

Exploring pathways for developing the global competence of Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students in foreign language universities

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Abstract. Taking talent cultivation in foreign language universities as the research object, this article examines how students from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities build global competence within the training systems of such institutions. The study argues that the cultivation of these students should emphasize patriotic education and ideological guidance. It advocates shaping their national sentiment, cultural identity, and personal literacy through approaches such as integrating ideological and political education into the curriculum, organizing educational activities, fostering campus cultural immersion, and leveraging the advantages of talent integration in the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area. The goal is to develop globally competent talents equipped to contribute to the construction of a strong socialist country in the new era.

Keywords: Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese university students, patriotic education, global competence

1. Introduction

In recent years, as China's overall national strength has continued to grow and the level of higher education has steadily improved, increasing numbers of university students from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities have chosen to pursue their studies at mainland institutions, with especially notable concentrations in universities across Guangdong. Accumulated experience in higher-education student development suggests that, due to differences in upbringing, basic education backgrounds, and related factors, these students often exhibit distinctive behavioral characteristics and developmental pathways compared with their mainland peers. At the same time, this group inherently benefits from cross-cultural learning and communication experiences, making them an advantageous population for cultivating global competence.

In late 2017, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released its "global competence" assessment framework, defining global competence as a multidimensional evaluative structure encompassing "cognitive development, socio-emotional skills, civic learning, attitudes, values, and behaviors" [1]. It serves as a framework for assessing students' overall literacy and competence. Foreign language universities in China typically distinguish themselves by cultivating internationally oriented talents; the

composition of their student body, campus culture, and training schemes all bear strong international characteristics, thereby providing favorable conditions for developing globally competent graduates. Using Guangdong University of Foreign Studies as a representative case, this article focuses on the development of global competence among students from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities. On one hand, it summarizes the current state and underlying causes of these students' learning and personal development based on their common characteristics. On the other hand, it distills effective strategies and educational practices from the talent-training models shaped by the internationalized characteristics of foreign language institutions.

2. Current status of global competence talent development in Chinese universities

Xi Jinping has emphasized that "students must be guided to correctly understand the global landscape and China's development trends" [2]. In other words, mastering international norms and participating in global governance constitute core objectives of talent cultivation in foreign language universities, aligning with China's expectations for developing globally competent talents. Overall, research and educational initiatives related to global competence in Chinese universities are steadily advancing. As China increasingly moves toward the center of the world stage, the demand for globally oriented talents capable of participating in international governance continues to rise. At present, however, Chinese universities face a situation in which research and training on global competence are advancing in parallel, yet talent cultivation and real-world demand remain out of sync.

2.1. Parallel advancement of research and training

The concept of global competence entered China in 2014. In 2016, Tsinghua University released an influential program for cultivating globally competent talents, identifying six core competencies required for global competence training [3]. Among these, language proficiency and communication constitute a critical component and form the foundational literacy needed for cross-cultural communication—namely, "understanding the connotations of different cultures." In 2020, Shandong University (Weihai) officially established its Global Competence Research Institute and subsequently launched training programs in language (English) critique and writing. Over the past decade, China's top universities have increasingly emphasized and implemented research and training initiatives related to global competence, with foreign language empowerment of intercultural communication recognized as a pivotal measure. It is therefore evident that foreign language universities possess inherent advantages over non-language institutions in cultivating globally competent talents.

2.2. Misalignment between talent supply and demand

Statistics show that in recent years China has become one of the major contributors to the budgets of the United Nations and other international organizations, accounting for more than 20 percent of total contributions—second only to the United States. However, China ranks only 17th among all countries in terms of the number of UN employees, representing merely 2.31 percent of the total workforce (as of December 2021). A clear mismatch exists between China's talent pool for global governance and the actual demand: the pace of demand is ahead, while the pace of talent cultivation is still catching up. Foreign language universities currently produce talents with notable cross-cultural competencies and strong international orientation, making them well-positioned to take the lead in developing globally competent individuals capable of participating in

international governance. Among them, students from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities possess even more pronounced advantages in cross-cultural communication, enabling them to form typical and replicable pathways for global competence training.

3. Challenges in developing the global competence of Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students in Guangdong

Similar to other universities, foreign language institutions have undergone multiple phases in cultivating students from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities, including exploration, integration, and characteristic training. The current challenges they face nonetheless share commonalities with those observed elsewhere. These challenges primarily manifest in three areas: alignment with the curriculum and training system, campus integration and identity formation, and divergent views on labor and employment.

3.1. Challenges in aligning with the curriculum and training system

In recent years, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students have experienced a series of policy adjustments in mainland universities' curricular systems. Previously, they were exempt from the "two compulsory ideology courses," meaning they were not required to take general education courses such as Fundamentals of Marxism, Ideological and Political Education, Outline of Modern Chinese History, Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought and the Theoretical System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, and Situation and Policy, nor were they required to complete military education credits. This has now been adjusted so that they attend classes together with mainland students on an equal basis. As a result, their academic burden has risen significantly over the past five years, and cases of extended graduation have increased. Since these students have lived abroad for long periods, the textbooks and curricular systems in their basic education differ greatly from those of the mainland. At the same time, ideological and political theory courses at the university level play a central role in cultivating patriotism, fostering communist ideals, and guiding students to support the Party and the socialist system. These courses constitute the primary platform for ideological guidance and form a crucial foundation for developing globally competent talents with Chinese characteristics—namely, cultivating confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism by demonstrating its advantages through comparison [4]. Difficulties in taking these two ideological courses objectively hinder this process of ideological guidance. Consequently, it becomes especially important to provide complementary ideological and political education for Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students beyond the existing course platform.

Beyond coursework, education in ideals and convictions represents another vital dimension of university-level talent development. This dimension is primarily realized through the guidance of Party and Youth League organizations. Universities are key bastions for uniting, cultivating, and guiding young people. Recruiting outstanding young people into the Communist Party constitutes a focal point of university Party-building work. However, even when Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students express strong willingness to join the Party, they must undergo extremely rigorous screening procedures, and very few successfully pass organizational vetting to become student Party members. During the cultivation process for prospective Party members, universities seek to guide students from organizational affiliation toward ideological commitment through various methods, including observation, evaluation, organizational study, and cultivation interviews. Under current conditions, a pressing challenge lies in how to guide Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students—who are, by definition, non-Party youth—to recognize the Party's

theories, principles, and policies; to understand the realities of the Party and the nation; and to progress from learning about and establishing a Marxist worldview to strengthening their communist convictions and their belief in the continued revitalization of the Chinese nation.

These two concrete issues illustrate that, compared with mainland students admitted through the unified entrance system, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students require diverse platforms for ideological guidance. More targeted, practical, and effective new forms and methods of ideological and patriotic education are needed to support their development.

3.2. Issues of campus integration and cultural identity

Unlike mainland students admitted through the national college entrance examination, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students studying in Guangdong enter through specially designed admission channels. For example, students holding Hong Kong, Macao, or Taiwan residency need only pass dedicated entrance assessments rather than the national examination. Within this group, some completed their pre-university education entirely abroad and therefore did not receive systematic training within the mainland's primary and secondary school system; some, despite holding Hong Kong, Macao, or Taiwan residency, attended primary and secondary school in the mainland just like local students; others only participated in short-term preparatory training offered by relevant institutions before taking separate entrance assessments administered by mainland universities. These diverse educational backgrounds prior to enrollment distinguish this group markedly from mainland students who have undergone the unified national college entrance examination, resulting in noticeable differences in campus integration and, particularly, cultural identity formation. Several specific examples illustrate this situation.

In daily student administration, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students frequently use traditional Chinese characters for their names, which makes their identities especially conspicuous. At the same time, traditional-character names sometimes require repeated verification or reminders in administrative processes such as bank card registration or campus card identification.

In collective campus life, these students often cannot obtain positions as student leaders within the Communist Youth League due to the particularities of their identity. As a result, they usually participate in student activities only as participants rather than organizers or responsible leads. The themes of campus life are often tied to vibrant collective activities under Youth League guidance. Fostering students' sense of presence, recognition, and even achievement within groups is essential for strengthening their adaptability to university life. The inability to serve as Youth League student cadres therefore becomes a practical challenge for these students' cultural integration on campus.

In merit-evaluation and awards processes, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students also benefit from dedicated institutional policies, such as special scholarship programs for students from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan.

These recurring differences—when contrasted with mainland students admitted through the unified system—repeatedly reinforce their sense of distinct identity. Of course, integration does not imply erasing differences, still less eliminating diversity. Rather, it entails advancing together along different yet harmonious paths toward shared goals. Youth from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities are equally indispensable contributors to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Nurturing and uniting young people, and preparing them to become builders and successors of the socialist cause, remains the central mission of university-level talent development.

3.3. Issues concerning employment and labor values

The value of labor is a core component of the Marxist worldview. Marxism holds that "free and autonomous labor arises from the intrinsic vital needs of human beings" [5]. Employment intentions among Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students are influenced by multiple factors. In addition to political identity education, career guidance plays an even more critical role in shaping their employment outlook and labor values. This aligns with the philosophy of global competence cultivation, in which professional ethics and self-realization constitute key elements of individual literacy. Accordingly, universities should strengthen career education guidance, positioning participation in global governance and the leveraging of cross-cultural and cross-border communication advantages as distinctive features of talent cultivation for this group. By establishing global competence training as the core objective, universities can help these students develop sound employment aspirations and positive labor values.

4. Strengthening patriotism education to guide the development of Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese university students

Behind the various interwoven issues discussed above, the core challenge in cultivating Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese university students lies in achieving cultural identity and integration. The focal point of this work is the implementation of socialist education. Against the backdrop of deepening internationalization and globalization, cultivating these students into internationally oriented talents who can serve socialist development has become particularly important. For foreign language universities, the foremost requirement in preparing such internationalized talents is to lay a solid ideological foundation for young students from the outset.

The cultivation of global competence encompasses knowledge, skills, and literacy. Among these, the most essential dimension is humanistic literacy—integrity, talent, and a deep sense of commitment to the nation. This is also the domain where universities with international characteristics must concentrate their efforts and pursue innovation when educating students from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities. Patriotism education should serve as the foundation for cultivating internationalized talent. Internationalization does not mean Americanization or Westernization; rather, it entails cultivating youth who are firmly grounded in patriotic and socialist values, who possess strong professional capabilities, who are able to participate effectively in international competition and cooperation, and who can tell China's stories well and demonstrate Chinese confidence and character on the global stage. For instance, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, in exploring models for internationalized talent cultivation, has articulated a framework of "five key competencies"—intercultural communication competence, practical competence, innovation competence, employability and entrepreneurship competence, and autonomous learning competence [6]. Guided by this framework, the university has developed a number of effective approaches specifically tailored to the educational and administrative needs of students from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese backgrounds.

First, educate young people through daily classroom teaching. Leveraging the ideological and political function of the curriculum (kecheng sixiang) is especially critical. Talent development plans across university disciplines should emphasize ideological guidance and bring patriotism education into the professional classroom. As General Secretary Xi Jinping has stated, "Schools are the frontline of ideological work." Integrating professional education with the cultivation of humanistic literacy, and supplementing foreign language training with courses on outstanding traditional Chinese culture [7], can produce strong educational outcomes. For example, giving full play to the role of "dual-role academic leaders"—those who lead both their

academic discipline and its ideological guidance—ensures that patriotic and humanistic elements are embedded in curriculum design, teaching organization, and feedback mechanisms. In this way, students cultivate a sense of national sentiment alongside their professional development, positioning the promotion of Chinese culture and the enhancement of national communication capacity as defining strengths of internationalized talent at foreign language universities [8]. Leveraging the diverse backgrounds of Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students can further enable them to grow into capable and virtuous individuals who genuinely love China and support socialism.

Second, cultivate young people through high-quality student activities. As Confucius observed, one develops through the arts and finds fulfillment in joy—underscoring the formative value of practical activities. The qualities demanded of internationally minded talent are multifaceted [9]. The rich spectrum of campus student activities has long served as an excellent arena for strengthening students' willpower, fostering teamwork-oriented character, and providing platforms through which young people can express themselves, grow, and thrive among their peers. Participation in student activities enables Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students not only to build friendships and integrate into groups but also to realize personal value, progressing from daily adaptation to identity integration and ultimately to psychological acceptance. At Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, professional competition-based student activities integrate disciplinary training, performance-based showcases, and other formats, enabling students to apply their professional knowledge beyond the classroom, engage in independent creative work, and benefit from the formative effects of experiential learning. Such activities not only reinforce professional competencies but also enhance personal qualities through teamwork and competition. At the same time, the university has emphasized the refinement of themed Communist Youth League (CYL) activities, embedding ideological guidance into routine class-level CYL work. The combination of small-class structures typical of foreign language universities and the rapid information flow of the "micro era" enables CYL activities to exert strong influence at the grassroots level, forming a "micro-era united front platform integrating Party and Youth League structures" [10]. For the small number of Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students in each class, this serves as an important complement to ideological and political education. By making innovative CYL activities a breakthrough point, beginning with class-level collectives, universities can help students internalize patriotic sentiment and express it through action.

Third, nurturing young people through immersion in campus culture. Owing to differences in their upbringing and prior educational backgrounds, some Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students enrolled in Mainland universities exhibit cultural traits and dispositions distinct from those of Mainland students. However, it is also important to note that, compared with international students, these students retain deep connections to traditional Chinese culture and strong familial and emotional ties rooted in shared heritage. Consequently, cultivating a campus atmosphere rich in humanistic care is highly conducive to fostering sound values among university students, especially during the critical first year of study, which can significantly support Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students in achieving successful cross-cultural adaptation [11]. Guangdong University of Foreign Studies adheres to the educational values of "excellence, integrity, inclusiveness, and confidence," striving to foster a campus culture grounded in openness and mutual respect. In exploring innovative approaches to guiding students with the core socialist values, the university places particular emphasis on dialogue and mutual trust among students of diverse backgrounds. It has established a campus cultural platform centered on patriotic and alma mater-oriented education, with graduation ceremonies and recognition events serving as signature rites-of-passage activities. It has also developed a distinctive work-study and financial aid system designed to nurture students' confidence in self-development and self-service, as well as to cultivate well-rounded character. A considerable number of Hong

Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students have alleviated financial difficulties by taking part-time positions on campus or applying for aid, which has strengthened their sense of warmth, belonging, and identification with Mainland universities. This emotional foundation helps them develop affection for their institution and, by extension, patriotic sentiment. As a foreign-language institution, GDUFS also leverages its multilingual learning environment to blaze an innovative trail for cultivating internationally oriented talent [12].

Fourth, leveraging the advantages of the Greater Bay Area to provide expansive opportunities for youth development. Located in Guangzhou at the heart of the economically dynamic Pearl River Delta, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies benefits from the deepening development of the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area. As Guangzhou continues to undergo sustained industrial upgrading, exchanges among Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao will become even more frequent. Talent is the essential driver of regional development, and Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students are certain to form a vital force in the future of the Greater Bay Area. The core objective of talent development at present is to cultivate competent builders who meet the requirements of national strategies and regional development needs [13], which also serves as a key benchmark for assessing internationally oriented talent. In recent years, an increasing number of enterprises in Guangdong have launched dedicated recruitment events for talent from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. The Mainland's prosperous and globally competitive internet and high-tech industries are likewise attracting ambitious youth from these regions. At the same time, Chinese enterprises are stepping onto the world stage with growing confidence, engaging in international competition and even shaping global rules, thereby intensifying the demand for globally competent talent. By aligning talent development with regional needs, universities in Guangdong not only provide intellectual support for the construction of the Greater Bay Area but also offer Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese students vast developmental opportunities. This enables them to embark on meaningful careers, contribute their efforts and insights, integrate into local communities, and become part of the broader Mainland youth cohort. Ultimately, they can grow into contributors to national development and socialist modernization, thereby deepening mutual recognition and trust among youth from Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, and jointly advancing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

5. Conclusion

Amid profound global transformations unseen in a century, uniting, cultivating, guiding, and relying on young people constitute essential guarantees for overcoming challenges and achieving future success. When the younger generation possesses ideals, capabilities, and a sense of responsibility, the nation has a promising future, and the people have hope. China's development depends on a stable environment, and the prosperity and prospects of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan rest upon the shoulders of today's youth. University students from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities in Guangdong serve as natural bridges for integrating and uniting young people across the Greater Bay Area. By leveraging the diverse backgrounds of these students and cultivating their global competence as a distinctive pathway, it becomes possible to identify effective entry points for strengthening unity among youth from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan and to foster exemplary role models who can lead and inspire their peers.

Funding

This work is supported by the Research Branch on the Management of Students from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and Overseas Chinese under the Guangdong Higher Education Association (HMT0202406); the 2025

University-Level Characteristic Innovation Project of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (25TS37); and the Featured Innovation Project (Social Sciences) of the Guangdong Provincial Department of Education (2024WTSCX121).

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