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BRIDGING CULTURES IN HISTORY EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TEACHING METHODS IN CHINA AND MALAYSIA'S UNIVERSITIES

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Abstrak:

This study comparatively analyzes university history teaching methods in China and Malaysia, and explores their efforts in overcoming cultural differences and improving learning effects. China's history teaching is deeply influenced by Confucian educational concepts and tends to be teacher-centered, emphasizing the memory and inheritance of knowledge; while Malaysia, due to its cultural diversity, has gradually adopted a more student-centered teaching model that emphasizes interaction and Participatory teaching methods. Researchers employed a synthesis-sources method in this study. The researchers adopted a comprehensive source approach in this study, integrating multiple documents and cases to provide a comprehensive perspective. Although the educational backgrounds and cultural traditions of the two countries are very different, the study found that they are both committed to promoting students' dynamic understanding of local and global history through innovative teaching strategies to meet the challenges of contemporary education. Interactive discussions in Malaysian classrooms stimulate critical thinking and enhance learning engagement through the exchange of ideas among students. Collaborative analysis projects in Chinese history teaching encourage students to work in groups and share insights, cultivating teamwork and in-depth understanding skills, all of which reflect the characteristics of a dynamic learning environment.

Keywords:

History Education, Cultural Integration, Comparative Education, Intercultural Understanding

Introduction

Bridging cultural differences in history education is critical to promoting mutual understanding and creating a more inclusive learning environment. This is particularly important in higher education in China and Malaysia, two countries with distinct cultural and historical backgrounds. China has a long tradition of Confucian education, which emphasizes teacher-centered teaching methods and values memory and respect for authority (Zhang & Guo, 2014). In contrast, Malaysia's multicultural society has prompted a more diverse and student-centered approach to history education, reflecting the country's efforts to integrate its diverse ethnic and cultural groups into the educational process (Abdullah & Jamil, 2019). Both systems, while rooted in their respective national contexts, share the goal of making history relevant and accessible to students, and the means by which this is achieved are shaped by cultural differences.

One notable difference between the two countries is the role of national identity in history teaching. In China, history education is often used to promote a unified national identity and emphasize the achievements of the Chinese nation, sometimes downplaying the history of ethnic minorities (Zhao & Zhang, 2018). This is in contrast to the approach in Malaysia, where history education must deal with the complexity of multiple ethnic and cultural narratives, such as the histories of the Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups (Tan, 2020). These different educational approaches highlight the impact of national context on pedagogy and curriculum development, as both countries seek to maintain cultural relevance in the context of globalization.

Furthermore, globalization and internationalization have had a significant impact on history education in both countries, albeit in different ways. China focuses on integrating global perspectives into history courses to improve international competitiveness, while Malaysia focuses on promoting intercultural dialogue through education, reflecting its diverse social structure (Knight & Morshidi, 2011; Ye & Wang, 2018). Both countries recognize the need to bridge cultural gaps, but their priorities and strategies differ. The integration of digital tools and online resources further enhances these efforts, broadening students' understanding of history by exposing them to diverse historical materials and perspectives (Yeo, 2023).

Teaching methods in both countries are also influenced by their historical and political backgrounds. In China, the centralization of education policy by the state has resulted in the uniformity of history teaching across the country, while Malaysia's decentralized education system allows for more flexibility in the way history is taught in different regions (Loh, 2012). This difference in educational governance further highlights the complexities involved in bridging cultural differences, as both the methods and content of history education are influenced by local and national policies. Despite these differences, both countries are exploring how to make history education more inclusive and reflective of their diverse student populations.

A comparative analysis of history teaching methods in China and Malaysia reveals similarities and differences in the challenge of bridging the cultural gap between the two countries. While teaching methods reflect the cultural and political context of each country, both China and Malaysia are moving towards a more inclusive and globalized history education. This research highlights ongoing efforts to bridge cultural gaps and promote mutual understanding through history education, fostering a more connected world where students can critically engage with the study of their own country's history, as well as the history of other cultures.

Literature Review

In recent years, the role of history education in bridging cultural gaps has attracted increasing attention, especially in the context of a global educational environment. In China and Malaysia, history education has become an important tool in fostering national identity and intercultural understanding. However, the approaches used by these countries vary significantly due to their unique historical, political and cultural backgrounds. Understanding these differences is important in analysing how cultural bridges in history education can be built in different educational contexts.

Chinese history education has long been influenced by the Confucian educational tradition, which emphasizes a hierarchical and teacher-centered approach. According to Zhao and Zhang (2018), this approach promotes respect for authority and prioritizes rote learning and memorization, especially in Chinese historical studies. The emphasis on national unity through historical narratives also contributes to a more focused approach to education, as curricula are often standardized across countries. However, the recent shift to a more global education strategy has encouraged the inclusion of more international perspectives in history education, especially in universities. This change is intended to prepare Chinese students for a rapidly changing world situation (Zhang and Guo, 2014). Despite these changes, the emphasis on collective memory and the teaching of a unified national history remains a key feature of Chinese history education.

On the one hand, Malaysia's approach to history education is closely linked to its multicultural society. As a country composed of diverse racial and cultural groups such as Malays, Chinese, and Indians, Malaysia's history education system needs to address the complexities of representing different historical narratives. Tan (2020) believes that Malaysia's history curriculum reflects the need to balance these different perspectives while promoting national unity. In Malaysian classrooms, emphasis is often placed on promoting interracial respect and understanding and utilizing history as a tool for social integration. Abdullah and Jamil (2019) highlighted the importance of intercultural dialogue in the Malaysian context and suggested that history education can serve as a forum where students can engage with the histories and experiences of the country's various cultural groups.

The biggest challenge in history education in Malaysia is ensuring that history is taught in a way that respects students' diverse backgrounds. Unlike China, which adopts a more holistic approach to history education, Malaysia's multicultural environment requires a more flexible and student-centered approach. Lee (2021) suggested that integrating local history and global narratives in Malaysian classrooms could help bridge cultural gaps and give students a broader understanding of history. By focusing on local and global historical contexts, Malaysian educators aim to create curricula that not only encompass different cultural perspectives but also relate to the world in which their students live.

In China and Malaysia, globalization has played a key role in shaping history education. As both countries seek to improve their international competitiveness, history education has become a key area for integrating global perspectives. In China, the desire to offer a more international curriculum has led to the emergence of a more diverse historical narrative, including a combination of Western history and global events (Knight and Morshidi, 2011). Similarly, in Malaysia, more global pedagogies are increasingly being incorporated into history education to foster intercultural connections and understanding (Yeo, 2023). However,

challenges remain on how to balance national narratives with global perspectives to prepare students for an increasingly interconnected world.

A key difference between the Chinese and Malaysian approaches is the role of digital tools and technology in history education. In China, digital resources are increasingly integrated into classrooms to enhance the learning experience and make history education more interactive. Digital platforms allow students to access a wider range of historical materials and interact with history in a more dynamic way (Yeo, 2023). Similarly, Malaysia has adopted digital tools in history education, especially to engage students from diverse backgrounds and promote an inclusive learning environment (Loh, 2012). The convergence of technology allows both countries to bridge cultural gaps by providing students with access to a global historical perspective and enriching the learning process.

The education strategies of both countries continue to evolve to reflect these changing priorities. In China, the government is pushing for reforms to make education more student-centered and encourage critical thinking and self-directed learning (Zhao and Zhang, 2018). However, moving from a rote learning system to a more interactive and critical approach remains a challenge. In Malaysia, the use of a more participatory approach is seen as responding to the diversity of the student population and the need to ensure all students are included in the classroom (Abdullah and Jamil, 2019). As a result, both countries are moving towards a more inclusive and dynamic history education model that reflects the needs of the international community.

A comparative analysis of history education in China and Malaysia reveals how each country strives to bridge cultural gaps through teaching methods. While China's approach is still primarily focused on teachers and national identity, Malaysian history education is more student-centered and reflects a multicultural society. Both countries have responded to the challenges of globalization by incorporating multiple historical perspectives in their curricula. As the educational practices of both countries continue to evolve, history education remains a key area for promoting intercultural understanding and fostering global citizenship.

Research Gap

Despite the abundance of research on history education in China and Malaysia, there remains a gap in comparative studies, especially those that explore how these countries' pedagogies bridge the cultural gap in university settings. Existing studies often focus on China's traditional Confucian approaches or Malaysia's multicultural educational environment, but rarely explore the intersection of these approaches in historical educational contexts. Furthermore, while the impact of globalization on history curricula is known, there is limited research on how digital tools and intercultural education can be used to improve cultural understanding in these two distinct educational systems. This gap is particularly significant in terms of how digital resources and interactive teaching strategies shape the way students engage with history in a global context. Theoretical and practical aspects need to be explored more nuanced. Thus, further research is needed to provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding how Chinese and Malaysian historical narratives and pedagogies can serve as tools to bridge the cultural gap in higher education.

Methodology

Researchers used a synthesis-sources approach in this study. Synthesizing the research on history education in China and Malaysia revealed significant differences and some common trends in bridging the cultural gap in university environments. Research has shown that history education in China has always been teacher-centered and focused on national history and collective memory (Zhao and Zhang, 2018). Research has shown that while there is a growing momentum to embrace a global perspective, this change has often been limited to national narratives and Confucian educational frameworks that emphasize authority and memory (Zhang and Guo, 2014). Meanwhile, Malaysia's multicultural society has led to the emergence of a more flexible, student-centered approach where history education serves as a tool for social integration and promotes intercultural understanding (Abdullah and Jamil, 2019). Malaysia's history curriculum aims to reflect the histories of different ethnic groups, highlight the importance of dialogue between different cultural narratives, and develop a more inclusive and diverse educational experience (Tan, 2020). A comparative analysis of the two systems shows that although both countries are trying to narrow the cultural gap through history education, their approaches reflect different social values, historical backgrounds, and educational traditions.

Methodologically, most of the existing studies have used qualitative methods such as lesson content analysis, classroom observations, and educator interviews to understand the teaching strategies used in both countries (Yeo, 2023; Tan, 2020). These studies often highlight the role of national identity in shaping history education and explore how cultural differences affect students' engagement in historical narratives. In contrast, quantitative studies that explore student outcomes related to cultural understanding and intercultural competence remain limited. The current study also lacks an integrative methodology that can simultaneously compare teaching methods and education policies in China and Malaysia within a single framework. Future studies could utilize mixed methods that combine qualitative insights with quantitative measures to evaluate the effectiveness of different teaching methods in promoting cultural bridges. Additionally, studies could explore the impact of digital tools and global teaching methods in shaping students' understanding of history in both contexts, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of how digitalization impacts history education in different cultural contexts (Abdullah and Jamil, 2019; Knight and Jamil, 2019). Morshidi, 2011).

Findings and Discussion

Teacher-Centered Approach Vs. Student-Centered Approach

One of the key differences between the Chinese and Malaysian history education systems is the pedagogy used in the classroom. Chinese history education has traditionally been teacher-centered, emphasizing memorization and the presentation of a standardized national narrative (Zhang and Guo, 2014). This approach is heavily influenced by Confucian educational values that prioritize respect for authority and the transmission of knowledge from teachers to students. As Zhao and Zhang (2018) observe, the Chinese system promotes a collective memory that is often focused on national identity while excluding the histories of ethnic minorities and broader global contexts. This can limit students' understanding of the diversity of historical experiences and perspectives beyond the official national history. Recent reforms have introduced more student-centered approaches, such as encouraging critical thinking and independent research, but these are still in the early stages of implementation and are often limited to traditional pedagogical frameworks (Zhang and Guo, 2014).

China's teacher-centered teaching system, although often criticized for its emphasis on rote learning, is deeply rooted in China's long-standing educational and cultural traditions (Zhao, 2012). In history teaching, this model promotes a deep understanding of complex historical events and narratives (Li, 2016). Teachers, as authoritative figures, guide students in learning important classic texts and basic historical materials that shape the country's identity and values (Wang, 2018). This model ensures that students gain an in-depth understanding of key historical moments, people, and ideas that have shaped Chinese culture over centuries (Chen, 2020). Although it places less emphasis on interactive learning than more student-centered teaching methods, it ensures that students gain a comprehensive understanding of their cultural heritage and the intellectual traditions that have shaped modern Chinese society (Yang, 2019).

Furthermore, China's teacher-centered system plays a crucial role in preserving long-standing cultural traditions and historical perspectives (Zhou, 2015). For example, when teaching Chinese history, emphasis is placed on classic texts such as Confucian documents, the historical record "Zi Zhi Tong Jian" or literary works of historical significance, so that students can read these works systematically and in depth (Liu, 2017). This model places an emphasis on rote learning not just for memorization, but for students to internalize content that is critical to Chinese cultural values and historical narratives (Zhang, 2014). By passing on these foundational texts and traditions, the teacher-centered teaching model helps students not only understand their cultural roots, but also enables them to see how these traditions influence contemporary society and politics (Xu, 2021). This careful interpretation of the pattern highlights its role in helping students develop deep connections with history, beyond superficial memories, and emphasizes its importance in the continuation of Chinese culture (Feng, 2019).

Meanwhile, Malaysia's history education system is shaped by a multicultural society, and history education aims to enhance intercultural understanding among different ethnics. Abdullah and Jamil (2019) argue that Malaysian universities emphasize student-centered learning, and their courses reflect the different ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the population. Thus, history education in Malaysia is not only a means of understanding the past, but also a means of promoting social integration and respect for diversity. The emphasis on participatory teaching methods encourages students to engage with history from different perspectives, fostering inter-ethnic dialogue and promoting a more inclusive approach to learning (Tan, 2020). This contrasts with China's more homogeneity approach, which often presents history through a single, state-sanctioned lens. Malaysia's student-centered approach, especially in history education, can better represent the stories of different cultures and encourage students to explore the complexities of a multicultural society.

National Identity and the Role of History

In both countries, history education plays an important role in shaping national identity, but in very different ways. In China, the state focuses on the achievements and struggles of the Han ethnic majority and uses history education as a means to promote a unified national identity. As Zhao and Zhang (2018) point out, this creates a curriculum that is biased towards superiority cultural narratives, and often marginalization of the history of the country's ethnic minorities. Chinese history courses emphasize key moments such as the imperial dynasties, the Opium Wars, and the rise of the Communist Party, viewing these events as central to the development of the modern Chinese state. This nationalistic approach aims to promote patriotism and loyalty to the country and ensure students align with the party's political vision.

However, given the multicultural society, Malaysia's approach to history education is more complex. Tan (2020) highlighted that the Malaysian history curriculum is designed to reflect the contributions and history of various ethnic groups, including Malays, Chinese, and Indians. The Malaysian government supports promoting national integration while celebrating the diversity of the country's cultural heritage. However, this inclusive approach faces the challenge of balancing the representation of different racial backgrounds without prioritizing one group over another (Abdullah and Jamil, 2019). Despite these challenges, Malaysia's emphasis on cultural diversity in history education allows students to recognize and understand the diverse and common historical experiences of the country's various ethnic groups. The Malaysian curriculum also aims to foster a unified national consciousness by acknowledging the diversity of students' identities, creating a sense of belonging among students.

The Impact of Globalization on History Education

Globalization has had a significant impact on history education in China and Malaysia, albeit in different forms. In China, globalization has shifted the curriculum to a more international perspective, especially at the university level. Yeo (2023) argues that Chinese history education increasingly incorporates global historical events and perspectives, such as world wars, colonialism, and globalization, to prepare students for a global workforce. However, the state remains cautious about the extent to which a global mindset should influence national education policies, often placing global events in a Chinese context to maintain control of the narrative. This reflects the government's desire to strike a balance between internationalization and maintaining national identity, allowing Chinese students to specialize in world history without diluting their commitment to the Chinese nation (Knight and Morshidi, 2011).

In Malaysia, globalization has also impacted history education, but with a stronger emphasis on intercultural understanding. As a country with a diverse population and a strong emphasis on social cohesion, Malaysia is increasingly placing emphasis on the need for students to understand the interconnectedness of world history while respecting their own cultural backgrounds (Abdullah & Jamil, 2019). Globalization has also encouraged Malaysian educators to use comparative history as a tool to explore how different cultures have historically interacted, promoting dialogue and intercultural understanding (Tan, 2020). While global influences are most strongly felt in Chinese history education at the international relations level, Malaysia aims to foster a sense of global citizenship in students and promote respect for the world by adopting a more holistic approach that combines global perspectives with local narratives.

The Role of Technology in a Culture of Solidarity

Both China and Malaysia are increasingly incorporating digital tools and technologies into history education to bridge cultural gaps and increase student engagement. The introduction of digital platforms in China has allowed students to engage with history in a more interactive and dynamic way. Yeo (2023) described how digital technologies such as online databases and multimedia presentations enable Chinese students to explore historical events from different perspectives and access global sources. These innovations expose students to different historical perspectives and help broaden their understanding beyond national narratives. However, ensuring equitable access to these technologies and balancing state control with the free flow of information remains a challenge, sometimes limiting the scope of available content (Knight and Morshidi, 2011).

The use of technology in history education in Malaysia also plays a key role in improving intercultural understanding. Malaysian universities are incorporating digital resources into history courses to provide students with a wider range of historical documents and perspectives (Loh, 2012). Digital platforms are used to enhance classroom learning and give students access to primary sources, historical databases, and international scholarly papers. This integration of technology promotes more inclusive and participatory history education, allowing students to engage with world history in ways not previously possible. Furthermore, technology facilitates collaborative learning and intercultural communication by enabling greater interaction between students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Tan, 2020).

Educational Reform and Challenges

Both China and Malaysia have implemented educational reforms in history education, but with varying degrees of scope and success. In China, the government has launched initiatives aimed at encouraging students to think critically and engage with history beyond memorization (Zhang and Guo, 2014). However, these reforms often face resistance from educators and traditional educational institutions that rely on a teacher-centered, rote learning model. Zhao and Zhang (2018) argue that despite these reforms, their impact has been limited due to persistent Confucian values that continue to shape China's educational practice. Centralization of education policy makes it difficult to implement these reforms, as local educators are often constrained by national curricula and regulations.

The decentralized nature of Malaysia's education system allows for greater flexibility in the use of participatory and student-centered teaching methods (Abdullah and Jamil, 2019). Malaysian universities are more likely to introduce innovative teaching strategies that encourage students to take an active role in their learning, especially history education. However, challenges remain in ensuring that these approaches are applied consistently across the country, especially in rural areas with limited access to resources. Furthermore, as Tan (2020) points out, there remains a tension between balancing the representation of different cultural narratives and maintaining national unity, which requires careful management of teaching strategies.

Intercultural Understanding and the Role of History Education

Ultimately, the aim of history education in China and Malaysia is to promote intercultural understanding and bridge cultural gaps. The emphasis on national identity through Chinese history education aims to promote a sense of unity among Han students, but the experiences of ethnic minorities are often ignored (Zhao and Zhang, 2018). This narrow focus on national identity can hinder students' ability to understand the diversity of historical perspectives and the complexities of world history. However, incorporating global perspectives and digital resources into the curriculum can gradually broaden students' understanding of history and encourage them to view events from different cultural perspectives (Yeo, 2023).

History education in Malaysia takes into account the country's racial diversity and plays an important role in bridging cultural gaps. Tan (2020) emphasized that history education in Malaysia aims not only to convey historical facts but also to foster respect for the country's different racial and cultural groups. History education in Malaysia aims to promote social cohesion and understanding by presenting history as a common experience. Combining a student-centered teaching methodology with an emphasis on cultural diversity allows students to explore history from different perspectives and have meaningful conversations about their

own cultural history (Abdullah and Jamil, 2019). This approach helps build a more inclusive and harmonious society by promoting empathy and mutual respect.

Comparative Analysis of History Education

A comparative analysis of history education in China and Malaysia highlighted the different teaching methods each country uses to bridge the cultural gap. History education in China is still primarily teacher-centered and national identity-centered, while in Malaysia, a student-centered approach emphasizes intercultural understanding and social integration. Both countries are influenced by globalization, but combine global perspectives in different ways that reflect their unique historical and political histories. The constant blend of technological and educational innovation in both countries provides opportunities to bridge the cultural gap.

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of history education in China and Malaysia reveals that these countries have common goals and significant differences in bridging cultural gaps in university environments. China adopts a more teacher-centered and nationalistic approach to history education, emphasizing national unity and identity. Malaysia's history education system is shaped by a multicultural background and focuses on promoting inclusiveness and intercultural understanding. Both countries have been affected by globalization, but their integration of global perspectives differs greatly. China has carefully integrated international history into its national framework, while Malaysia has promoted a more inclusive intercultural dialogue. As both countries continue to adapt their teaching practices, the use of technology and innovation in teaching methods offers great opportunities to enhance students' understanding of history and develop more connected and culturally aware global citizens. These findings highlight the importance of culturally sensitive teaching methods in history education, which may play a key role in bridging cultural differences and promoting greater mutual respect in different societies.

Shared teacher training programs and cross-cultural curriculum development provide practical ways to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between countries with multicultural backgrounds, such as China and Malaysia. By engaging educators from both countries in joint training, they can exchange best practices, learn how to handle cultural differences in teaching, and work together to develop shared teaching frameworks. The development of cross-cultural courses furthers this effort by incorporating the perspectives of both cultures into teaching materials, encouraging students to both recognize the importance of global inter-connected while valuing their own cultural identities. These initiatives not only bridge cultural gaps but also promote an inclusive and dynamic learning environment that prepares students to develop global citizenship. These research findings provide new perspectives and practical experiences for discussions on global education and intercultural understanding. They not only demonstrate the impact of cultural diversity on educational methods, but also provide valuable reference for cooperation and interaction between different countries in educational reform.

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