

Theoretical Exploration and Practice of China's National Conditions Education for International Students in China¹

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Abstract: To guide international students to tell the Chinese story well is one of the main purposes of international student education in China. The education in China's national conditions is an important means to achieve this goal. Based on the "input theory" and "output-driven theory", this paper proposed the programme of China's national conditions education for international students. This study identified the learning process into three phases: input of China's national conditions, establishment of affective commitment, output of China's national conditions. By literature review, this paper summarized the existing problems of China's national conditions education, and put forward suggestions to the government and higher education institutions to promote the teaching efficacy, including strengthening the construction of curriculum and teaching staff, and providing comprehensive consulting services to international students.

Keywords: China's national conditions education; International students in China; Higher education institution; Tell Chinese stories well

Introduction

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education of China, a total of 492200 international students from 196 countries and regions came to China to study in 2018, and China has become the largest destination country for studying in Asia. Today, China is no longer a leading "sending" country, but has become an important receiving country in the global market of international education, attracting a large number of international students from different countries (Jiani, 2017). On June 21, 2022, Xi Jinping, the general secretary of China, wrote back a letter to the international students at Peking University, addressing that "You have taken the initiative to understand China's national conditions and the history of the Communist Party of China, which is very useful for understanding China's past, present and future." He also encouraged them to learn more about the real China, and at the same time introduce their ideas and experiences to more people, so as to play a positive role in promoting China's connections with other countries. The Secretary's reply reveals the importance and purpose of international students' education. The main purpose is to cultivate a group of international students who can tell the story of China well, and a group of participants who can promote friendly exchanges between China and foreign countries and work together to build a community with a shared future for mankind. China's national conditions education for international students is an important way to realize the purpose, which has important and far-reaching significance for enhancing China's cultural soft power and improving the overall image of the country.

Previous studies on international students in China have mainly focused on exploring the motivation of studying in China (Jiani, 2017; Ahmad & Shah, 2018), adaptation issues including academic and psychological adjustment (Jiang, Li & Shypenka, 2018; Zhu, Yang, Wan & Li, 2023), and there are few studies on national conditions education for international students. The purpose of this paper is to explore the theoretical basis of national conditions education, summarize the practical experi-

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ences of higher education institutions (HEIs in the following for simplicity) in China, and propose practical and feasible implementation plans for national condition education, so as to provide reference for HEIs to carry out this work.

1. The current situation of overseas students' education

The Quality Standards for Higher Education for International Students in China (for Trial Implementation) issued in October 2018 clearly stipulated that international students in China should be familiar with China's history, geography, society, economy and other basic knowledge of China's national conditions and culture, know China's political system and policy, understood China's mainstream values and public morality, and form a good sense of rule of law and morality. According to the policy requirements, all HEIs have set up courses on national conditions and organized diverse cultural activities, but there are still some common problems.

First, the content of education is narrow, the curriculum is not systematic and the form of teaching is simple (Jia & Zhao, 2022). HEIs often regard Chinese traditional culture as the main or even the only content of national conditions education, while the content of contemporary Chinese culture and society development, the history of Communist Party of China is ignored. The form of teaching is limited to the classroom teaching, simply giving theoretical lectures and the curriculum is lack of experiential content.

Second, The number and quality of teachers are insufficient. At present, the education of China's national conditions for international students in China is mainly undertaken by the teachers of relevant courses such as China in Brief or international students counselors, and there is a lack of stable and professional teaching team (Ma & Li, 2021). In some HEIs, the teaching tasks of China in Brief and other courses are undertaken by teachers of relevant disciplines. Although these teachers may be familiar with the teaching content, their English proficiency is limited, and the quality and effect of classroom teaching are difficult to guarantee.

Third, HEIs do not attach importance to the education of China's national conditions for international students (Chen & Yuan, 2020). Compared with the national conditions education for Chinese students, national conditions education for international students is still a non-mainstream work, and the allocation of teaching resources is seriously insufficient. Compared with the setting of professional courses for international students, the arrangement of national education courses is much less. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out the theoretical and practical exploration of China's national conditions education for international students.

2. Theoretical construction and practice

Krashen (1985) put forward the influential “input hypothesis”, which advocated that language input is a prerequisite for language acquisition, and the ideal condition for achieving language acquisition is to have sufficient comprehensible language input. Swain (1985) proposed “output driven hypothesis”, which indicated that comprehensible language output can promote language acquisition. In teaching practice, the “input hypothesis” and “output driven hypothesis” theories can be adopted to culture teaching (Hu, Guo & Wu, 2022). Based on these theories, the programme of China's national conditions education for international students is proposed, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Programme of China's national conditions education for international students

PHASE	CONTENT
Input Hypothesis: input of China's national conditions	Curriculum construction
	On-campus activities
	Off-campus activities
From Input to Output: establishment of affective commitment	Academic assistance
	Career instruction
	Psychological counselling
	Financial support
Output Driven Hypothesis: output of China's national conditions	Offline activities
	Online activities

2.1 Input Hypothesis: input of China's national condition

According to “input hypothesis” theory, input is the most basic and important prerequisite in the acquisition process, and the acquisition effect will depend on the quantity and quality of input (Krashen, 1985). Only by fully understanding different aspects of China can international students better adapt to their study and life in China, and promote them to identify with Chinese culture.

First, China's national conditions curriculum is an important means to carry out national conditions education. In all HEIs, China in Brief course is a compulsory course for all international students. The form of the course should contain lectures and experiential activities. The lectures can cover the geography of China, China's history, China's economy and politics and so on, so that students can know different aspects of China. The experiential activities can include representatives of Chinese traditional culture, such as acupuncture, martial arts, tea art, paper-cut, etc., to make students feel the charm and characteristics of Chinese culture.

Second, on-campus cultural activities is necessary, especially during Chinese traditional festivals and special time points. For example, Wenzhou Medical University has held the "Spring Festival Lunch" activity on Spring Festival's Eve for 10 consecutive years. Every year, nearly 200 Chinese and international students who stay on campus during the winter vacation celebrate the holiday together. In addition, HEIs can post stories about Chinese traditional festivals online, so that international students can better understand the origin and significance of each traditional festival. The rich campus activities not only make international students have a better understanding about Chinese cultures, but also provide opportunities for international students to make friends, reduce homesickness, ease cultural shock and quickly adapt to campus life in China.

Third, off-campus activities can enrich international students' culture experience. Moran (2001) put forward the principle of "cultural practice" in cultural teaching. To improve the level of cross-cultural communication and enhance cross-cultural sensitivity, it is important to actively experience culture. For example, Wenzhou Medical University organizes international students to visit the companies and enterprise zones, and Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics organizes foreign students to visit the National Committee of the Chinese Political Consultative Conference. Through culture experience can international students better understand the breadth and depth of Chinese culture and have a sense of cultural identity.

2.2 From Input to Output: establishment of affective commitment

From the stage of cultural input to the stage of output, international students' affective commitment with China is very important, which is directly related to whether international students are willing to output and the quality of output. International student counselors are an important team to implement China's national conditions education. Focusing on the common problems of academic adjustment, career planning, psychological adjustment and economic difficulties of international students (Mesidor & Sly, 2016), providing assistance to help international students adapt to student life in China is an important way to obtain the affective commitment from international students. HEIs need to provide international students with various kinds of guidance in study and life, which is a kind of implicit education that can make international students have a sense of belonging in China, so that they can present a true, multi-dimensional, and panoramic view of China to the world.

The main purpose of international students studying in China is to achieve academic success, thereby obtaining better job opportunities and changing their future life. Academic assistance is the most concerned demand of international students (Zhu, Yang, Wan & Li, 2023). HEIs can regularly carry out learning guidance seminar, provide "one-to-one" assistance to international students with learning difficulties, and provide senior student assistants and professional teachers for new classes, so that students can better adapt to learning in China. In terms of career guidance, HEIs can offer career planning courses to junior students in the form of workshops to inspire students' awareness of career planning. Xi'an University of Electronic Science and Technology organizes enterprises to come to the university to hold job fairs for international students.

Previous studies have shown that it is common that international students suffer psychological and economic pressure and other adaption problems (Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Jiang, Li & Shypenka, 2018). In terms of psychological assistance, It is necessary for HEIs to carry out psychological general test for all freshmen, and conduct one-on-one interview to check the psychological status of students who have abnormal psychological test result. According to China's policy, international students cannot obtain work visas and earn living expenses while studying in China. Therefore, colleges and universities can provide part time jobs and scholarships for international students. Guidance and assistance activities can make international students have a good impression on China, which can make them have affective commitment to Chinese culture, and then spread Chinese culture.

2.3 Output Driven Theory: output of China's national condition

As the starting point and ultimate goal of learning, output helps force learners to organize and use the acquired materials and knowledge points, and stimulate their enthusiasm to learn new knowledge, and finally achieve the purpose of driving output. The best way for international students to master China's national conditions is to tell the world the story of China.

On the one hand, HEIs can carry out offline activities to encourage international students to return to their hometown for public welfare activities during the winter and summer holidays. Organizing international students to use their knowledge

and skills learned in China to carry out various public welfare activities at their hometown enable local people to see China's educational philosophy, and at the same time make students serve the local community by social practice. During the activities, international students will also tell local residents about their experiences in China and China's social development, so that local people can better understand the true China. In response to the "the Belt and Road" policy, Wenzhou Medical University organizes student social practice teams to carry out public welfare activities during the winter and summer holidays when they returned home. This kind of activities can make more people around the world know that China has cultivated a number of excellent international students. It is an effective way to tell China's story well.

On the other hand, HEIs can make good use of the Internet to tell stories about China and carry out diverse online activities. Wechat official account, instagram, Twitter and other platforms can be used to spread Chinese stories. It is important to cultivate the ability of international students to tell Chinese stories well, and make media into a powerful tool to spread mainstream Chinese culture, so as to enhance the influence of Chinese culture (Ouyang, 2015). International students shall be encouraged to introduce their own "story of studying abroad in China" on the Internet according to their own knowledge and cultural background, interests, hobbies, and professional expertise, to make their own voice and express their own opinions, and finally to achieve a sense of fulfillment in the dissemination of Chinese stories to the world.

3. Further Recommendations

Education in China's national conditions for international students is an important part of international students education and an important means of training international students to tell Chinese stories well. The government and HEIs should jointly make good policies for promoting the teaching efficacy.

3.1 Strengthen the curriculum construction of China's national conditions education

Curriculum is the key carrier of education and teaching, and is a most convenient, fast and authoritative way for students to obtain knowledge. HEIs can strengthen the curriculum construction, by continuing to innovate classroom teaching methods, improve classroom teaching management and evaluation methods, and improve classroom teaching effect. HEIs can increase the credit requirements for national conditions courses, provide more compulsory courses and optional courses characterized by general education. It is also important to adopt modern educational technology and enable international students to study China's national conditions courses online anytime, anywhere. In addition to the classroom teaching, on-campus and off-campus cultural practices can be embedded into the curriculum system, and enhance teaching effect. Teaching material is the basis of curriculum system of national conditions education. The content of national conditions textbooks should also keep pace with the development of the times. On the one hand, the Ministry of Education can update qualified and unified textbooks for compulsory courses. On the other hand, HEIs can make contribution to compile regional textbooks and school-based textbooks.

3.2 Strengthen the construction of teaching staff

Teachers are an principal part of China's national education. It is necessary to increase the training of teachers and cultivate a group of teachers who have a firm political position, excellent professional quality, love the cause of international student education, and understand the laws of culture and education. For HEIs' teachers, it is far more difficult to teach international students China's national conditions than Chinese students. HEIs shall make policies to encourage more teachers to participate in international student education, such as increasing teaching-hour subsidy, giving teachers extra points in the evaluation of professional titles, and awarding excellent international student teachers with honors, etc.. At the national level, relevant incentive policies can also be issued, such as setting up international student education research programs, for which only teachers who teach international students can apply, and sending teachers to participate in international exchange and training programs. In addition, since international student counselors are responsible for the counselling work of international students in all aspects of their study and life, it is suggested that HEIs can appropriately increase the number of international student counselors.

3.3 Strengthen counselling services for international students

International students in China come from different countries and having different cultures background. They will experience a series of adaptation processes, including cultural adaptation, psychological adaptation, academic adaptation, etc.(Mesidor & Sly, 2016). If international students have an adaptation crisis, they will have a negative emotions, which will affect their impression of China and the acquisition of China's national conditions. The counselling services for international students in China should be more comprehensive, including the academic, career planning, employment instruction, psychological coun-

selling and so on. International students can make appointments to communicate with counselors “one-to-one” online or offline, in this way the accuracy and effectiveness of assistance can be ensured. Group counselling activities can be organized for international students to help them find strength in groups, learn how to study and work in a team.

4. Conclusion

This paper proposed the programme of China’s national conditions education for international students and summarized national conditions education cases in different HEIs, which can provide reference for other HEIs. The paper also concluded the current problems of China’s national conditions education for international students and gave suggestions for government’s and HEIs’ policy makers to promote the education quality and make international students voluntarily tell Chinese stories well to the world.

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