

COMPARING CHINA AND MALAYSIA: MAIN DISSIMILARITIES IN CIVIC EDUCATION

WU JIUZHAN*
and
WANG XUAN**

ABSTRACT

Both mainland China and Malaysia have their comprehensive civic educational systems, but they differ in many aspects due to historical, cultural, and social systems. The kernel orientation and emphasis of such systems being different, the curricula are dissimilar. Next, their strategies formulated and paths run are unlike, producing different effects in fostering citizens' quality. Facing the challenge of globalization, China's civic education, especially its curriculum design, needs further adjustment and optimization.

Keywords: Mainland China; Malaysia; civic education

* Wu Jiuzhan 吴九占 Guangzhou Institute of Science and Technology, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, China wujiuzhan@126.com
** Associate Professor, School of Marxism, Wuyi University, Jiangmen, Guangdong Province, China wujiuzhan@126.com

“Civic education” is an integral part of a state’s national educational system. It is shaped by multiple factors such as history, culture, social system, social policies, and comprehensive conditions of a particular era. The components of a country’s civic educational system cover the general civic educational design, educational objectives, educational approaches adopted, and the aims to be realized. In terms of the research target of this research, we will discuss the topic about Malaysian national aims to impart and reinforce national identity through its civic education system, Mainland China’s civic education for its broader social, cultural, and political contents, as well as the make a comparison and contrast between the two systems.

Regarding the differences in civic educational objectives between the two countries, China prioritizes strengthening pupils’ national identity and social responsibility, while Malaysia stands out for promoting its ethnic diversity and inclusiveness. China predominantly focuses on national identity and social responsibility, which is especially evident in its educational policy formulated, which includes patriotism and the cultivation of pupils’ capacities with good psychological quality, legal compliance, moral integrity, and lofty ideals.¹ China’s emphasis is placed on the importance of historical development, current conditions, and its wrangling with foreign sphere of influence, highlighting the cultivation of traditional values and moral norms. The civic educational system in Malaysia, however, mainly emphasizes the diversity of its ethnic groups and how to maintain such diversity through educational training; one of the kernel parts of the diversity lies in the language policy that each ethnic group should have the privilege of learning their native language, so the country shows, to some extent, the inclusiveness towards different linguistic groups. For instance, Malaysia’s Chinese population has a complete Chinese language education system, which, although sometimes difficult to carry out such a policy due to the fluctuations of political spheres of influence in various periods, is protected by its constitution, which reflects the country’s endeavor on multiculturalism and ethnic equality.

Consequently, it comes to the differences in the contents of their curricula designed and other social activities involving civic education, show the dissimilarities in their social, cultural, and political aspects. The content of civic education in China highlights the cultivation of the so-called “socialist core values” and the recognition of citizens’ responsibilities towards the country, communities, and individuals. In this regard, they divided the contents into four major sub-categories: essential citizenship knowledge, citizenship awareness, citizens’ capability, and behavior in public society; such that to help shape and establish students’

1 T. Tse, “Discourses of Citizenship Compared: Junior High School Knowledge in Mainland China and Taiwan,” *Issues and Studies*, 2014.

comprehensive citizenship constitution and adaptability by coordinating both school teachings and the non-school, or out-of-door edification, which are described as vertical co-ordination of overall design, complete operation, and effective linkage. In contrast, the content of civic education in Malaysia mainly focuses on the integration of diverse cultures and inclusive instruction. According to some research results, Malaysia’s curriculum covers several sub-categories, including history, ethnic education, Islamic studies, economics, and citizenship relationships. Such a system not only pays attention to fostering students’ national identity but also accentuates respect for different ethnicities and understanding of different races, as well as the study and practice of Islamic teachings, which is the dominant ideology of the Malay majority. In this regard, the two countries display their great gap: while China’s priority lies on cultivating “socialist core values,” Malaysia is inclined to promoting the integration and inclusive education in a multicultural society; there are differences in adopting methods for the implementations of their educational targets, too. The similarity exists in the fact both are making efforts to improve the overall quality of citizenship, but different political ideologies and practices lead to the distinctions, each may have different impact on the national quality.

Let’s come to the functional strategies for civic educations in both countries. We will talk about China. First, to realize the “socialist core values,” as China calls up, it needs to integrate its civic education with the national educational system. They create a “three-in-one” educational mode in which family education, social education, and school education should work together to jointly push the realization of their aim, that is, to foster the “socialist core values.”² The second is the “Extension of Courses and Practical Activities.” In this regard, pupils during the primary and secondary schooling stage are guided in multiple dimensions through course learning in the classroom and extracurricular activities; the most important goal, however, is to foster their civic awareness and their sense of citizenship responsibility. These activities are conducted out of the classroom in order to regain students’ sense of citizenship and responsibilities in society; together with pupils’ textual studies in school, they are called the realization of “raising of overall quality.” A third is called the “combination of theory and practice,” which entails not only the course-learning in the classroom or theoretical studies but also practical training of pupils so as to enable them to transform theoretical knowledge into actual actions, thus achieving the “unity of knowledge and action,” a slogan coming up with education in ancient China. A fourth is the construction of the public sphere. Through the construction of the public sphere, citizens

2 韩巍岩;宋吉鑫.将社会主义核心价值观融入国民教育体系(人民论坛2013-06-15),17. Han Weiyan; Song Jixin. Integrating Socialist Core Values into the National Education System (People’s Forum 2013-06-15), 17.

with communicative rationality can be cultivated and can pursue a holistic and virtuous life in public space. This is a realistic path for the organic convergence of core value education and citizenship education, through which citizens will learn to have their communicative rationality so that they can pursue a virtuous life in public space.³ The last is the “expanding of educational channels in all directions.” This includes the establishment of rightful goals, enriching educational content, and adopting innovative methods in constructing harmonious communities, promoting “close-to-the-people” relationships, and integrating citizenship awareness into daily lives. By offering publicity guidance and establishing good examples, it is hoped that the design will be actualized for “citizenship-centered value-orientation education.” In adopting all these methods, joint efforts will be made from all fields across society, which is said to have been often overlooked or misunderstood both in theory and practice, thus requiring urgent remedies to eventually produce a comprehensive effect.⁴

Apart from the above-mentioned elements, “integration of multiculturalism” is also mentioned in Malaysia. The government advocates that in the context of globalization, civic education needs to absorb and learn from the excellent elements of different cultures, including traditional Chinese culture, Western culture, and Marxism, to promote cultural exchange and integration. However, it doesn’t seem to be carried out as factually as in Malaysia.

As in Malaysia, the accomplishment of civic education strategy mainly covers several significant points. The first is the fundamental layout of such education, which concerns political, legal, and economic understanding. Civic education does not imply just learning basic facts about the institutions and procedures of political life but also includes an understanding of politics, law, and economics, as well as the skills of effective and responsible participation in public and democratic life.⁵ The government pushes “service culture, community service, and volunteer activities.” Various teaching methods have been adopted to meet these requirements, requiring pupils and students to participate in community affairs, whether in a school or in a community. Through participation in community activities, students may receive direct training to assume the responsibilities they should undertake outside of campuses, which is

3 冯周卓;王益珑.核心价值观教育与公民教育的融合及其路径研究(湖南社会科学2016-07-28), 8. Feng Zhou-zhuo; Wang Yilong. Research on the integration of Core Values Education and Civic Education and its Path (Hunan Social Sciences 2016-07-28), 8.
4 张宜海.以公民教育促进社会主义核心价值观的培育和践行(道德与文明2017-07-10),7. Zhang Yihai. Promoting the Cultivation and Practice of Socialist Core Values through Civic Education (Morality and Civilization 2017-07-10), 7.
5 Noor Banu Mahadir; Tan Bee Piang. “Promoting Good Citizens through Service-Learning Engagement in Multi-Ethnic Malaysia”, *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Science* (2019), 1.

preparation for undertaking their future civic responsibilities. Next is “justice and empathetic concerns.” Social-oriented civic education curriculum is based on such a concept, which is similar to the concept as proposed in China, the “unity of knowledge and action.” A third is “multidisciplinary learning,” covering physical exercise, spiritual transcendence, personal capacities development for and social services—all these are based on Malaysian educational philosophy, national education law, and national vision (2020).⁶

One of the significant features is the so-called “trans-ethnic communication learning.” This concerns the composition of the population of Malaysian social reality. The objective of such a course design is evident enough to foster a modern Malaysian nation. Pupils and students are required to respect those other than their own race, trying to reach a mutual understanding with respect to those from various racial or ethnic backgrounds. For the purpose of such a “vision,” a particular scheme was designed with the construction of mutually shared facilities in an area adjacent to various kinds of schools from all ethnic groups so that their communications and interactions could be possibly made, thus pushing their integrations.

The main challenges facing civic education in Malaysia firstly include issues of national identity arising from globalization, cultural diversity and lack of community participation. Globalization and postmodern thought have posed new challenges to national citizenship identity, requiring civic education not only to cultivate political identity, but also to strengthen cultural identity and global identity education. This means that civic education needs to adapt to cotemporary changes and constantly update its content and methods to meet the needs of citizens in the new era. Thus, understanding of global citizenship makes another part of Malaysian civic education, by leaning these knowledge students can understand global issues and become global citizens. This indicates that civic education also includes recognition of global issues and cultivation of global citizenship. Next, cultural diversity is another important challenge. In the context of globalization, people from different cultural backgrounds come together, which requires civic education to respect and integrate these different cultures and promote understanding and respect among different cultures. This requires educators to be able to communicate across cultures and to design educational activities that both celebrate multiculturalism and promote intercultural dialogue and understanding. Lastly, lack of community participation is also a problem. Community education is an important way to enhance citizens’ vision and participate in public affairs, but if community education can’t really

6 Hazlina Abdullah; Ratnawati Mohd Asraf. “Bringing the Malaysian curriculum into the 21st century”, *Advanced Science Letters*, (2017), 1.

integrate into citizens’ life and consciousness, it will be difficult to play its due role. Therefore, improving the participation of community education and making it an important link in the process of citizen cultivation is the key to ensuring the effectiveness of civic education.

Last, we’ll talk about the different impacts of civic education on national qualities between China and Malaysia. Due to the disparity in the contents of civic education between China and Malaysia, the two countries adopt different strategies and methods to improve their national quality, thus affecting the citizens’ qualities. This influence is complex and varied. China’s emphasis is placed on the importance of historical development, current conditions, and experiences suffering from foreign oppression in modern times. With great effort, China stresses the cultivation of its traditional values and ethnic norms. In Malaysia, in a multi-ethnic country, especially in dealing with racial, linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity, emphasis is placed on the role of civic education in creating a harmonious society,⁷ weighing greater than others by promoting social harmony and the integration of diverse cultures through civic education. This shows a significant difference between China’s goals and methods of civic education in the two countries.

Facing the challenges of globalization, the issues of civic education in China mainly exist in the curriculum content, which needs further adjustment and improvement. This might be firstly realized in updating and expanding the content system. In the context of globalization, the curriculum content for civic education needs to be updated and expanded, apart from the traditional patriotism and socialist belief, other elements such as democratic consciousness, awareness of laws, ethnic cultural diversity, and globalisation and so on should possess potions in the civic education contents. Next concerns improving educational methods and strategies. In order to cope with the challenges brought by globalization, China needs to innovate its methods such as emphasis on explicit, implicit, multi-level, and multi-method, civic education and self-education; these are called “two-way communication” methods. Such innovation will be helpful in enhancing the effectiveness of civic education, enabling citizens to understand the diversity of world cultures and enhance their abilities to live in harmony with peoples from various nations. With the continuous extending of globalization and influences of cultural diversity, China has begun to pay more attention to the construction of cross-cultural civic education. Further efforts should be reinforced to build cultural exchange platforms through various means and by the educates with cross-cultural communication skills. Last is the practices

7 S. R. Sari. “Important Role of Civic Education in Multi-Ethnic Countries Malaysia and Singapore”, *Journal of Moral and Civic Education*, (2018), 14.

of global civic education in foreign language education: In this field, China needs further exploration of practical activities for integrating global civic education into the curriculum of the teaching process; for instances, these activities may include international news reporting, textual analysis, film appreciation, project-based research, and drama performances. These will not only provide rich cultural knowledge but also help improve students’ cross-cultural competence and critical thinking abilities.

In summary, China and Malaysia have different emphases in citizenship education, reflecting their unique national characteristics and social needs. Malaysia places more emphasis on the integration and balance of multiculturalism, while China places more emphasis on the cultivation of socialist core values. Both have individual characteristics and commonalities and need to exchange with each other in the context of globalization, learn from each other’s strengths and weaknesses, and further enhance the effectiveness of citizenship education.

REFERENCES

Li Liaoning 李辽宁. “论全球化背景下的跨文化公民教育” [On Cross-cultural Citizenship Education in the Context of Globalization]. 福建论坛(社科教育版) [*Fujian Forum (Social Science Education Edition)*], 2010-12-20.

Liu Zuojian 刘作建; Geng Ping 耿平; and Feng Junxue 冯俊学. “核心价值观视角下中小学公民教育的着力点” [The Focus of Civic Education in Primary and Secondary Schools from the Perspective of Core Values.” 教学与管理 [*Teaching and Management*], 2021-02-20.

Reavis, W. C. “Direct Training in Citizenship through the Participation of High-School Pupils in Community Activities.” *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, 1926.

S. R. Sari. “Important Role of Civic Education in Multi-Ethnic Countries Malaysia and Singapore.” *Journal of Moral and Civic Education*, 2018, 14.

Wang Shiwei 王世伟. “试析社会行动取向公民教育课程的特色” [Analysis on the Characteristics of Social Action-Oriented Civic Education Curriculum]. 全球教育展望 [*Global Education Outlook*], 2011-11-15.

Zhang Jiajun 张家军 and Chen Ling 陈玲. “中小学公民素养课程内容体系的建构” [Construction of the Content System of Citizens’ Quality in Primary and Secondary Schools]. 课程 教材 教法 *Curriculum, Textbook, and Teaching Methods*, 2017-03-01.