

Comparison of Humanities Education Content for Chinese and Korean University Students

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Abstract

As indicated by the research, the substance of humanities education in the contemporary era forms an integrated and systematic framework, representing a unified whole encompassing multiple types, dimensions, and level. Within the execution of educational aims for university students, the curriculum content acts as a central conduit, which not only embodies the core values of the set objectives but also marks a fundamental phase in their concrete achievement.

Keywords

Humanities Education; University Students; China; South Korea; Confucian Thought; Moral Education.

1. Introduction

As societies undergo rapid transformation amid intensifying global cultural exchanges, the role of humanities education within higher learning has grown increasingly vital. It is now entrusted with key missions: transmitting cultural heritage, guiding value formation, and fostering comprehensive student development. A comparative examination of humanistic education for university students in China and South Korea offers significant value. Such a study helps to illuminate the distinctive qualities and underlying principles of each system, while also bridging cultural and pedagogical divides. Ultimately, this promotes greater mutual understanding and creates avenues for collaborative progress in education.

2. Content of Humanities Education for Chinese University Students

2.1. Ideological and Moral Education

Moral education is an important content that includes moral cultivation, ideals and beliefs, and patriotic education, focusing on improving students' moral quality and deepening their love for the motherland and hometown.

Guided by the Implementation Outline for the Development of Civic Morality, the framework for moral education in China prioritizes the establishment of fundamental ethical norms, encapsulated in the principles of "patriotism and law-abiding, courtesy and integrity, solidarity and friendship, industry and self-reliance, dedication, and commitment[1]". To translate these principles into practice, colleges and universities employ a dual approach that blends formal instruction with experiential learning. It begins within the formal classroom, where required courses such as Ideological and Moral Cultivation deliver structured knowledge on ethical principles. Beyond this foundation, the learning extends to informal "moral lectures", which feature professionals from diverse fields discussing authentic challenges and dilemmas encountered in their work. The third and most critical component involves experiential learning through voluntary service. By participating in community welfare, elder care, and cultural advocacy initiatives, students move beyond abstract understanding, embodying these

values in concrete actions. This comprehensive framework is designed to nurture a dual sense of accountability: to oneself as a moral individual and to the wider campus as a responsible community member.

Ideal and Belief Education aims to help students establish correct ideals and beliefs, and strengthen their faith and pursuits. As builders and successors of socialism, conducting Ideal and Belief Education for college students is crucial to the future and destiny of the country. University educators should actively guide college students to establish the lofty ideal of communism and the common ideal of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and help them fully and closely integrate their personal ideals with the lofty ideal and the common ideal [3]. Through the courses such as Outline of Modern Chinese History offered by universities, students are guided to integrate their personal ideals into the common ideals of socialism with Chinese characteristics and thus contribute to the realization of the Chinese Dream.

With the Law of the People's Republic of China on Patriotic Education (effective January 1, 2024) providing legal support, Chinese universities integrate patriotism-focused segments into core curricula—including Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought and the Theoretical System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. These modules are designed to immerse students in the time-honored cultural heritage and revolutionary past of the Chinese nation, thereby kindling their patriotic passion and enhancing national solidarity.

2.2. Mental Health Education

Mental health education is essential for helping students manage pressure and stay healthy. It gives them the knowledge and skills they need to handle life's ups and downs. When combined with broader humanities learning, it becomes even more powerful[3]—promoting not just self-awareness, but also the resilience to get through tough times and a lasting positive attitude. That's why most universities now offer classes like Mental Health Education for Students, which prepare them not just for college, but for all of life's challenges.

2.3. Innovation Capacity Education

Imperative in the new era is a focus on cultivating students' capacity for innovation and practical problem-solving. Guiding this mission is The National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan Outline (2010-2020), with its call to innovate models for talent development and its emphasis on building an innovative mindset and practical skills [4]. Consequently, a pressing line of inquiry involves integrating humanities education to strengthen university students' competence in innovation and entrepreneurship[5]. To translate this into action, higher education institutions are building an ecosystem of experiential learning. By offering specialized courses, organizing competitions, and deepening collaboration with corporate and social partners, they provide the real-world opportunities essential for enhancing students' innovative capabilities.

3. Content of Humanities Education for South Korean University Students

3.1. Moral Education

Moral education in South Korea is deeply rooted in the continued relevance of Confucian principles. These principles, integral to the country's traditional culture, continue to guide the ethical outlook and conduct of its people. In higher education, humanistic literacy programs strategically connect the "loyalty and filial piety" ideology with contemporary social objectives. This approach not only prepares students to adapt to societal demands but also effectively fosters a committed sense of social duty[6]. While inheriting Confucian ethics, these universities also actively absorb modern Western moral concepts, striving to achieve an organic integration of tradition and modernity, as well as of East and West. By introducing the theories and methods of relevant disciplines such as ethics, sociology, and psychology, students

are helped to understand and accept the moral norms and values contemporary society. This integration not only enriches students' moral cognition but also enhances their ability to adapt to modern society.

Moreover, South Korean higher education institutions place special emphasis on cultivating social ethics, professional ethics, and family virtues in their moral education system. Social education is realized by organizing students to participate in volunteer service, environmental protection actions, and public security maintenance and other practical activities. Professional ethics education, on the other hand, aims to a solid moral foundation for students' future careers. By guiding students to deeply understand the professional ethics standards of various industries, South Korean higher education institutions are committed to cultivating industry elites professional spirits such as integrity, dedication, and responsibility. Family virtues education is an important cornerstone for building students' spiritual home. In a warm family atmosphere, students learn to their elders and care for their family members, thus cultivating a strong sense of family responsibility and kinship.

3.2. National Spirit Education

The South Korean government has consistently regarded humanistic literacy education as a core component of school education, with national spirit education being the top priority in higher education[7]. It inherently includes ethnic spirit and patriotism education. Patriotism lies at the heart of national spirit. The 1968 National Education Charter clearly defined the objectives, tasks, content, and requirements of patriotism education. South Korean schools emphasize integrating "National Ethics Education" across all curricula and educational activities, advocating for patriotism education from both vertical and horizontal dimensions[8] to cultivate outstanding patriotic talents.

4. Analysis of Similarities and Differences in the Content of Humanities Literacy Education for Chinese and South Korean University Students

4.1. Similarities

4.1.1. Emphasis on Patriotism and National Spirit Education

China and South Korea both assign a central position to patriotism and national spirit education within their humanistic curricula. This shared emphasis is directed toward strengthening students' national identity and sense of belonging. For Chinese college students, patriotic education is implemented through learning about national history (including revolutionary history and socialist construction history) and participating in patriotic theme activities, which strengthens their pride in national culture and development achievements. For South Korean university students, courses such as "The Korean Independence Movement" and "The Formation of the Korean Nation" inspire patriotic fervour and national will; meanwhile, South Korea's national identity, rooted in Confucian principles of "loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, trustworthiness, righteousness, and peace", has evolved into a modern national spirit characterized by civility, diligence, solidarity, and perseverance, further consolidating students' national spirit[9].

4.1.2. Be deeply influenced by Confucianism

Confucianism has played a pivotal role in the historical development of both China and South Korea. From the Han Dynasty onward, Confucianism solidified its position as the state orthodoxy in China, with its doctrines profoundly permeating the nation's political, economic, and cultural spheres. Similarly, in South Korea, it evolved into a cornerstone of traditional culture, fundamentally molding its social institutions, value systems, and ethical norms. Given this deep-seated influence, it is unsurprising that Confucianism holds a pivotal place in the educational frameworks of both nations. In China, for instance, pedagogical practices actively

incorporate its tenets, championing ideals such as "the investigation of things to extend knowledge" "the cultivation of sincerity and rectification of the mind" and "self-cultivation, family regulation, state governance, and world pacification". These principles are central to a curriculum designed to foster moral character and a sense of social duty in students. In South Korea, Confucianism is regarded as a key educational content, emphasizing values such as "benevolence" "propriety" and "loyalty" aiming to cultivate students' moral qualities and national spirit.

4.1.3. Emphasis on Moral Education

Both nations regard moral education as a cornerstone for cultivating high-calibre talent and fostering harmonious societal development. Higher education institutions offer dedicated moral education courses to help students comprehend and practice ethical principles. Similarly, both countries stress the synergistic educational roles of the family, school, and society in strengthening students' sense of social responsibility.

4.2. Differences

4.2.1. Theoretical Foundation and Guiding Philosophy

The philosophical underpinning of moral education in China is steered by Marxist theory, which undergoes continuous Sinicization to align with the national context. Consequently, the educational curriculum is meticulously designed to correspond with the socialist path with Chinese characteristics, ultimately serving the overarching objective of constructing a harmonious society. In contrast, South Korea's approach, while also acknowledging political dimensions, demonstrates a more syncretic theoretical core. It forges a deep integration between traditional Confucian tenets and modern Western ethical concepts, with a pronounced emphasis on the Confucian framework for personal moral cultivation.

4.2.2. Educational Objectives and Focus

At its heart, China's moral education strives to shape citizens who embody the socialist ideal: individuals with strong morals, a sense of purpose, and discipline. To do this, a key focus is placed on the spirit of collectivism, helping students think through how their personal goals fit within the larger picture of national and collective needs. Meanwhile, South Korea sets out with a dual purpose. Its programs work to instill a deep-seated national identity and pride, but they are equally committed to broadening students' horizons. The ultimate aim is a comprehensive one: to prepare young adults not just for success at home, but to stand out with confidence and capability on an international scale.

4.2.3. Extent of Confucian Cultural Influence

The presence of Confucian culture within Chinese higher education often assumes a diffuse character. It finds expression not as a standalone discipline but through dedicated courses such as "Introduction to Chinese Culture" or via dissemination across digital media platforms. These initiatives primarily aim to cultivate a general appreciation for traditional heritage among students. In stark contrast, South Korea's engagement with Confucianism is defined by a deliberate policy of institutional integration. For decades, its moral and ethical tenets have been formally embedded within the national curriculum for basic education. This top-down approach is manifested in a sequenced curriculum: "Correct Way of Life" at the primary level, "Morality" in middle school, and "National Ethics" for high school students. By systematically ingraining these values from an early age, South Korea has constructed a far more uniform and thorough framework for cultural transmission.

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