

## Article

# Pathways for Integrating Regional Culture into General Education in Chinese Universities: Exploring the Implicit Value-Guiding Function of Curriculum

Qian Du <sup>1,\*</sup><sup>1</sup> Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China

\* Correspondence: Qian Du, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China

**Abstract:** This paper explores effective pathways for integrating regional culture into general education in Chinese universities, emphasizing its dual role in enriching academic content and fostering value formation. By examining the implicit value-guiding function of curriculum, the study highlights how regional culture can subtly nurture students' moral reasoning, social responsibility, and cultural confidence through narrative, reflection, and immersive experiences. Challenges such as fragmented curriculum design, faculty constraints, and the balance between regional identity and broader educational goals are analyzed. The paper proposes interdisciplinary curriculum design, interactive teaching methods, and strengthened faculty training as key strategies to realize the educational mission of "Lide Shuren" (cultivating virtue and educating people). Finally, it calls for coherent institutional support and future research to develop sustainable models of culturally embedded general education that contribute to the holistic development of students and society.

**Keywords:** regional culture; general education; value cultivation; moral education; interdisciplinary teaching; cultural identity

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, general education has gained increasing prominence in Chinese universities as a vital component of cultivating students' comprehensive abilities, ethical awareness, and sense of social responsibility. Moving beyond discipline-specific training, general education is now expected to play a formative role in shaping students' worldviews, values, and cultural understanding. This shift reflects a broader educational objective: to develop well-rounded individuals who are not only knowledgeable, but also morally grounded and socially engaged.

Amid this transformation, regional culture — rooted in local history, customs, values, and artistic expressions — has emerged as a valuable but underutilized educational resource. As a reflection of collective memory and community identity, regional culture offers students the opportunity to connect abstract knowledge with tangible cultural realities, fostering a deeper appreciation of their heritage and a stronger sense of belonging. More importantly, it serves as an implicit vehicle for value cultivation, enabling educators to guide students toward civic-mindedness, cultural confidence, and ethical reflection without relying on overt moral instruction [1].

Despite its educational potential, the integration of regional culture into general education curricula remains fragmented and often superficial. There is a lack of systematic approaches that align cultural content with the broader pedagogical goals of value shaping and intellectual growth. Against this background, this paper seeks to explore the following question: How can regional culture be effectively integrated into general education in Chinese universities to support both knowledge acquisition and value formation?

Received: 16 May 2025

Revised: 27 May 2025

Accepted: 10 June 2025

Published: 13 June 2025



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

By addressing this issue, the study aims to contribute to the development of a more holistic, culturally grounded, and ethically aware general education system.

## 2. The Educational Significance of Regional Culture

### 2.1. Key Characteristics of Regional Culture

Regional culture is a multifaceted concept shaped by long-standing historical developments and geographic uniqueness. It encompasses various elements such as local customs, dialects, folklore, traditional arts, architecture, festivals, and collective values. These components not only serve as important markers of cultural identity but also carry inherited wisdom and social norms that can be effectively utilized in education. Table 1 summarizes the key dimensions of regional culture along with concrete examples and their educational relevance. For instance, local customs like rituals and food traditions promote cultural awareness and intercultural respect, while historical narratives involving local heroes and folk legends encourage critical reflection and historical thinking. Artistic heritage, such as calligraphy and folk music, can stimulate students' aesthetic appreciation and creativity. Additionally, community practices, including ancestral worship and village governance, help cultivate collective memory and civic responsibility. Incorporating these cultural dimensions into general education enriches the curriculum and supports the implicit cultivation of values.

**Table 1.** Key Dimensions of Regional Culture and Their Educational Relevance.

Dimension	Examples	Educational Relevance
Local Customs	Rituals, food traditions, dress	Promote cultural awareness and intercultural respect
Historical Narratives	Local heroes, revolutionary events, folk legends	Encourage historical thinking and critical reflection
Artistic Heritage	Calligraphy, folk music, traditional crafts	Stimulate aesthetic appreciation and creativity
Community Practices	Village governance, ancestral worship, festivals	Cultivate collective memory and civic responsibility

### 2.2. Enhancing Cultural Identity and Belonging

By engaging with regional cultural content, students are exposed to the values and experiences embedded in their local communities. This fosters a deeper sense of cultural identity and emotional belonging. Such connection helps students develop self-awareness, pride in their heritage, and a meaningful understanding of their social environment. Especially for students studying far from home, reconnecting with regional narratives can support their psychological grounding and reduce feelings of alienation [2].

### 2.3. A Platform for Implicit Moral and Civic Education

Beyond cultural enrichment, regional culture plays an implicit yet powerful role in moral and civic education. Without explicit preaching, it conveys values such as diligence, perseverance, communal harmony, and respect for elders — values that align with the broader goals of civic education. When regional culture is meaningfully integrated into curriculum, it becomes a soft but effective channel for shaping students' ethical consciousness and social behavior.

For example, a local story about collective resistance against natural disasters may be used to illustrate themes of solidarity and public responsibility in a general education course on environmental ethics. Similarly, traditional crafts may offer a platform for discussions on intergenerational knowledge, patience, and the dignity of labor.

### 3. Current Challenges in Implementation

#### 3.1. Fragmented Curriculum Design and Weak Integration Mechanisms

One of the most pressing challenges in integrating regional culture into general education lies in the fragmented nature of curriculum design. In many universities, efforts to introduce regional cultural content are sporadic and disconnected, often implemented as isolated course units or one-time thematic lectures rather than as part of a cohesive pedagogical system. Without a clear framework or consistent learning outcomes, such content remains peripheral and fails to fully engage students in sustained cultural and moral reflection [3].

This fragmentation is further exacerbated by the absence of robust integration mechanisms. In most cases, there is no institutional strategy guiding the selection, development, and alignment of regional cultural materials with the overall goals of general education. As a result, regional content is frequently incorporated based on the personal interests or academic background of individual instructors rather than on systematic educational planning. This leads to wide variations in quality, relevance, and effectiveness across different courses and departments.

Moreover, curriculum developers often struggle to align regional cultural content with value-oriented educational objectives. Although regional culture holds implicit moral significance — such as promoting community solidarity, respect for tradition, and responsibility to others — these values are seldom made explicit in course design or instructional practice. In many cases, cultural materials are treated merely as background knowledge or supplementary content, rather than as a medium for cultivating students' ethical awareness and civic consciousness.

The lack of interdisciplinary coordination also contributes to this problem. Effective integration of regional culture into general education requires collaboration between scholars in history, literature, philosophy, education, and the arts. However, such cooperation is rarely institutionalized. Without cross-departmental dialogue and planning, it is difficult to create curricula that meaningfully connect cultural content with broader learning objectives such as critical thinking, value formation, and identity development.

#### 3.2. Faculty Constraints and Lack of Pedagogical Innovation

Another significant obstacle to the effective integration of regional culture into general education is the set of limitations faced by faculty members. In many universities, instructors responsible for teaching general education courses lack specialized training in regional cultural studies. Their academic backgrounds are often rooted in broad disciplines such as literature, philosophy, or political theory, with limited exposure to localized knowledge systems, folk traditions, or community-based cultural practices. This knowledge gap directly hinders the depth and authenticity with which regional content can be delivered.

In addition, many faculty members still operate within traditional pedagogical paradigms that prioritize content transmission over student-centered learning or value cultivation. Lectures remain the dominant mode of instruction, leaving little space for dialogic teaching, critical engagement, or experiential learning approaches that are better suited to conveying the lived meaning and ethical implications of regional culture. As a result, students are often passive recipients of information rather than active participants in cultural inquiry and moral reflection.

Furthermore, a notable deficiency lies in the faculty's capacity to guide students in value interpretation and ethical reasoning. While regional culture is rich in implicit moral themes — such as perseverance, communal responsibility, and respect for nature — these are rarely discussed explicitly in classroom settings. Many instructors lack the confidence, pedagogical tools, or institutional support to facilitate such discussions in a balanced and reflective manner. This limits the potential of regional content to function as a vehicle for implicit civic and moral education [4,5].

Finally, the absence of interdisciplinary collaboration and faculty development programs further constrains innovation. Effective teaching of regional culture requires coordinated efforts across fields such as anthropology, history, education, and the arts, yet such collaboration is seldom formalized. At the same time, most universities lack sustained training mechanisms to equip educators with both content expertise and innovative pedagogical strategies. Without targeted support, it is difficult for faculty to move beyond textbook knowledge and deliver transformative educational experiences grounded in regional culture.

### *3.3. Balancing Regional Identity with General Education Goals*

Integrating regional culture into general education presents an inherent tension between emphasizing local distinctiveness and aligning with broader national educational objectives. Universities face the challenge of highlighting unique regional characteristics without falling into the pitfalls of excessive localization or folklorization, which might limit students' understanding of their place within the larger national and global context.

From the perspective of value education, regional culture serves as a vital foundation for cultivating students' cultural confidence and identity. This aligns closely with the educational goal of fostering a sense of belonging to the Chinese nation and promoting socialist core values such as patriotism, social harmony, and responsibility. By thoughtfully incorporating regional cultural elements, educators can help students appreciate the diversity and richness of China's cultural landscape, while reinforcing the shared values that underpin national cohesion.

However, the transformation of local cultural content into universally relevant educational material requires careful curriculum design and ideological guidance. Regional culture should not be presented merely as static heritage or folkloric curiosity; rather, it must be connected to contemporary social values and national development goals. For instance, traditional stories emphasizing diligence, honesty, and community welfare can be framed within the broader discourse on civic virtue and social responsibility promoted in general education.

Furthermore, this integration process must avoid reinforcing stereotypes or narrow regional perspectives. Instead, it should promote critical thinking and encourage students to reflect on how regional identity intersects with national identity and global citizenship. This dual focus helps cultivate well-rounded individuals who are both proud of their local roots and committed to contributing positively to society at large.

In sum, balancing regional identity with general education goals involves a strategic blend of cultural heritage appreciation, moral education, and ideological alignment. Through this balance, regional culture becomes not only a source of knowledge but also a powerful medium for implicit moral education, helping students internalize values essential for personal development and social harmony.

## **4. Pathways for Integration into General Education**

The fundamental mission of education in Chinese universities is the cultivation of virtue and the development of well-rounded talents, often encapsulated by the concept of "Lide Shuren". This principle highlights moral education as a core objective alongside academic knowledge. Integrating regional culture into general education offers a vital avenue to fulfill this mission by providing rich cultural resources that support value formation and foster a strong sense of social responsibility among students.

One key pathway is to embed regional cultural themes into humanities and social science courses, where the content naturally aligns with discussions of ethics, history, and social values. Incorporating local narratives, customs, and traditions into literature and history curricula not only enriches students' cultural understanding but also reinforces

core values such as diligence, harmony, and respect. These courses can help students develop cultural confidence and a sense of belonging to their communities and the nation, while promoting moral qualities that are essential for personal and social development.

Another effective approach is the creation of interdisciplinary general education modules that combine regional culture with subjects like ethics, environmental studies, and civic education. Such modules can, for example, explore the relationship between traditional cultural practices and environmental stewardship, thereby linking heritage with contemporary social issues. Additionally, integrating moral education with regional history encourages students to critically reflect on the role of cultural heritage in shaping societal values and responsibilities. This interdisciplinary design fosters critical thinking and supports the holistic development of students as responsible and engaged citizens.

Interactive teaching methods also play a crucial role in deepening students' engagement with regional culture and values. Activities such as case discussions centered on local issues, student-led research projects on cultural topics, and community engagement initiatives provide experiential learning opportunities that move beyond passive content absorption. These methods encourage students to internalize values like social responsibility, respect for diversity, and commitment to the common good. By directly connecting with their cultural environment, students are better able to translate abstract principles into meaningful personal and social actions.

To ensure the success of these pathways, faculty development and institutional support are essential. Educators should receive targeted training to enhance their interdisciplinary teaching skills and capacity to guide value-oriented learning. Universities must also foster cross-departmental collaboration to design integrated curricula that align academic objectives with moral education goals. Assessment systems should be adapted to evaluate not only knowledge acquisition but also students' moral growth and cultural awareness.

The integration of regional culture into general education is a strategic approach to advance the educational mission of "Lide Shuren". Through thoughtful curriculum design, interdisciplinary innovation, and interactive pedagogy, regional culture becomes a dynamic resource that cultivates students' moral character, social responsibility, and cultural identity, ultimately contributing to the development of talents who are well-prepared to serve society.

## **5. The Implicit Value-Guiding Function of Curriculum**

Curriculum serves not only as a vehicle for knowledge transmission but also as a powerful, though often subtle, mechanism for value cultivation. Rather than relying on direct or dogmatic instruction, an implicit value-guiding function can be realized through carefully designed narratives, reflective activities, and immersive cultural experiences embedded within the curriculum. This "soft guidance" approach encourages students to internalize moral and social values in a natural and meaningful way, supporting the development of autonomous moral reasoning and heightened social awareness.

Narrative plays a central role in this process. Through stories drawn from regional history, literature, and cultural traditions, curricula can present values in context-rich and relatable ways. Narratives engage students emotionally and intellectually, fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of human experiences that shape community identity. Reflective practices such as journaling, discussions, and critical analysis further support students in connecting these narratives to their own values and social responsibilities. These reflections promote self-awareness and encourage students to actively negotiate their personal and societal roles in light of cultural heritage.

Cultural immersion within the curriculum — through exposure to local customs, arts, and community practices — provides experiential learning opportunities that reinforce the implicit transmission of values. Immersion allows students to experience the living aspects of culture, moving beyond abstract concepts to concrete, lived realities. This form



of engagement helps foster respect for diversity, a sense of belonging, and cultural confidence, all of which are essential components of responsible citizenship.

The role of "soft guidance" is especially important in fostering moral reasoning that is self-motivated rather than externally imposed. By embedding values within content and experience rather than explicitly instructing them, curricula empower students to internalize principles such as diligence, harmony, responsibility, and mutual respect. This approach aligns with broader educational goals that emphasize the cultivation of civic consciousness, empathy, and cultural confidence — qualities that prepare students to contribute thoughtfully and ethically to society.

Moreover, the implicit value-guiding function of curriculum complements formal ideological education by creating a learning environment where values are experienced and reflected upon organically. This subtle integration helps avoid resistance that may arise from overt moral instruction and encourages genuine personal engagement with core societal values.

The curriculum's implicit value-guiding function represents a critical dimension of holistic education. By leveraging narrative, reflection, and cultural immersion, it shapes students' moral compass and social awareness in a manner consistent with the overarching goals of cultivating responsible, empathetic, and culturally confident citizens. Such educational design not only enriches students' academic experience but also contributes to the sustainable development of society.

## 6. Conclusion

Integrating regional culture into general education in Chinese universities serves a dual function: it enriches academic content with distinctive cultural perspectives while simultaneously supporting the crucial task of value formation. This integration offers students not only a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage but also the opportunity to cultivate core virtues and social responsibilities aligned with broader educational goals.

To achieve these outcomes, coherent curricular planning is essential. General education programs must be designed thoughtfully to ensure regional cultural elements are meaningfully embedded, connecting knowledge acquisition with value cultivation. Equally important is strong institutional support, including policies that encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and prioritize moral education. Faculty development and teacher training play a vital role in equipping educators with the skills needed to facilitate culturally responsive teaching and guide value-oriented learning experiences effectively.

Looking ahead, further research is needed to explore best practices for curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment that maximize the educational potential of regional culture integration. Policy initiatives should aim to create sustainable models of general education that consistently reinforce cultural identity and moral development while adapting to the evolving needs of students and society. By fostering these efforts, Chinese universities can continue to fulfill their mission of "Lide Shuren", cultivating talents who are both academically competent and morally grounded, ready to contribute positively to their communities and the nation.

## References

1. X. Li and Y. Li, "Individualized and Innovation-Centered General Education in a Chinese STEM University," *Educ. Sci.*, vol. 13, no. 8, p. 846, 2023, doi: 10.3390/educsci13080846.
2. X. Ma, "New Regionalism in Action: The CAMPUS Asia Initiative and Its Role in Global Higher Education Governance from China's Perspective," *High Educ. Policy*, 2024, doi: 10.1057/s41307-024-00391-y.
3. K. Yan and Y. Zhang, "The tensions of general education reform in China," *Asia Pac. Educ. Rev.*, vol. 25, pp. 131–142, 2024, doi: 10.1007/s12564-022-09767-4.
4. R. Faragher et al., "Inclusive education in Asia: Insights from some country case studies," *J. Policy Pract. Intellect. Disabil.*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 23–35, 2021, doi: 10.1111/jppi.12369.

5. C. Xue, T. Yang, and M. Umair, "Approaches and Reforms in Undergraduate Education for Integration of Major and General Education: A Comparative Study among Teaching, Teaching—Research, and Research Universities in China," *Sustainability*, vol. 15, no. 2, p. 1251, 2023, doi: 10.3390/su15021251.

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of GBP and/or the editor(s). GBP and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.