

# Educational diversity and ethnic cultural heritage in the process of globalization



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**Abstract** The inheritance of ethnic cultures is an important subject in the field of educational anthropology. As the most important conduit for the passing along of ethnic cultures, education strongly impacts that inheritance. Today, however, the rate of globalization is rapidly increasing. Whether in domestic or foreign education, or whether for primary or higher education, increasingly severe challenges in education are yielding profound changes. One of the most important developments in education at the present time is the cultivation of diversity. Increased diversity in education will have a profound impact on the inheritance of ethnic cultures. In light of the current age and contemporary social changes, the significance of the inheritance of ethnic cultures within the process of globalization is magnified. The current work uses the characteristics of educational development toward diversity to analyze the relationship between education and the inheritance of ethnic cultures, and suggests necessary changes in education to promote that inheritance.

**Keywords** Educational diversity · Ethnic cultures · Inheritance

## Background

The inheritance of ethnic cultures in times of change

The definition of the simple word “culture” is quite complicated. In general, “culture” can be viewed as the collection of all the factors that give a society a unique

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essence. Cultural anthropologists believe that culture is a complex that is formed of the spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional characteristics that embody the dynamics of a social group. Every culture will be a unique feature of a particular human community and their way of thinking and organizing life. The World Cultural Policy Conference, held in Mexico in 1982, pointed out that culture includes not only art and literature, but also lifestyle, basic human rights, value systems, traditions, and beliefs. Cultural development always accompanies developments in human history; human beings create and are molded by culture.

A wide variety of ethnic groups compose the human world. Each nation has created a rich, unique ethnic culture throughout the course of its own development, thereby contributing to a diverse global culture of all nations. If the world can be compared to a colorful brocade, then each ethnic culture is one element of colorful silk embroidery, a part of the overall pattern that still maintains its own unique characteristics. As time has passed, cultural differences have become increasingly respected, and people have gradually realized that every nation has the right and obligation to develop its own culture. This diversity of culture enriches human life and supports human development. American cultural anthropologist Ralph Linton believes that a person who knows nothing about other cultures cannot truly understand his or her own culture. Therefore, it is equally and vitally important for each nation to understand both its own culture and other cultures (Linton 2007). With the changes brought on by increasing globalization, the cultural contact between countries has been gradually increasing. This dialogue between cultures is positive, as it recognizes the value of each culture's existence, and stems from a mutual appreciation, a mutual respect and a mutual promotion of each culture. In the context of globalization, the different varieties of cultural dialogue aid in the inheritance and innovation of new cross-cultural knowledge, the promotion of understanding between different ethnic cultures, and the development of friendly relations among nations. However, people now worry that the rich and diverse culture of each ethnic group may be diluted in the torrent of global information. This worry is not without reason as this dilution has begun to manifest itself in real life. In a world where information flows freely, any culture can change rapidly, either leading to enrichment or to crisis. Realistically, cultures, which are dynamic but fragile entities, will obviously face challenges with regard to diversity as they become global citizens. In contrast, a relatively closed living environment with no obvious external influences will protect and develop the traditional culture of a given ethnic group. This fact has been abundantly shown to be true.

The process of globalization is rapidly changing different regions, different ethnicities and different countries, and is strongly affecting traditional cultures. Many countries currently face a dilemma concerning whether to open further to foreign cultures, or to close themselves off in order to live and solve problems in a more traditional manner. In this context of globalization, many countries are worried that their cultures could decline or die, and they have thus adopted a conservative attitude, trying to resist and eliminate the strongest influences through localization movements. In this situation, the preservation and transmission of traditional ethnic cultures is becoming an important proposition facing all ethnicities and countries. Since the modernization process involves the conflict, integration and evolution of

traditions and modernity, some basic values of a traditional culture will not only be able to serve as an important resource for social integration, cultural reconstruction, civilization cultivation, and moral education, but will also have the potential to become global, common values as the East and the West merge. Therefore, it is especially important to correctly treat the inheritance of ethnic cultures in the context of globalization.

Indeed, cultural choices and cultural heritage yield a tremendously complex process. A rational understanding and criticism of the traditional culture of a nation serves as the starting point for handling traditional culture. Cultural anthropologists maintain that ethnic traditional cultures are formed from the different levels of institutional culture, conceptual culture, artifact culture, and folk culture. The important functions of a traditional ethnic culture for a modernizing nation primarily include guiding ethics and morals, forming cultural communities, and increasing ethnic cohesion and the sense of identity. The traditional ethnic culture maintains the cultural and ethical identity of the social community, its etiquette, and moral conscience, while influencing the direction of social development and the understanding of the meaning of life (Vago 2007). Every ethnicity has its own customs, including traditional festivals, etiquette for living, and art. The inheritance of traditional culture can compensate for the alienation, spiritual and emotional loss, and psychological instability that inevitably appear in the cultural identity of people undergoing modernization. Such traditional cultures propagate the history of the civilization of a nation, yet, some ethnic cultures will have components that do not adapt to the flow of human progress and possibly even hinder that progress. Passing along traditional culture is an important mission for a nation. Societal changes will have an impact on the traditional cultures of a given nation, but, conversely, these changes give a deeper insight of the significant role that traditional ethnic cultures play in human life.

## **Theoretical framework and research methods**

This thesis uses the basic theories of ethnology and anthropology applied to literature analysis as well as classroom and field surveys to discuss the interaction between educational diversity and ethnic cultural heritage during the era of globalization. By making inter-ethnic comparisons and examining historic societal changes, this paper will explain the significance of the inheritance of ethnic cultures and analyze the impact of diversity in educational development on that inheritance. Based on these findings, this work will end with measures that can be implemented in the field of education to promote the inheritance of an ethnic culture.

## **Discussion**

Development of educational diversity in the midst of social changes

With modern transformations and development, the openness and democratic nature of society have been continuously enhanced and the connections between

various cultures have grown increasingly close. In an era of globalization, modern society increasingly reflects diversity. This diversity is primarily manifested in the diversification of ethnic, racial, cultural and lifestyle patterns. In terms of ethnic or racial diversity, a typical example is the United States, which, as a major immigrant destination, is gaining a distinct culture that accommodates different cultures and ethnicities. Current estimates predict that, by 2030, 40% of the population of the United States will be a minority. The United States is rapidly strengthening the diversity of its social identity (Chen Zhiyuan 2003). China is itself a multi-ethnic country with a multi-ethnic culture spread throughout a vast territory. In addition, with continuing reforms and increased openness, the exchanges between the Han Chinese ethnic culture, minority domestic ethnic cultures, and foreign ethnic cultures is increasing in frequency so that people now have access to more available models for the course of their lives. The pathway through life is becoming increasingly rich. In today's pluralistic society, all groups display different attitudes and requirements.

Human development tends towards diversity. On the one hand, diversity enriches human life and respects differences, balancing "harmony and difference." On the other hand, the pursuit of pluralism poses many challenges, and such a pursuit may become a threat to the unity of the nation. Due to the threats to identity and loyalty as well as to the complete union of state power and territory, a diverse society will seek to establish and strengthen a common foundation for its civic values. Multicultural scholars maintain that respecting pluralism in unity and establishing unity in pluralism must be the basic principle for developing a pluralistic society (Kymlicka 2005). We need to establish a diverse society that is balanced and coordinated. If self-definition is always found in distinction from others and if problems are not seen from the perspectives of others, establishing and maintaining social diversity will be challenging. In a diverse society, different cultures and nations will be understood and respected, and each individual will have the opportunity to create his or her own developmental path as long as it does not violate the basic principles of diverse social development.

Inevitably, the changes in social life will be integrated into education. Education itself is influenced by the diversity present in a society, and must adapt as that diversity morphs. Concurrently, changes in education will promote greater diversity in society. Education and diversity are intertwined, each constantly affecting the other. In this era of globalization, where economic and social exchange are becoming increasingly common and connected and the characteristics of social diversity are becoming increasingly pronounced, the features of a diverse education are becoming increasingly obvious.

### *The first feature is diversity in educational institutions*

In Western countries, many famous universities were founded as private schools, and the current trend reveals both public and private universities. Encouraged to pursue educational diversity, developing countries such as China are gradually transforming the pattern in which public schools are dominant. These countries are encouraging the development of private schools, with even the very types of

colleges and universities being diversified into research universities, teaching universities, teaching and research universities, as well as being more stratified into undergraduate, specialist and vocational colleges. Further, in pre-school, primary, and secondary education, the current movement is toward diversity. In China, educational institutions aimed primarily at ethnic minorities form a distinct feature of the Chinese education system. These distinctive educational institutions have become an important mechanism for the inheritance of ethnic culture. At present, in addition to the development of formal, traditional education, informal educational institutions have emerged. Companies, enterprises, and individuals at various training institutions are becoming an educational force. Various interethnic cooperative schools have received great attention and public focus. Indeed, even the number of people involved in education has increased. Although the forms of educational institutions are changing, their function remains the same: the inheritance of knowledge. This inheritance of traditional knowledge both meets the common needs of human beings and the differing needs of different groups.

*The second feature is the diversification of the active members of education*

The chief members involved in education primarily include teachers and students in addition to administrative and support staff. Within a context of globalization, the makeup of modern schools is becoming increasingly diverse, whether consciously or unconsciously. Schools will intentionally choose to pursue diversity, while an increase in members from different groups will unintentionally increase diversity. Additionally, the diversification of subject material has become an important feature in modern education. This diversity is chiefly manifested in the rich cultural backgrounds and ethnic origins of the main body. Today's schools are home to students and teachers from diverse ethnic, racial, economic, social, religious and cultural backgrounds. In the United States, following the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, colleges and universities began to strive after the goal of equal education regardless of ethnicity, race, class, gender, or religion. With current developments, people increasingly recognize that the diversification of educational subjects is conducive to achieving education goals at an institution. Increased diversity among teachers and students will allow the students greater access to different ideas and experiences. This increase in cultural experience is connected with skills related to social interaction (Chen Zhiyuan 2003). Students educated in a diverse environment can develop superior comprehensive abilities and skills, and thus be more motivated and able to participate in the complex social life of the future.

*The third feature is the diversification of educational models*

This era of globalization has yielded the rapid creation and widespread distribution of knowledge. Rapid technological developments have revolutionized current educational models. Beyond the traditional school education model, modern students have gradually accepted the concept of lifelong education, not seeing learning as merely a classroom activity. Education rather has become the key to material

prosperity, social mobility, and the hope for a meaningful life. Modern people choose different educational methods in order to achieve these goals. Using modern media technologies such as the internet, people are able to meet their learning needs anytime, anywhere. Thus, now, formal education, adult education, vocational and technical education, and independent education constitute the current learning model. The development of the internet has enabled distance education, making virtual schools an important educational tool. The diversity of educational methods meets the different educational needs of contemporary society. These educational models, such as online education, which are based on new technological advances, are increasingly becoming a powerful support platform for the inheritance of ethnic culture. In addition, understanding and paying attention to the cultural background of students is becoming an important prerequisite for the development of educational models.

*The fourth feature is the diversity of the educational environment*

In contrast to traditional education, the environment in which modern education is conducted has become increasingly diverse. Education faces increasingly powerful challenges and pressures from a diverse society. Indeed, education itself no longer resides in a relatively simple environment as in the past, and its internal factors are growing more complicated. Therefore, the modern educational environment is diversifying, both internally and externally. As the demand for education changes, education will be increasingly critiqued, forcing education itself to respond positively. In terms of Chinese minority education, the system must cope with its own internal pressures, while simultaneously facing the challenges and pressures from other domestic institutions of higher learning and the growth of interethnic higher education. For the successful development of education, cooperation is needed to improve the diversity of educational environments, to promote a healthy relationship between a school and its surrounding community, to embrace communal responsibility for diversity, to reduce barriers to diversity within schools, to ensure that school policies are consistent with the stated diversity goals, and to promote connections and communication within and between schools. Modern schools must serve a diverse society, including in cultural, economic, and ethnic terms. With the current pressure of its own significance, education must be actively reformed to adapt to the challenges of increasing social demands and limited resources.

*The fifth feature is the diversification of educational methods*

In light of contemporary diversity, traditional teaching and educational methods have also changed. In schools of education, future teachers are trained in increasingly diverse ways, and recognition is given to the wide diversity in student learning. Chinese education has traditionally been oriented around the teacher, who wields absolute authority. Students are passively indoctrinated and rarely challenge either teachers or textbooks. At present, this focus on the teacher is shifting to a focus on the student. The student's subjective state is valued, the student's personality is understood, and the student's learning needs are recognized. Thus, an

interactive, heuristic teaching approach has gradually dominated the classroom. With technological developments, modern educational methods greatly enrich teaching techniques. With these new techniques, the teaching has become more vivid and flexible. Students are not limited to acquiring knowledge in the classroom, but, through online courses, students possess a greatly expanded space for independent learning. Students and teachers can now communicate in person directly, but also communicate more flexibly via the internet. Online courses have enabled more people to learn at the same time from the limited teaching resources available. Educational methodology is also changing, as the traditional, teacher-centered, centralized teaching model has been transformed into a decentralized, student-oriented, open learning paradigm. Students are not limited to the knowledge in a textbook, and the teaching methods of participation and practice are increasingly employed. The field survey method promoted in educational anthropology has great value in education about ethnic cultures.

#### *The sixth feature is the diversity of educational knowledge*

The era of globalization is a time of information proliferation and rapid changes in knowledge. Rapid developments in science and technology have greatly enhanced the transfer of information. Modern people face a torrent of information and knowledge that can be acquired from many channels every day. The knowledge required in modern education has become more diverse. The nomenclature of school subjects is becoming greatly detailed, and the curriculum is broadening and diversifying. Both the breadth and depth of the knowledge acquired by contemporary students cannot be compared to past education. Yet, the knowledge gained in modern education is not sufficient to meet the requirements of this modern era of information proliferation. Continuing, lifelong education has become the inevitable choice. The mission of school education has shifted its aims to now help people understand the basic subject material, to help people master some methods of learning, and to help people build a basic knowledge reserve. In modern, diverse societies with ever-closer connections between people, schools focus on the cross-cultural education of their students in order to understand the experiences and culture of their own and other ethnic groups.

Education aids in creating, preserving, disseminating and applying knowledge. In the era of cultural diversity, education must seriously face concerns about the selection and transmission of the key knowledge needed for human life, about the requirements for intellectual diversity in education, about the rules concerning the development and orientation of education itself, and about the effective promotion of social progress.

#### The impact of educational diversity on the inheritance of ethnic culture

The specific concern of this paper is the manner in which specific educational institutions reflect diversity. For universities, the main concerns would relate to the formulation of policies and systems that develop diversity, to the embodiment of fair educational concepts, to the establishment of necessary and appropriate teaching

content, to the execution of effective teaching activities and focus, and to the reflection of cultural diversity on the campus. One important aspect of these concerns is the methods whereby schools can provide equal educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups and promote students' understanding of ethnic cultures. In developing educational diversity, ethnic cultural heritage should be considered as an important piece.

As an important carrier of cultural inheritance, the influence of the development of diversity in education upon the inheritance of an ethnic culture manifests itself in two distinct but related aspects.

### *The danger of the marginalization of cultural heritage*

The development of educational diversity is driven by the diverse needs of people, while, at the same time, multiplies choices for people. The pressure of real life affects the values that people hold. In the pursuit of a better quality of life, people may consider methods to learn practical or pragmatic knowledge. With a market economy, education, lost to the vortex of the market, rushed to offer practical knowledge to ease the market pressure. Forced by the pressures of life and survival, people naturally choose "useful" knowledge. Education has had to respond in kind, based on the concern of sustaining education in a market-oriented situation. Thus, for some time, the focus of attention has been placed on practical knowledge. The humanities and ethnic or traditional knowledge consequently faces the danger of marginalization. Whether in teaching content or activities, ethnic cultural heritage has either not been valued, either simply viewed as an embellishment or just ignored. In the mainstream educational context of China, teaching content about ethnic cultures is either very shallow, or the scope is narrow or non-existent. The cultivation of students' cross-cultural understanding and communication skills is still an important goal for education.

Of course, the danger of the marginalization of ethnic cultures is not only found in formal education, but also in family and social education. The marginalization of ethnic cultures may lead to a general ignorance of the traditional cultures of a nation, and the ethnic cultures will eventually fade away due to sheer indifference. The modern ignorance of ethnic cultures will eventually lead to an emptiness in identity and spirit, thus will modern people lose themselves in this life. Concurrently, due to this ignorance of ethnic cultures, people will face one difficulty after another, such as barriers to and misunderstandings of communication, discrimination, arrogance, and conflict.

### *Re-examination of the inheritance of ethnic cultures*

The development of educational diversity, especially in the educational environment, is also causing people to re-examine the importance of ethnic culture. Educational anthropology observes the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the main members of education and the individualized development factors of the education process. The relationship between educational achievement and cultural background, personality, and the educational environment has attracted attention.



Understanding factors such as the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the parties involved in education has become an important prerequisite for a successful education. Therefore, understanding the shared cultural knowledge of various ethnic groups has become an urgent necessity. Ralph Linton posits that, if human beings accumulate knowledge of other societies and cultures, they can use these many presuppositions to study personality and thus reach the deeper layers of personality. Individuals are all carriers of a particular culture. Education based on understanding individual differences in personality can increase the respect for and inheritance of such cultures.

With an increasingly multi-ethnic character for the people involved in education, ethnic groups have increasingly frequent contact and the links between people have become increasingly close. In this interactive process, people find a lack of understanding of both themselves and other ethnic cultures, and the urgency of the need for this knowledge to be clearly felt. Therefore, people started to understand again the specific import of ethnic cultures when dealing with others. Initially, people must understand and master their own cultural knowledge as an important basis for self-identification within group communication. Conversely, people must also urgently understand and master the cultural knowledge of others to have satisfactory interactions and results. Multiculturalism is a present reality in all sectors of society, whether in schools or companies or any other entity. Therefore, in this context, people have regained a new appreciation for the importance of ethnic cultures, thus contributing to the “cultural fever” that is erupting. The original, ecological, ethnic culture is presently favored in China and the National Museum has held exhibitions concerning this intangible cultural heritage, as traditional ethnic culture has become a topic of great concern to people.

## Conclusions

In the era of globalization, the diversification of education regarding the inheritance of ethnic cultures appears to be a double-edged sword. Indeed, education cannot simply be integrated into the market. Education serves society by providing practical knowledge and fostering talents while also leading and guiding society concerning its values and worldview. With the inheritance of ethnic cultures, education must have and adhere to its own mantra: inherit the tradition, adapt to change, and lead the age.

The trend of diversification in education profoundly affects the inheritance of traditional ethnic cultures. Under the influence of modern technology, the educational models, methods, means, and content have greatly changed. The traditions of ethnic cultures can be transmitted at a faster rate, shared more broadly, and communicated with fuller content. Although social and educational diversity have affected the inheritance of traditional ethnic cultures, they have also brought more opportunities. The manner in which to seize these opportunities and powerfully employ them for the inheritance of traditional cultures in the nation is the choice facing the people. A variety of educational institutions, members, models, and methods should all manifest positive changes for the promotion of ethnic cultural heritage.

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