the efficient operation of large-scale teaching, but it may also limit students' expression [2].

In the United States, classroom interactions are more flexible, and students are free to express their opinions. They can even engage in debates and discussions during the teaching process. Teachers place a strong emphasis on helping students better understand course content through interactive learning. This teaching method helps enhance students' sense of participation and autonomy [4].

2.1.4 Assignments and Evaluation

In China, student assessment is primarily based on standardized tests, especially in middle school. The High School Entrance Examination determines whether a student can enter high school for further study, while the College Entrance Examination determines whether a student can enter university for advanced academic research. The content of the exams is focused on important knowledge points from textbooks, and the assessment of a student's learning outcomes is mainly based on whether they can efficiently recall and apply knowledge in the exam [5].

In the United States, assessment methods are more diverse, including assignments, projects, presentations, essays, and group work. Many schools are gradually reducing the weight of standardized tests and focusing more on holistic assessment of students' abilities, encouraging them to demonstrate their learning outcomes through various means [2,4].

2.1.5 The family's expectation

In China, parents are very concerned about their children's academic performance, and many believe that high grades and prestigious schools are the key to their children's future success. As a result, they arrange for a lot of after-school tutoring and academic activities. Worse still, some parents even believe that without these additional activities, their children cannot achieve high grades, which leads to a significant increase in their children's academic pressure [6].

In the United States, parents typically place a greater emphasis on a child's overall development, which includes both academic performance and social, athletic, and psychological well-being. Parents want their children to receive a well-rounded education in school, rather than just good test scores [7].

These differences show that teaching concepts and methods in China and the United States are deeply influenced by their respective cultural traditions and reflect the different priorities and values of their educational systems.

2.2 Comparison of Educational Systems and Policies

2.2.1 Education hierarchy structure

China's education system has a strong sense of unity, with the vast majority of educational levels from primary school to higher education being managed by the national education authorities, while only a few municipalities and special regions are left to the local education authorities to design. The national government sets out curriculum guidelines and examination content for each stage, especially during the Gaokao (National Unified Entrance Examination for Higher Education), which is highly consistent across the country [2]. This unified system makes educational resources relatively balanced across regions, but it also leads to excessive reliance on examination scores.

The American education system is relatively decentralized. Education policies and curriculum are primarily decided by local education authorities (such as states and school districts), while the federal government primarily provides funding support and sets educational goals [4]. This decentralized model results in significant differences in educational content and standards among states and regions but also provides greater flexibility to adapt to the needs of different regions.

2.2.2 Academic system

The educational system in China is relatively fixed, typically consisting of six years of primary school, three years of junior high school, and three years of senior high school, followed by university. Students enter the appropriate grade based on their age, and the curriculum and exams in each stage are highly standardized. This rigid system results in highly synchronized educational progress across the entire country [2].

The educational system in the United States is more flexible, with multiple school and course options beyond the standard K-12 (from preschool to 12th grade) system. Students can choose different courses based on their interests and academic abilities, and even earn college credit in advance through AP (Advanced Placement) or dual credit courses [3].

2.2.3 Examination system

China's examination system is particularly centered around the gaokao, which determines whether and which university a student can enter. The competition for the gaokao is extremely fierce, and students are informed from high school that the next three years will be focused on preparing for the exam. The gaokao is considered a fair educational competition tool, but due to the excessive

number of competitors and after-school tutoring, it can also bring great learning pressure to students [1].

The college admissions assessment system in the United States is more diverse, in addition to standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT, many universities also refer to a student's grades in school, extracurricular activities, letters of recommendation, and personal essays [4]. In recent years, some universities have even implemented a "test-optional" policy to reduce reliance on standardized tests [8].

These differences indicate that the educational systems and policies of China and the United States have developed unique characteristics in their respective historical and social contexts. China's educational system tends to be more centralized and uniform, while the American educational system is more decentralized and diverse.

2.3 Teacher-Student Relationships and Classroom Culture

2.3.1 Teacher-student authority and equality

In China, teachers are regarded as symbols of knowledge and authority, and the relationship between teachers and students is usually relatively formal. Students have a very high regard for teachers, and teachers have a higher status in the classroom. Students are less likely to actively question their teachers' views or participate in discussions in class. This authority comes from China's long-standing Confucian culture, in which respecting teachers and emphasizing learning is one of the core values [1,4].

In the United States, the relationship between teachers and students is more egalitarian. Teachers are seen as guides and supporters in their students' learning process, rather than as representatives of authority. Students are free to ask questions, challenge their teachers' views, and even debate with them. American education emphasizes the development of students' independent thinking and critical thinking, and the interaction between teachers and students is more open and casual [9].

2.3.2 Classroom discipline and participation

In Chinese classrooms, discipline is strict and students are expected to remain quiet and listen to the teacher's instructions during class. They are also expected to follow the teacher's guidance for learning. Students are only allowed to speak, ask questions, and participate in discussions when permitted. The opportunities for discussion and interaction are limited, and the teacher dominates the entire class. The disciplined classroom environment ensures the smooth delivery of teaching content, but may also limit the development of students' individuality and creative thinking [3]. In China, teachers are regarded as

knowledge impartors, with high prestige. In the classroom, teachers are often the only speaker and dominate the entire teaching process. Students are expected to acquire knowledge through listening, note-taking, and memorization, while teachers ensure that students understand every knowledge point through detailed explanations [2]. The classroom culture in the United States is more free and open. Students are encouraged to actively participate in class discussions and express their opinions. The proportion of discussion and interaction in class is larger. The American educational culture places more emphasis on students' self-expression and participation, which cultivates their independence and creativity [4]. In the United States, the role of teachers is more like that of a learning facilitator, who helps students explore knowledge through asking questions, guiding, and collaborative learning. Teachers interact with students frequently, encouraging them to ask questions spontaneously and solve problems through discussion. This facilitative teaching style plays an important role in cultivating students' autonomous learning ability [4].

2.3.3 Classroom goals

The main goal of classroom instruction in China is to help students acquire knowledge and achieve good grades in exams, so teachers usually focus on knowledge transmission. Students are more likely to listen and take notes. The design of the classroom revolves around standardized tests, and teachers deliberately allocate class time for the explanation of key knowledge points, avoiding too much interactive discussion. Knowledge that is not on the test is simplified or completely omitted [1].

The classroom goals in the United States are more diverse, with teachers placing more emphasis on developing students' critical thinking and creativity in addition to knowledge transmission. Teachers not only expect students to understand the knowledge points, but also encourage them to expand their learning through discussion, cooperation, and independent projects. Such a teaching model places more emphasis on the students' comprehensive development rather than solely on academic achievement [3].

2.3.4 Student expectations and teacher expectations

In Chinese classrooms, teachers expect students to show obedience and diligence towards the class. Students learning is seen as an expression of effort, and teachers usually evaluate their performance based on the degree of diligence. Emphasis is placed on students' hardworking study and efficient completion of assignments [1].

American teachers place more emphasis on students' independence and exploratory spirit. Students' performance is not only evaluated based on the degree of effort, but

also through their innovative abilities, critical thinking, and teamwork. In addition, teachers encourage students to achieve their learning goals through independent learning, research projects, etc. [2].

These differences reflect the different influences of Chinese and American cultures on education: the teacher-student relationship in China is more focused on order and authority, while the teacher-student relationship in the US is more focused on equality and interaction. The classroom culture in the two countries also shows significant differences due to cultural background and educational goals.

2.4 Educational Outcomes and Social Impact

2.4.1 Employment rate

China's education system strongly prioritizes academic achievement and specific areas of employment, especially in high-paying careers such as engineering, technology, and finance. Due to the highly competitive college entrance examination and university admission system, students are often steered towards subjects with stable, high-paying prospects [2]. However, many students face employment pressure after graduation, especially after the expansion of higher education, where there is an excess of graduates, leading to a certain degree of "degree devaluation" and mismatches between the job market and graduates' qualifications [1].

The American education system is more flexible, and students can choose their career paths based on their personal interests and market needs. Employment options are more diverse, and the education system emphasizes the development of practical skills and personal capabilities, such as enhancing employability through vocational-technical education and internship programs [9].

2.4.2 Innovative ability

The education system in China places a strong emphasis on knowledge transmission and the consolidation of basic knowledge but is relatively limited in cultivating innovative abilities. Students' educational paths are more exam-oriented, emphasizing the scores in standardized tests, and the "teaching by filling" mode often limits the students' creativity and independent thinking. Although the government has put forward the strategy of "innovation-driven development" in recent years, the cultivation of innovative abilities still faces challenges in the actual teaching process [4].

The American education system is globally renowned for its emphasis on cultivating critical thinking and creativity. School curricula are designed to foster students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills through open-ended

discussions, project-based learning, and interdisciplinary collaboration, encouraging students to think independently and innovatively. Many schools also prioritize STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education, encouraging students to explore new knowledge domains through experimentation and projects.

2.4.3 Global competitiveness

China's education system has produced a large number of specialized technical talent globally, especially in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) fields. China has excelled in cultivating a large number of engineers and technical experts, which has enabled China to take the lead in certain areas of global manufacturing and technological innovation. However, the education system places relatively less emphasis on critical thinking and creativity, which leads to students' lack of flexibility when facing the rapidly changing global market.

The United States plays a significant role in the world in cultivating innovative talent, with its educational system placing a particular emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Many of the country's top universities and research institutions have fostered a large number of globally competitive innovative individuals through open academic environments and innovative programs. These individuals not only lead in the field of science and technology but also make important contributions in the areas of cultural and creative innovation and business innovation.

2.4.4 Student mental health and educational stress

Due to the highly centralized examination system and parents' extremely high expectations for academic achievement, students in China's education system are subjected to immense psychological pressure. The decisive role of the college entrance examination leads students to receive extensive extra-curricular tutoring and training from a young age, which hurts their mental health. In recent years, the Chinese government has introduced a series of policies aimed at reducing students' stress, but pressure remains a major issue in the country's education system [10].

While the American government and society also have expectations for education, the overall educational pressure in the United States is lower than in China, especially in high school. American schools place a strong emphasis on students' mental health, and many schools offer counseling services. They also reduce academic pressure through extracurricular activities and sports. Schools encourage students to develop in a balanced way, reducing excessive academic pressure, which is beneficial to their long-term mental health.

In summary, the differences in the educational systems of China and the United States in terms of their impact on student's future development and society are manifested in many ways. China's educational system has an advantage in cultivating technical and academic talent but is relatively limited in terms of innovation and social mobility. In contrast, the educational system in the United States places greater emphasis on individualization, creativity, and diverse pathways, and has a more significant impact on promoting students' future development and social mobility.

3. Revelation and Suggestions

3.1 Combining Academic Achievement with Creativity Development

The educational systems of China and the US, which respectively emphasize exam scores and creativity, demonstrate the necessity of diverse educational models. Countries can introduce diverse teaching methods in their educational systems, ensuring academic achievements while encouraging students to develop their creative thinking, forming a more balanced development model. China can maintain its high academic achievements while learning from the US's model for cultivating creativity, and promoting innovative education. For example, encouraging project-based learning, interdisciplinary cooperation, and practical teaching can reduce excessive reliance on standardized exams. The US can also strengthen the learning of fundamental knowledge to ensure that students develop creative thinking while having a solid academic foundation.

3.2 Balancing Exam Stress and Student Mental Health

Policymakers should seek a balance between academic achievement and student mental health, reducing unnecessary pressure and promoting their all-round development. Both countries should pay more attention to student mental health in education. China can introduce a mental counseling mechanism alongside exam-oriented education to alleviate students' exam stress. The US should continue to promote mental health services in schools to ensure that students receive support in balancing academic and life pressures. Establishing stress-relief activities and flexible academic assessment methods can also help students better cope with academic challenges.

3.3 Strengthening Educational Equity to Nar-

row the Educational Gap

Education equity has a direct impact on social mobility. This suggests that it should pay attention to the equitable distribution of educational resources when designing education policies, ensuring that students from different backgrounds have equal opportunities. China should continue to promote the equitable distribution of educational resources, especially between rural and urban areas. The government can increase investment in rural schools, improve teachers' salaries, and encourage high-quality teachers to teach in remote areas. The United States should further narrow the educational gap between different social and economic strata and increase educational support for low-income areas to ensure that all students have equal access to education.

3.4 Promoting Home-School Cooperation and Forming Synergy

Parental expectations have a profound impact on students' academic performance and development trajectories. This suggests that future educational reforms should consider parents' needs for education and promote cooperation between families and schools to help students achieve a balance between academic and personal development. The family-school cooperation mechanisms in China and the United States can learn from each other. China should further encourage parents to participate in their children's education, not only focusing on academic performance but also on children's interest development and mental health. The United States can enhance communication between families and schools and encourage parents to participate in school decision-making and management through family activities and school volunteers, thus improving the effectiveness of family-school interactions.

3.5 Enhancing Global Competitiveness and Cultivating Interdisciplinary Talent

In the context of globalization, educational policies should focus on enhancing students' comprehensive abilities and adaptability, through interdisciplinary education and international cooperation, to provide more students with a global vision and cross-disciplinary capabilities for future global competition. China can cultivate students' global competitiveness through international exchange programs, interdisciplinary education, and more international cooperation. The United States can continue to promote STEM education and encourage students to develop cultural understanding and cross-border cooperation skills while learning technology, to provide more innovative talent for the future global market.

4. Conclusion

By conducting in-depth research into the cultural differences between the educational systems of China and the United States, one can draw the following conclusions: cultural background has a profound impact on educational objectives, teaching methods, teacher-student relationships, family expectations, and educational policies.

The educational system in China places more emphasis on academic achievements and social status advancement. Students enter higher education through a unified examination system, such as the college entrance examination, and parents have high expectations for their children's academic success. The educational system in the United States, on the other hand, places more emphasis on individualized student development, creativity, and the cultivation of critical thinking. Parents tend to support their children's participation in diverse extracurricular activities, forming a comprehensive education model.

China's education system has advantages in knowledge accumulation and the cultivation of professional skills, but it also has problems in the cultivation of innovative ability and creative thinking. In contrast, the American education system encourages students to learn independently and innovate through flexible teaching methods and diverse evaluation systems, which is particularly prominent in global competitiveness. However, the challenge of regional educational equity in China, such as the gap in educational resources between urban and rural areas, limits social mobility. Although the United States performs well in terms of social mobility and equal opportunities, it also faces unequal distribution of educational resources, especially in low-income areas.

Based on these differences, future educational reform should strike a balance between academic achievement and innovative ability, paying attention to student's mental health and reducing excessive academic pressure. Meanwhile, policymakers should strengthen home-school cooperation to ensure that parents and schools work together to promote students' development. In the context of globalization, the education system should also cultivate students with an international perspective and interdisciplinary abilities to meet the needs of future society and the market. These studies provide valuable insights into how to optimize the education system through cultural differences.

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