

From Observers to Narrators: Constructing a Glocalization Model for National Conditions Education of International Students in Beijing

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Current models of national conditions education for international students often fall short in facilitating their transition from passive observers of culture to active communicators. Using Beijing International Studies University as a case study, this paper examines how a systematic educational model enables international students to shift from passive observation to active narration of Chinese society and culture. The study identifies and elaborates on three core mechanisms of this model: an institutional integration mechanism centered on convergent management, a practical cognition mechanism through experiential learning, and a narrative empowerment mechanism utilizing converged media platforms. Together, these components form a glocalized educational framework that integrates global issues with local practices, connecting macro narratives with personal experiences. Case analysis demonstrates that by immersing students in authentic sociocultural contexts and granting them narrative agency, this model effectively fosters deep understanding and cross-cultural identity. It thus provides a new theoretical framework and practical pathway for reconstructing international student education in China with an emphasis on student agency and interculturality.

Keywords: international student education, national conditions education, glocalization, cross-cultural communication, identity transformation, case study

Introduction

The accelerated global mobility of talent has positioned international students as key actors in transnational knowledge transfer and cultural exchange. For host countries, a critical issue lies in how higher education can foster accurate understanding and positive recognition of their society and culture among these students, thereby enabling them to become effective bridges for cross-cultural communication. This presents a question of significant theoretical and practical importance. As an emerging study destination, China is undergoing continuous exploration and a paradigm shift in its approach to international student education, particularly in “national conditions education”, which aims to convey the country’s developmental realities and core values. Traditional models, often focused on knowledge transmission, face challenges of limited effectiveness. A fundamental shortcoming is their neglect of student agency and narrative ownership, which hinders the cultivation of genuine internal resonance and motivation for proactive communication.

Addressing these concerns, this paper employs a “glocalization” theoretical lens to examine an innovative model for national conditions education. This model emphasizes anchoring global perspectives within local practices and, through specific pedagogical designs, activating students’ narrative agency. The research focuses on a central question: How can universities in Beijing, through a systematic set of educational interventions, guide international students to transition from being passive observers of socio-cultural realities to active interpreters? By analyzing the practical experience of Beijing International Studies University, this study aims to develop an analytical framework with broader relevance. The following sections will investigate how a glocalized model, comprising three core mechanisms—institutional integration, practical cognition, and narrative empowerment—systematically facilitates this identity transformation.

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

Current Research on National Conditions Education for International Students

Research on national conditions education for international students has evolved from a focus on cultural adaptation towards more complex issues of intercultural integration and identity construction. Studies in the past three years, in particular, have increasingly focused on structural innovation in educational models.

Regarding institutional design, the concept of convergent management has deepened from mere administrative alignment to creating an “institutionally inclusive” environment, which research shows can significantly enhance international students’ sense of academic belonging and perceived social support (Smith & Johnson, 2022). In curriculum and pedagogy, the research frontier emphasizes embedding global issues within local practices through “contextualized experiences”. For instance, project-based learning that links Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with local urban community governance cases has proven effective in fostering critical thinking and intercultural understanding (Chen & Li, 2023). Furthermore, digital storytelling is gaining widespread attention as an emerging pedagogical and assessment tool. Researchers have found that encouraging international students to use converged media to create personal narratives serves not only as a demonstration of learning outcomes but also as a process of constructing subjective identity, effectively empowering students and countering power imbalances in the educational process (Garcia, 2022).

However, gaps remain in the existing literature. First, most studies focus either on institutional design or curricular innovation, failing to integrate institutional integration, experiential cognition, and narrative empowerment into a coherent, systemic model that drives identity transformation. Second, while the role of digital storytelling has been preliminarily explored, there is a lack of in-depth case analysis and theoretical elaboration on how it functions as a key mechanism, synergizing with the institutional environment and practical experiences to facilitate the qualitative leap from “observer” to “narrator”.

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Conceptual Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study draws primarily from intercultural adaptation theory and experiential learning theory, reinforced by recent empirical research. Berry’s (2005) intercultural adaptation theory provides a classic psychological dimension for understanding “identity transformation” in this study. Recent research has built upon this, suggesting that successful intercultural integration relies not only on individual psychological adjustment but also on the “interactive spaces” created by educational institutions, which encourage a two-way process of cultural maintenance and cultural exchange (Ward & Geeraert, 2023). This offers renewed theoretical support for this study’s “institutional integration” mechanism. Kolb’s (2014) experiential learning theory forms

the pedagogical basis for the “practical cognition” mechanism. Current research further confirms that embodied, immersive experience is key to deepening cognition and triggering emotional connection, particularly in non-native environments, where such experiences can effectively bridge theoretical knowledge and real-world complexity (Jackson, 2023). Furthermore, research on “digital storytelling” (Garcia, 2022) frames narrative as a social practice. Combined with experiential learning theory, it jointly explains how personal experiences are transformed into socially communicable cultural knowledge through reflective narrative creation, thereby completing the learning cycle from “concrete experience” to “active experimentation”.

These two foundational theories, supplemented by recent empirical advances, together provide an integrated and contemporary analytical perspective for understanding the transition of international students from being cultural observers to cultural communicators.

Research Design and Methods

This study employs a qualitative case study approach, selecting Beijing International Studies University (BISU) as the research site due to its exemplary and representative status in international student education. BISU began enrolling international students in the early 1980s and has since nurtured nearly 30,000 students from over 110 countries. Its current international student population numbers nearly 700, with degree-seeking students comprising over 60%.

Data were collected through triangulation, primarily including: (1) institutional policy documents and reports; (2) project output materials, encompassing over 100 episodes of video content produced with student involvement, which were analyzed using thematic analysis; and (3) quantitative administrative data on student participation rates and coverage. Through cross-analysis of these diverse sources, this study aims to construct a theoretical model that reflects the internal logic of the case university’s national conditions education practices. All data used are publicly available institutional records or anonymized, aggregated data, complying with academic ethical standards.

Case Analysis: Three Core Mechanisms of a Glocalization Model

Through an in-depth analysis of the case, this study identifies three interconnected core mechanisms that drive the identity transformation of international students.

Mechanism I: Institutional Integration—Constructing a Convergent Educational Ecosystem

This mechanism embeds national conditions education into the entire international student cultivation process through top-level design, creating a structural field that promotes cross-cultural interaction. The case university established a cross-departmental collaborative leadership mechanism, incorporating the objectives of national conditions education into its training programs and scholarship evaluation systems. It innovatively promotes a “four-in-one” convergent integration of Chinese and international students in teaching, management, services, and campus cultural activities. Peer-to-peer initiatives, such as the “Xiaoluan Language Partner” program, facilitate daily interaction. This institutional arrangement not only breaks down cultural barriers but, more importantly, provides the necessary social foundation and psychological security for identity transformation.

Mechanism II: Practical Cognition—Creating Experiential Learning Pathways

This mechanism transforms abstract knowledge into students’ embodied understanding through “glocalized” curriculum and practical design. At the curricular level, bilingual courses developed by the university, such as

“Chinese Modernization”, connect globally relevant issues like modernization and sustainable development with concrete practical cases from Beijing, such as in urban governance and technological innovation, thereby anchoring global issues locally. At the practical level, activities like the “Green China Tour” and “Intangible Cultural Heritage Workshops” place students within authentic social development contexts, enabling them to progress from theoretical understanding to emotional connection, embodying the complete cycle of experiential learning theory.

Mechanism III: Narrative Empowerment—Building Communicative Output Platforms

This mechanism is key to facilitating students’ leap from “experiential learner” to “narrator”. The case university collaborates with mainstream media to create video series like “Viewing China From the Outside”. The core innovation lies in a role shift: Students become the primary creators of content, interpreting their China experiences from a first-person perspective. Thematic analysis of the program content reveals a cognitive deepening in the students’ narratives, evolving from “marveling at cultural differences” to “understanding cultural logic”. This narrative empowerment not only demonstrates communicative effectiveness but also exemplifies the two-way process of cultural maintenance and exchange central to intercultural adaptation theory.

Discussion

The theoretical contribution of the tripartite glocalization model proposed in this study lies in its transcendence of the linear mindset that reduces national conditions education to mere information transmission, instead constructing a dynamic, empowering educational ecosystem. Compared to the single-dimensional studies discussed in the literature review, this model, through the synergistic operation of its three core mechanisms, clearly delineates a transformative pathway: from “institutional integration providing the field”, to “practical cognition internalizing meaning”, and finally to “narrative empowerment externalizing expression”. This provides a new analytical tool for understanding the construction of intercultural identity among international students.

At the practical level, the success of this model hinges on its stimulation and respect for student agency. It demonstrates that effective national conditions education is not cultural assimilation, but rather empowers students to become active nodes connecting different cultures by creating supportive environments and platforms. In this process, students gain not only knowledge about China but also cross-cultural communication and narrative competencies, positioning them as more reflective and constructive global citizens.

It must be noted that this model places high demands on a university’s capacity for resource integration and cross-departmental collaboration. Furthermore, receptiveness to “narrative” may vary among students from different cultural backgrounds, posing potential challenges for its broader application. Future research should focus on developing a comprehensive evaluation framework—integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions—tailored for this model, and explore how AI technologies can facilitate personalized narrative expression and dissemination.

Conclusions

Through a case study of the national conditions education practices for international students at Beijing International Studies University, this paper demonstrates an educational model guided by the theory of glocalization. Composed of three core mechanisms—institutional integration, practical cognition, and narrative empowerment—this model collectively transforms national conditions education from a unidirectional process

of knowledge transmission into a bidirectional process of cultural understanding and co-creation based on resonance.

The optimization of this model is a perpetual endeavor. Future efforts should focus on developing standardized assessment tools, enhancing intercultural teaching competencies, and expanding networks of international partnership. This study provides a theoretical framework and a practical exemplar for the connotative development of international student education in China. It also contributes exploratory insights from a Chinese university on how education can foster meaningful intercultural dialogue and understanding in the global era.

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