

# CONSTRUCTING A NATIONAL CONTEXT EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CHINA: THE PERCEIVING CHINA INITIATIVE

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**Abstract:** This study conducts a systematic review of current research on national context education for international students in China, synthesizing extant literature to conceptualize the essence of such education. Through the analytical lens of the "Perceiving China" initiative, the paper examines the pedagogical mechanisms designed to cultivate international students' capacities to perceive, interpret, and articulate China's socio-cultural and political realities. By integrating theoretical frameworks including lifelong learning principles, interculturality theory, and systems theory the research proposes actionable pathways for implementing national context education in higher education institutions. The findings offer theoretical and practical insights for universities to refine curriculum design, enhance cross-cultural pedagogy, and foster international students' critical engagement with China's developmental narratives. This work contributes to scholarly discourse on global higher education by bridging gaps between conceptual rigor and institutional praxis in transnational educational contexts.

**Keywords:** Perceiving China; International students in China; National context education

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China underscores the imperative to "narrate China's stories effectively, amplify China's voice globally, and project a national image that is credible, endearing, and respectable." As China's comprehensive national power continues to grow, the call to refine its storytelling and advance the self-construction of its national image has become a defining agenda of the new era. Compared to mass media, China's national context education for international students—a "slow medium" predicated on the strategy of "bringing-in"—demonstrates greater holistic coherence, institutional stability, and cultural immersiveness. These attributes enable it to more effectively embody the tripartite image of a credible, endearing, and respectable China. Currently, China ranks as the world's third-largest and Asia's foremost study destination, positioning its national context education for international students as a potent channel for narrating China's stories with nuanced authenticity and cross-cultural resonance.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education (MOE) of China promulgated the Quality Standards for Higher Education of International Students in China (Interim),[1] which mandated that international students in China acquire foundational knowledge of the nation's history, geography, society, economy, and cultural traditions. The standards further require students to comprehend China's political system, foreign policies, mainstream societal values, and public ethics, thereby cultivating a robust awareness of rule of law and moral principles. The MOE's Department of International Cooperation and Exchange (Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan Affairs Office) [2] has highlighted the urgency of strengthening national context education for international students and advancing the institutionalization of a systematic pedagogical framework for such education. Guided by these policy directives, Chinese universities have initiated exploratory practices in national context education. However, the critical challenge lies in developing scientifically rigorous and systematically structured approaches to this education. Current practices necessitate deeper, theoretically grounded implementation to align with the MOE's vision of fostering international students' holistic understanding of China's socio-political and cultural landscape.

## 2 RESEARCH DESIGN

### 2.1 The Connotative Dimensions of 'Perceiving China' National Context Education for International Students in China

National context education constitutes a foundational pillar for enhancing the quality and efficacy of international student education in China. Its conceptualization must transcend generalized interpretations and instead align with the systemic framework of ideological and political education, which comprises four core elements: educators, educations, content and methods, and educational environment. Within this framework, the social environment operates as an external influencing factor rather than an intrinsic component, while educational objectives serve as the ultimate orientation and internal benchmark for national context education targeting international students. Consequently, the design and implementation of such education must explicitly address fundamental questions: Who teaches? Whom to teach? What to teach? How to teach? and What types of individuals are to be cultivated?

Building on this analysis, this study defines national context education for international students in China as: an interactive process wherein educational stakeholders engage with culturally diverse international students through multifaceted channels to present China's fundamental realities. This process aims to cultivate three key roles: "dialogic others" capable of intercultural exchange rooted in Chinese cultural literacy; globally competent professionals with holistic development; cultural ambassadors fostering cross-civilizational understanding and affinity toward China.

## **2.2 Mechanisms of National Context Education for International Students in China: A 'Perceiving China' Perspective**

Perception of China serves as the foundational element for national conditions education among international students in China. From a psychological perspective, human cognition of the world originates through sensory perception of external phenomena. By physically interacting with various aspects of objects and environments, individuals develop comprehensive perceptual understanding, which ultimately evolves into abstract comprehension. Epistemologically, human cognition undergoes a spiral progression from particular to universal recognition, followed by a return from universal to specific applications. This cognitive pattern suggests that international students' understanding of China's national conditions must commence with their perceptual experiences within the Chinese context. Only through this perceptual foundation can systematic knowledge about China's national characteristics be progressively constructed through iterative cognitive refinement.

Li R.Z. [3] posits that a complete human being embodies threefold vital dimensions: natural life, spiritual life, and ideal life. At the natural life stratum, the integrity of personhood manifests as the psychosomatic unity of body and spirit, wherein affective sensibility coexists with cognitive rationality, and perceptual experiences align with conceptual understanding. This bi-directional interdependence operates as an ontological necessity: should corporeal existence detach from spiritual essence, it would descend into existential nihilism, fostering relativistic and individualistic epistemic orientations. Conversely, spiritual existence divorced from physical embodiment would precipitate disembodied cognition, culminating in epistemic absolutism.

As holistic individuals, international students in China must actualize their psychosomatic integration through the praxis of "unity of knowledge and action" in perceiving China. This philosophical principle constitutes both the intrinsic epistemological requirement for their China perception and the operational manifestation of their psychosomatic integrity.

The conceptual dyad of "knowledge" denotes cognitive operations, while "action" represents practical engagements. Praxis is characterized by perceptual qualities and empirical modalities through which individuals develop corporeal dependence as embodied beings can only execute praxis and acquire sensorial understanding through somatic existence. Conversely, cognition constitutes the subject's dynamic reflection upon objects through practical foundations, engendering spiritual dependence where intellectual faculties become essential for rational comprehension. Empirical evidence demonstrates this dialectic: organized field immersion in rural communities, industrial enterprises, museums, and marketplaces enables international students to somatically apprehend China's historical-contemporary dialectics, cultural-technological syntheses, civil rights implementations, and multicultural convergences.[4] Such embodied pedagogies significantly enhance both their perceptual grasp of China's national conditions and the transnational dissemination of China's developmental narrative.

This epistemological-practical synergy therefore dictates that national conditions education for international students in China must be operationalized through syncretic integration of cognition and praxis. The pedagogical imperative lies in constructing experiential learning frameworks whereby corporeal engagement and intellectual reflection become mutually reinforcing processes in China perception.

The human spiritual existence constitutes an organic tripartite unity of affectivity, volition, and cognition. From the perspective of human epistemic mechanisms, emotional resonance and volitional resolve function as psychic propellants for cognitive advancement. Cognitive processes are fundamentally driven by subjective motivational vectors such as intellectual curiosity and inherent interest. These psychological catalysts engender intense emotional investment and steadfast volitional commitment, thereby propelling cognitive exploration towards progressive profundity. In the absence of emotional and volitional sustenance, cognitive activities would degenerate into passive knowledge acquisition devoid of sustainable epistemic momentum.

The comprehension of China by international students should be anchored in the philosophical framework of "harmonious coexistence". The concept of "harmony" embodies both cultural concordance signifying mutual respect amidst diversity, and civilizational pacifism denoting peaceful intercultural engagement. "Co-ownership" represents humanity's collective stewardship of shared civilizational spaces, particularly our planetary habitat. Crucially, such syncretic symbiosis fundamentally opposes cultural homogenization through hegemonic assimilation that erodes civilizational plurality. Instead, it constitutes an ontological paradigm where poly cultural entities, premised on epistemic equity, engage in dialogic reciprocity - a dialectical process wherein cross-cultural pollination enables mutual refinement while preserving distinctive identities. [5] This dynamic equilibrium facilitates civilizational symbiosis: diverse cultures achieve synergistic co-evolution through perpetual intercultural negotiation, whereby cultural matrices simultaneously actualize self-perfection and contribute to collective civilizational advancement.

The intercultural cognition process of international students in China inherently incorporates affective-volitional engagement, necessitating pedagogical frameworks that strategically leverage their preexisting cultural schemata and

intrinsic emotive dispositions. Our theoretical proposition advocates a tripartite mechanism: cognitive-affective potentiation through cultural schema activation, volitional reinforcement via cross-cultural meaning-making, and hermeneutic symbiosis in intercultural dialogue systems. By operationalizing students' emotional investments and will to understand as epistemic catalysts, we facilitate bicultural neural coupling - wherein Chinese cultural codes and students' native frameworks achieve mutual neural resonance through supervised intercultural exposure.

### **2.3 Approach of National Context Education for International Students in China: A 'Perceiving China' Perspective**

The pedagogical mechanism for national conditions education of international students in China operates through tripartite cognitive progression: sensorimotor assimilation of China via cognitive-behavioral integration, civilizational hermeneutics through syncretic symbiosis, and schematic cartography via partial integrations. This necessitates paradigm shifts in educational praxis: Embodied Learning Implementation; Intercultural Intersubjectivity Framework; Systemic Curricular Architecture.

#### ***2.3.1 Operationalizing the embodied cognition framework***

Developing a "Practice-Oriented, Context-Situated, Task-Driven" Approach to National Conditions Education A holistic educational paradigm requires the integration of physical and cognitive dimensions. For international students in China, national conditions education must operationalize embodied learning principles to establish a tripartite methodology characterized by practice-oriented engagement, context-situated immersion, and task-driven acculturation. Embodied learning—defined as the cognitive process mediated through bodily interactions with environmental stimuli—emphasizes the body's role as an epistemic interface between learners and their surroundings. Every culture emerges from its unique "contextual soil", [6] necessitating the strategic deployment of cultural-situated pedagogy in national conditions education. Through contextualized practice, this approach facilitates the organic acquisition of China's national realities via: Embodied cultural mapping through tactile engagement with sociopolitical ecosystems; Neural schema construction via multisensory exposure to historical-cultural landscapes; Cognitive-behavioral alignment achieved through iterative task performance.

#### ***2.3.2 Innovating curricular frameworks for cultural immersion***

The course Introduction to Jiangsu-Zhejiang Regional Cultural Studies is designed to systematically introduce the knowledge system of Jiangsu-Zhejiang culture, offering a comprehensive overview of its representative cultural elements. Learners engage with interdisciplinary knowledge frameworks spanning traditional cultural achievements, contemporary lifestyles, and regional profiles of Zhejiang, thereby cultivating an integrated perspective for understanding the cultural landscape. The curriculum is structured in accordance with cognitive learning principles, progressing from surface-level observations to in-depth explorations, while tracing historical developments to establish a systematic framework of regional cultural knowledge. [7] Instructors employ diverse pedagogical methods to enhance students' critical engagement with local cultural contexts, enabling learners immersed in the cultural environment to comprehend both the manifestations and underlying rationales of Jiangsu-Zhejiang cultural practices.

Academic English Translation:

By strategically integrating learners' interests, preferences, and proficiency levels in Chinese, the curriculum prioritizes the curation of regionally distinctive cultural content. This approach includes implementing specialized elective modules—such as paper-cutting, traditional opera, and culinary arts—to facilitate in-depth exploration of each cultural theme. Compared to the foundational Introduction to Jiangsu-Zhejiang Regional Cultural Studies, these modular elective courses on regional cultural specialties enable deeper pedagogical engagement, moving beyond introductory frameworks. Unlike standalone cultural courses, the modular structure empowers students with autonomy in selecting content, aligning with individual learning preferences and fostering personalized intellectual development. This learner-centered approach ensures that instruction addresses both the practical manifestations and sociocultural significance of regional traditions, thereby enhancing learners' agency in tailoring their educational trajectories.

#### ***2.3.3 Developing experiential platforms for contextual comprehension***

The development of the "International Cultural Festival" initiative shall systematically cultivate a series of activities encompassing three core categories: cultural customs, competitive engagements, and field research visits. Cultural Customs Immersion: Centered on traditional Chinese festivals, this component aims to recreate authentic celebratory atmospheres that enable participants to experience the cultural practices of the Chinese nation. Representative activities include: Dragon Boat Festival racing demonstrations; Winter Solstice dumpling-making workshops; Lunar New Year reunion dinner rituals. Cross-Cultural Competitive Engagements: This category promotes Sino-foreign student camaraderie through collaborative and competitive events such as: Hybrid "Fun Olympics" integrating traditional and modern sports; International football tournaments with mixed-nationality teams; Cultural salons featuring calligraphy, tea art. Field Research and Observational Visits: Designed to facilitate firsthand understanding of China's national conditions, this component involves structured investigative activities: Ethnographic studies of urban-rural development projects; Factory tours in advanced manufacturing hubs; Community governance observation programs in model neighborhoods.

#### ***2.3.4 Expanding industry-academia synergy for cultural acculturation***

The institution organizes international students to conduct field research at prominent local enterprises, tailored to their academic disciplines, to examine China's achievements in industrial, economic, and technological development. Beyond documenting material progress, these investigations reveal the Chinese ethos of entrepreneurial pragmatism and

pioneering innovation embedded in corporate practices. Building upon preliminary research findings, the program implements university-industry collaboration aligned with international students' developmental objectives. Participants engage in structured internship programs within corporate environments, achieving dual outcomes: Acquisition of sector-specific professional expertise through hands-on training; Immersion in Chinese corporate teams, where the workplace itself constitutes an authentic cultural ecosystem.

Without systematic reflection and cognitive integration, extensive practical engagement by international student risks remaining fragmented episodic memories, ultimately failing to construct a cohesive understanding of China's national conditions. Therefore, while emphasizing experiential and context-based pedagogical approaches, institutions must concurrently implement task-based learning methodologies. This involves organizing international students to participate in research projects addressing contemporary challenges in healthcare, education, employment, and elderly care. By assigning international student task-driven fieldwork and requiring structured outputs such as group presentations or defense sessions, educators can guide them to proactively synthesize practical experiences, crystallize actionable insights and progressively deepen their contextualized understanding of China's socio-institutional realities. This pedagogical scaffolding transforms fragmented observations into systemic comprehension, fostering critical engagement with China's evolving governance frameworks and cultural dynamics.

## **2.4 National Conditions Education Model for International Students in China: A Perspective from "Perceiving China"**

### **2.4.1 Strengthen research on source countries**

Educators must develop cultural sensitivity and systematic understanding of international students' native cultural backgrounds. By affirming cultural assets through respectful engagement, trust-building mechanisms are activated to bridge cultural gaps. Pedagogically, instructors should adopt culturally anchored scaffolding — leveraging students' own cognitive frameworks as interpretive lenses to decode China's socio-political contexts. This comparative cognition strategy not only heightens learner agency but also facilitates meta-cultural reflection, enabling critical awareness of intercultural divergence. Ultimately, this methodology cultivates cross-cultural empathy while institutionally advancing global citizenship education paradigms.

### **2.4.2 Implement multilingual classroom teaching**

Language and culture constitute dual facets of communicative ontology, where strategic deployment of students' native languages in pedagogical settings can amplify epistemic access to China's national conditions. This necessitates multilingual curriculum engineering in international student education: First, employing internationalized linguistic frameworks ensures cognitive resonance through linguistically mediated comprehension. Second, developing region-specific textbooks under the "Chinese + English + X" triadic model proves critical, where "X" represents the dominant native languages of target student cohorts. Such context-sensitive instructional design not only enhances textual relevance but also activates cultural schemata transference, thereby optimizing intercivilizational pedagogy outcomes.

### **2.4.3 Cultivate intercultural competence among teachers and students**

Educators must transcend hegemonic pedagogy that privileges ethnocentric narratives, as uncritical exceptionalism in teaching national conditions risks provoking intercultural dissonance. This necessitates cultivating hermeneutic humility through dialogic pedagogy — implementing China studies via cultural osmosis rather than declarative indoctrination. Institutionally, universities should leverage domestic students as cultural brokers, systematically developing their intercultural mediation competencies. By constructing peer-mediated learning ecosystems where cross-cultural co-learning becomes quotidian practice, institutions can materialize embodied citizenship education that transforms dormitories into intercivilizational contact zones and cafeterias into transnational epistemic communities.

## **2.5 Epistemic China Framework: Designing Transcultural Curricula for International Students' Civic Literacy Development**

### **2.5.1 Systematizing curricular architectonics**

To advance the epistemic enrichment of international student civic literacy programs, institutions shall implement triaxial curricular engineering through systematic modularization, comprising: Cosmopolitan Episteme Modules (Transdisciplinary China Literacy) ; Critical Topophilia Modules (Place-Conscious Pedagogy) ; Glocal Civitas Modules (Transcultural Citizenship Praxis). The general courses should cover China's fundamental national conditions. Due to the extensive and complex content, institutions should develop specialized teaching modules—focusing on politics, economy, culture, and natural environment—tailored to their specific contexts and needs. Concise Translation: "Localized courses should incorporate regional characteristics to deliver diverse and distinctive national condition education. Civic education should focus on international students' legal literacy, safety awareness, and cross-cultural competence, helping them adapt to life and study in China and become responsible global citizens.

### **2.5.2 Stratifying pedagogical scaffolding**

From the perspective of learner profiles, the heterogeneous linguistic foundations and cultural competencies of international students necessitate pedagogical strategies rooted in scaffolded pedagogical sequencing. Educators must adopt a developmental trajectory adhering to the cognitive principles of progression from simplicity to complexity and gradual epistemological deepening. This requires implementing a structured curricular framework spanning from freshman to senior years, systematically designed in accordance with Vygotskian zones of proximal development.

Furthermore, the instructional modalities for national conditions education should manifest hierarchical differentiation through hybrid learning architectures. Institutions are advised to operationalize a blended pedagogy combining: Traditional didactic instruction Technology-mediated autonomous learning systems. Leveraging the tripartite advantages of internet-based education – bidirectional interactivity, real-time updatability, and universal accessibility – universities should strategically deploy AI-driven educational platforms and mobile application ecosystems.[8] This digital transformation initiative aims to construct an open-access repository for transnational comparative citizenship education, ultimately facilitating cross-institutional resource interoperability through blockchain-enabled knowledge-sharing mechanisms.

### **2.5.3 Embedding needs-responsive curricular ecology**

The extensive body of China's national conditions knowledge presents inherent pedagogical challenges for international students to fully assimilate through curricular instruction. This reality necessitates a strategic curation of educational content, requiring educators to adopt a learner-centric demand-driven framework for prioritizing curricular components. The curriculum design must prioritize the integration of international students' cultural backgrounds, followed by their academic disciplines and learning interests. Pre-course surveys should be conducted to identify shared educational needs in national conditions education. However, this learner-centered approach does not justify excessive accommodation. The curriculum must remain grounded in its foundational content, distinguishing between non-negotiable core modules (e.g., political systems, historical contexts) and elective components.[9] Core knowledge essential for understanding China's fundamental conditions must be systematically preserved through structured content hierarchies.

## **3 CONCLUSION**

The national conditions education for international students in China constitutes a long-term systemic endeavor requiring continuous theoretical and practical refinement. Future research should strengthen investigations into both educational agents and recipients. For educational agents, priorities include enhancing faculty competencies in ideological-political pedagogy and developing discipline-specific teaching materials that systematically integrate national conditions education. Regarding educational recipients, regional and country-specific analytical frameworks should be implemented, utilizing big data analytics and qualitative research to identify tailored pedagogical strategies for distinct student demographics. This approach aims to effectively communicate China's narratives, project a credible, appealing, and respectable national image, and facilitate the global dissemination of Chinese civilization through academically grounded educational practices.

## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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