

# Review and Reflection on the Content of Chinese and Foreign Education

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**Abstract:** *The educational content of China and foreign countries in different historical periods and different regions is restricted by different factors and radiates its own distinctive characteristics. By reviewing and combing the context of Chinese education content and foreign education content in various periods, this paper summarizes the commonalities and differences between the two in exploration and comparison, and further learns and draws on the useful experience and practical path of education reform, in order to condense a number of valuable contents that can be used as reference for setting up contemporary education content, and promote the high-quality development of education in China.*

**Keywords:** China's education content, Foreign education content, Review and comparison, Enlightenment.

## 1. Introduction

Education is an important part of social development and individual growth, and the content of education is one of the core of education. It has social historicity, and its development and evolution are also influenced by many factors such as history, culture and society. It has unique meaning and value.

## 2. Connotation and Value of Educational Content

Educational content refers to the general term of knowledge, skills, values and other content taught in the process of education. The "Dictionary of Education" is interpreted as "the cultural totality of knowledge, skills, codes of conduct, values, and worldviews that are selected and incorporated into the process of educational activities in order to achieve educational goals." [1] It is the core of education, which is directly related to the cultivation of students' quality and ability. It is generally reflected in the form of courses. It has many effects such as shaping talents, welfare society, unifying talents and social needs.

One is to shape talents. The fundamental purpose of education is to create builders and successors of the socialist cause with all-round development of morality, intelligence, physical beauty and other aspects of "ideal, morality, culture and discipline" for our country [2]. Therefore, the design of educational content should not only pay attention to the breadth and depth of subject knowledge, but also pay attention to the cultivation of students' moral quality and the development of all aspects. The first is the basic knowledge system, such as mathematics, Chinese, natural science, etc., as well as the humanities and social sciences, such as history, philosophy, sociology, etc., these knowledge systems constitute the basic literacy of talents. Second, practice and skills training, such as art, sports, labor skills, etc., to cultivate students' innovative ability, practical ability and ability to adapt to social needs. The third is the content of ethics, aesthetic sentiment, civic awareness, such as integrity, self-discipline and optimism, and the cultivation of students' social ability, such as leadership, public awareness, etc., in order to improve the overall quality of students and lay a solid

foundation for their future development, so as to cultivate talents with social responsibility and civic awareness, and contribute to the construction of a harmonious society.

Second, the welfare society. Education is an important engine of social development, and the quality of educational content is directly related to the level of social development [3]. The content of education should be close to the needs of society and guide students to adapt to the changes and challenges of modern society. For example, the rapid development of information technology has made information literacy an important part of education. International exchanges and cooperation in the context of globalization have made multilingual skills and cross-cultural communication skills valued. Therefore, the design of educational content should keep pace with the times, pay attention to new knowledge, new technology, new culture and so on, so as to cultivate talents to meet the needs of the times and promote the progress and development of society.

The third is to unify individual and collective needs. Education is an important way to provide opportunities for individual development, meet the needs of individual growth, and adapt to the social environment. The content of education should respect students' development characteristics and individual differences, and cultivate students in a personalized way. This means that the content of education should focus on students' interests, abilities and learning styles, provide diversified educational resources and adapt to individual differences in teaching methods, and cultivate the potential and expertise of each student. At the same time, the content of education should also pay attention to social needs, cultivate students' ability to solve problems, innovation ability, teamwork ability, etc., in order to adapt to the diversified work and life challenges in modern society. In addition, the content of education should also focus on inspiring thinking, cultivating innovative ability, stimulating students' potential and creativity, and emphasizing the cultivation of students' independent thinking, critical thinking and problem-solving ability. Such educational content enables students to have the ability to adapt to complex social environments and unknown problems, cultivate students' innovative spirit and entrepreneurial ability, and provide support for individual development and social progress. Through education, personal growth is organically combined with national

development and national destiny in a subtle way, in order to encourage young students to work tirelessly for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

### 3. Review of China's Education Content

Taking the Xia Dynasty as the starting point, ancient China mainly studied military training and religious education, and demanded 'Ming human relations'. The Shang Dynasty mainly carried out 'ritual' and 'music' education. In the Western Zhou Dynasty, the content of education was more abundant, learning basic life skills and habits, preliminary etiquette rules and the concept of primary number in family education, and learning 'six arts' in school. With the rise of private schools, the educational content of the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period reflected the situation of 'hundred schools of thought contending', which was presented in the propositions of various schools of thought. For example, Confucianism, represented by Confucius, advocated learning 'poetry', 'books', 'rituals', 'music', 'Spring and Autumn'; Mohism represented by Mozi advocated learning science and technology education, including productive labor, military and natural sciences. In the Qin Dynasty, in order to maintain the need for centralized rule, the "fool policy" was adopted, and the "official teacher system" appeared, that is, the law was taught, the officials were teachers, and private schools were strictly prohibited, which greatly limited the diversification process of the development of educational content. Until the Han Dynasty, under the proposal of Dong Zhongshu, Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty carried out the policy of 'pushing forward the Confucius family and deposing the hundred schools of thought', and established the status of Confucianism as the main educational content. With the development of the school, the Taixue in the central official school was dominated by Confucianism, and the Hongdumen School was dominated by poetry, calligraphy and painting. The local official school learns moral education activities such as 'rural shooting' and 'rural drinking'; in the private school, the library learns the basis of literacy, calligraphy and Confucianism, while the Confucian classics are taught in a special way. The "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues" advocated by Dong Zhongshu also became the central content of feudal moral education for more than two thousand years. During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, the content of education appeared metaphysics, literature, history, law, etc., breaking the dominance of "Confucian classics" education since the Han Dynasty. Yan Zhitui, a representative figure of this period, advocated learning 'virtue' and 'art'. 'Virtue' refers to filial piety, 'art' refers to classics and history and miscellaneous arts, and attaches importance to speech education and determined education. In the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the imperial examination system appeared, and the educational content centered on the imperial examination was established. Until the end of the Qing Dynasty, although there were also medical, astronomy, musicology, martial arts and other educational contents, education was always serving the imperial examination, catering to the needs of the rule, and could not be separated from the educational content of "Confucian classics." Until the development of modern education, the imperial examination system gradually withdrew from the historical stage. With the emergence of church schools, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement

and the Westernization Movement, the content of Western education began to be introduced into China, and religious education, Western scientific and technological knowledge and other educational content appeared [4]. From Wang Guowei's first proposal of "moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic" four educations in China, to Cai Yuanpei's proposal of "five educations simultaneously," and then to Tao Xingzhi's "life education," China's education content began to move towards comprehensiveness, diversification and life.

### 4. Review of the Content of Foreign Education

The education content of ancient foreign countries is mainly based on the ancient civilizations of the East and the West. The education content of the ancient civilizations of the East includes moral education, intellectual education and religious education. The education content of the ancient civilizations of the West is mainly military education, and there are moral education, music education, political education and so on [5]. By the Middle Ages, Christian education was dominant, learning the "Bible," "Seven Arts" and simple reading and writing. In addition, secular education has also developed to a certain extent, with palace schools learning 'Seven Arts', Latin, Greek, knight education learning 'Seven Skills of Knights', medieval universities learning 'Literature, Law, Theology, Medicine', and urban schools learning literacy and some handicraft and business knowledge. Into the Renaissance and the Reformation period, there have been humanism education, Protestant education and Catholic education. The educational content of these three kinds of ideological trends has religious color. At the same time, it pays attention to classicism and humanism education. The educational content has gradually become secular. For example, Virgilio advocates learning history, theory, eloquence and history. Victorino advocates learning classical disciplines and a wide range of subject knowledge and classical language in the "happy home." Erasmus advocates cultivating children's piety, morality and wisdom through classical culture. Montaigne advocates using native language teaching to learn practical knowledge. From the beginning of the 17th century to the 20th century, under the background of the two industrial revolutions, represented by Britain, France, Germany, the United States, Japan and Russia, in order to develop their own economy and maintain social stability, the content of education has been constantly reformed, trying to cultivate the talents needed by the current society through education and push education to secularization. For example, British higher education learned classical knowledge represented by Oxford University and Cambridge University in the 17th and 18th centuries, and introduced natural science knowledge into universities by the "New University Movement" in the 19th century, and did not learn religious knowledge in universities; in order to promote the secularization of education in France in the 19th century, the "Ferry Act" removed the religious education in primary education, and established moral and civic education classes, and studied classical language and classical humanities in both classical national and municipal secondary schools in secondary schools. Modern secondary schools of practical nature learn modern language and natural science knowledge; in the 1920s and 1980s, there was a "pendulum phenomenon" in Soviet education, that is, the focus of education content was changed back and forth inside and outside labor education. In

modern times, with the continuous emergence of various ideological trends, there is no final conclusion on what education should learn. For example, essentialism advocates learning mathematics, language and natural science, eternity advocates learning classical disciplines, neo-Thomism believes that the core of the curriculum should be religious education, and lifelong education believes that people should learn a wide range of knowledge to meet the needs of lifelong development.

## 5. Summarization and Comparison of Chinese and Foreign Educational Content

The nature of the educational content in ancient China can be described by the word “relatively stable.” In the Xia, Shang and Western Zhou Dynasties, the educational content took “Six Arts” as the core, and in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Period, there was a situation of “contention of a hundred schools of thought.” From the Qin Dynasty to the late Qing Dynasty for more than two thousand years, they all served the autocratic monarchy. ‘Intellectual education’ stipulated that ‘classics’ was the core through the imperial examination system, ‘moral education’ was carried out around ‘three cardinal guides and five permanent members’, and ‘physical education’ was reflected in ‘martial imperial examination’. In short, it is a kind of education content with ‘intellectual education’ and ‘moral education’ as the core. Until the late Qing Dynasty, the West tried to open China’s “door,” first through the cultural infiltration of natural science knowledge, religious education, foreign language into China, the impact of the traditional educational content, forcing the traditional education reform, so that China’s educational content to practical and scientific. The nature of the foreign educational content is to focus on learning classical knowledge in ancient times, and the educational content has a religious color. Until the beginning of the Renaissance, the content of education gradually became secularized, and secular knowledge and religious knowledge were combined in school education. At the beginning of the first industrial revolution, the content of education began to be combined with productive labor, and the development of natural science knowledge also pushed the content of education to a scientific direction. In modern times, with the diversification of school types, the content of education is also enriched, aiming at meeting the needs of individual lifelong development and paying attention to the unity of scientific spirit and humanistic spirit.

Compared with the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign education contents, it can be summarized into four aspects: nature, time of change, type and stability. First, from the perspective of the nature of educational content. The content of education in ancient China was political. The people studied the content of education based on “Confucian classics” for imperial examinations. With the continuous strengthening of centralization, the content of education became more and more “poor.” It was not until the introduction of modern foreign education content that this situation was broken. The content of education in ancient foreign countries has a religious color. Through ‘theology’ to cultivate individual piety and belief, secular education only occupies a small part, and it gradually fades out of the system of educational content until the religious reform. Second,

from the perspective of the time of educational content change. The emergence of modern knowledge based on natural science in China’s education content is later than that in foreign countries, which makes China’s pioneering representatives in the field of natural science insufficient, and the current development of natural science is also struggling to catch up with the development level of foreign countries. Thirdly, from the perspective of the type of educational content, ancient China focused on ‘moral education’ and ‘intellectual education’. ‘Moral education’ is reflected in ‘three cardinal guides and five constant virtues’, and ‘intellectual education’ learns classics. In ancient times, foreign countries paid attention to ‘religious education’ and ‘intellectual education’. Religious education cultivated people’s piety, and ‘intellectual education’ learned classical subject knowledge, which was not prominent in the development of ‘moral education’. In addition, when focusing on ‘physical education’, ‘aesthetic education’ and ‘labor education’ started relatively late, almost all of them began to set up corresponding subject courses in modern times. Fourth, from the perspective of the stability of educational content. The content of education in China is more stable, and it is constantly ‘supplemented’ until the Qing Dynasty after the determination of ‘Confucian classics’, while the content of foreign education began to change frequently in the 17th century. The reason is due to the change of society. On the one hand, the political instability of the country affects the change of education, so that the content of education changes accordingly; on the other hand, educational content serves the needs of social development, and what the society needs is what educational content is provided.

## 6. Inspiration to the Reform of Contemporary Education Content in China

The historical changes of Chinese education content and foreign education content have important reference significance and enlightenment significance for the construction and reform of Chinese contemporary education content, which helps to promote China’s talent training system to meet the needs of the times. Therefore, we should actively look for the connection axis between Chinese and foreign educational content in historical changes, and explore the road of Chinese-style modern education based on our own reality [6]. First, the content of education needs to keep pace with the times. In Chinese history, the content of education has undergone many changes. In the period of feudal society, Confucian classics became the core content of education; during the period of the New Culture Movement, the ideas of science, democracy and freedom penetrated into education; since the 1980s, the socialist core values have become an important part of education. These changes reflect the progress and development of society, and also reflect the necessity of changing the content of education with the changes of the times. The content of contemporary education must also keep up with the development of society, pay attention to new knowledge, new technology, new culture and so on, in order to cultivate talents to meet the needs of the times. Second, the content of education should focus on inspiring thinking and cultivating innovative ability. The traditional Chinese education system emphasizes memory and recitation. Students often only pay attention to rote memorization and lack independent thinking and innovation

ability. Western education advocates inspiring learning and pays attention to cultivating students' thinking ability and innovative consciousness. The content of contemporary education should be inspired from this aspect, not only to impart knowledge, but also to cultivate students' thinking ability, innovative consciousness and problem-solving ability, so that they can adapt to the changes and challenges of modern society. Third, the content of education needs to be fully developed. In the past, the content of education often only paid attention to the teaching of subject knowledge, ignoring the all-round development of students, while modern education paid more attention to comprehensive quality education, combining subject knowledge, moral quality, social ability and innovation ability organically. This shows that education needs to focus on cultivating students' comprehensive quality, improving students' autonomous learning ability, teamwork ability, leadership ability, etc., rather than simply emphasizing the teaching of subject knowledge. Fourth, education content needs to pay attention to personalized development. China's traditional education is the implementation of the one-sided education model, emphasizing the unity of students. However, modern education focuses on individualized development, encourages students to develop their own strengths and talents, and advocates that each student is a unique individual. Personalized education believes that everyone has the right and ability to learn, and the content of education should be adjusted and designed according to students' interests, abilities and learning styles. Education should pay attention to the individual development of students, provide diversified educational resources and adapt to individual differences in teaching methods. Fifth, the content of education should pay attention to the cultivation of social responsibility and civic awareness. In the past, the content of education often ignored the cultivation of students' sense of social responsibility and civic awareness, so that many students only pay attention to their own interests, ignoring social responsibility and civic obligations. Western education pays more attention to the cultivation of students' sense of social responsibility and civic awareness, emphasizing the cultivation of students' civic quality and the awareness of participating in social life. Therefore, education should focus on cultivating students' sense of social responsibility and civic awareness, so that they can actively participate in social affairs, care for others, and become citizens with a sense of mission and responsibility.

Through the historical review and comparison of Chinese and foreign educational content, we can deeply understand the development and evolution of educational content, and also find out the characteristics and advantages of educational content in different countries. For the reform of contemporary education content in China, it is necessary to learn from foreign advanced education concepts and contents, and also pay attention to the cultivation of students' comprehensive ability and interdisciplinary learning, so as to better meet the needs of social development. In order to reform the content of education, cultivate more talents with innovative ability and comprehensive quality, and make greater contributions to the development of the country.

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