

Original Paper

Methodological–Axiological Alignment for Cultural Heritage Education

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Abstract

Across the Asia-Pacific region, schools face a dual mandate: cultivating students' national cultural identity while developing globally competitive cross-disciplinary competencies. This article advances the concept of methodological–axiological alignment—a theorised distinction between the curriculum methodology a school borrows from an international framework and the locally determined values that methodology is made to serve. The concept is developed through a study of a four-year design-based research programme at a junior secondary school in a large city in western China, which used the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IB MYP) as an inquiry architecture while anchoring its value orientation in China's Core Competencies framework. Survey data from 1,077 students and 74 teachers were integrated with thematic analysis of four iterative design cycles (2021–2025). The findings document a demand–supply mismatch—strong student interest alongside limited teacher interdisciplinary design capacity—and elicit four conversion mechanisms whose process observations are consistent with cultural confidence development. The article offers a transferable analytical framework for global–local curriculum integration of relevance across Asia-Pacific systems navigating analogous tensions.

Keywords

Asia-Pacific education, Chinese cultural heritage, core competencies, design-based research, IB Middle Years Programme, interdisciplinary curriculum, methodological-axiological alignment

1. Introduction

Across the Asia-Pacific region, governments are pressing schools to cultivate students' national cultural identity while developing globally competitive interdisciplinary competencies (Deng & Luke, 2008; Tan, 2021). In China, this tension is sharpest in the 2022 Compulsory Education Curriculum Plan, which

requires at least 10% of each subject's instructional time for cross-disciplinary thematic learning (MOE, 2022), while the Educational Powerhouse Construction Programme (2024–2035) designates cultural confidence as a primary national value. How schools can embed mandated cultural content within genuinely interdisciplinary pedagogical structures—rather than appending heritage topics to single-subject lessons—has become a pressing design challenge, sharpened by regulatory re-nationalisation of international curriculum frameworks in China (Poole & Qin, 2024; Wu & Koh, 2023; Wright et al., 2022). This article's core innovation is the *methodological-axiological alignment* framework: a theorised distinction between the *methodology* a curriculum borrows from an international framework and the *values* that curriculum is designed to serve. The framework is developed through a research review of a four-year design-based research (DBR) programme in a large city in western China, which used the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IB MYP) as an inquiry architecture while anchoring its value orientation entirely in China's Core Competencies framework (MOE, 2016). In doing so, the article offers Asia-Pacific educators and researchers a transferable analytical tool for a configuration that recurs wherever national cultural mandates and global curriculum frameworks intersect.

Existing scholarship on Chinese cultural heritage education has predominantly treated this as a problem of content selection and delivery: identifying which classical texts, historical narratives, or civic values merit inclusion in the curriculum (Sun & Hu, 2019). This approach tends to treat heritage content as inert knowledge to be transmitted, overlooking a more fundamental challenge identified in Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital framework: cultural resources do not convert automatically into educational outcomes. Their transformation into genuine competencies, authentic cultural identification, and civic agency requires deliberate institutional mechanisms. Despite extensive scholarship on heritage content selection (Sun & Hu, 2019), the field offers limited guidance on the pedagogical mechanisms through which cultural resources might be converted into genuine competencies—particularly in interdisciplinary contexts where multiple subject epistemologies must be coordinated.

Three research questions organise this study: (RQ1) What characterises the demand-supply mismatch in current interdisciplinary cultural heritage education at junior secondary level? (RQ2) What curriculum mechanisms support cultural confidence development, and through what theoretical logic? (RQ3) What institutional conditions enable or constrain implementation? Although grounded in Chinese reform, these questions speak to a structural challenge across East Asian systems where national cultural mandates intersect with global curriculum frameworks (Deng & Luke, 2008; Tan, 2021).

We are explicit about this article's epistemic scope: as a single-site DBR review without a control group, pre-test, or validated outcome instruments, it builds theory and elicits mechanisms rather than testing causal claims. The review synthesises the programme's theoretical foundations, curriculum design architecture, embedded survey data from 1,077 students and 74 teachers, and qualitative observations from four implementation cycles, and offers an empirically grounded curriculum architecture that Asia-Pacific practitioners and researchers may adapt and test in their own contexts.

2. Synthesising the Literature

2.1 Cultural Capital Theory: From Reproduction to Activation

Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital theory has historically functioned diagnostically in curriculum studies (Apple, 1979; Reay, 2004). Affirmative extensions—Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth, Carter's (2003) account of non-dominant capital, funds-of-knowledge work (Zipin et al., 2015), and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017)—reframe non-dominant cultural knowledge as a generative curriculum resource that schooling typically fails to activate.

This affirmative-conversion literature, however, has developed almost exclusively in Western multicultural contexts addressing minoritised students. The configuration here is structurally different: Chinese cultural heritage is nationally dominant and policy-mandated yet pedagogically inaccessible in current instructional form—an analytically distinctive challenge we term the *cultural capital translation paradox*: heritage resources that students value are rendered opaque by their pedagogical delivery. Extending the affirmative-conversion framework to this majority-culture context is one of the article's theoretical contributions (cf. Lam, 2025).

2.2 Interdisciplinary Curriculum in Humanities Education: Evidence and Gaps

The interdisciplinary literature theorises integration along a continuum from multidisciplinary to transdisciplinary (Beane, 1997; Jacobs, 1989; Klein, 1990); Guo's (2014) Chinese adaptation positions the interdisciplinary level (preserving disciplinary depth while creating cross-disciplinary synthesis) as most appropriate for junior secondary schooling. Project-based learning (Krajcik & Shin, 2014; Xia, 2018, 2022) supplies the instructional architecture: concept-driven driving questions, authentic-audience products, disciplinary rigour.

Evidence is uneven: STEM contexts show reasonably robust interdisciplinary benefits (Krajcik & Shin, 2014), but humanities and cultural education remain thinner, dominated by descriptions rather than controlled comparisons (Zhong, 2023). Three structural barriers recur across Asian systems: subject-specialist teacher socialisation (Siskin & Little, 1995), timetabling constraints, and absence of accessible design frameworks (Lo, 2012; Tan, 2021).

2.3 International Curriculum Frameworks in Non-Western Contexts: The IB MYP Case

The IB MYP literature offers direct relevance. Doherty and Shield (2012) and Hayden and Thompson (2013) document IB adaptation as creative negotiation between programme fidelity and local sovereignty, while Wright and Lee (2014) detail East Asian implementation challenges. Critical perspectives are equally important: Bunnell (2010) argues that IB programmes carry implicit Western liberal-humanist values; Sriprakash et al. (2014) document IB-driven stratification in the Global South; Poole and Qin (2024) and Wu and Koh (2023) describe how Chinese regulatory tightening has pushed international schooling toward a 'cosmopolitan nationalism' (Wright et al., 2022) in which programme structures persist while value content is renegotiated. The synthesis finding (Wright & Lee, 2014) is that IB's methodological architecture transfers more readily than its value emphases—a distinction foundational to the alignment framework proposed here.

This review directly addresses Bunnell's (2010) critique by theorising how schools can adopt IB's methodological architecture while exercising local value sovereignty—a distinction we term *methodological-axiological alignment*. The following section elaborates this framework and its scope conditions.

2.4 Cultural Identity Development: Theoretical Resources for Heritage Education

Three developmental frameworks supply the design and evaluative vocabulary. Phinney's (1992) three-stage identity model traces movement from unexamined cultural acceptance through active search to secure achievement. Banks' (2004) curriculum integration model identifies four progressive levels (contributions, additive, transformative, social action). Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory holds that genuine learning involves shifts in meaning perspectives. Together they reframe the target outcome from heritage knowledge accumulation to transformed relationship with heritage.

3. Theoretical Framework: Methodological-Axiological Alignment

3.1 A Sequential Integration Logic

This review advances a framework—*methodological-axiological alignment*—that integrates three theoretical systems sequentially (see Figure 1). Bourdieu (1986) establishes the foundational premise that cultural resources require active institutional mechanisms. IB MYP's architecture (IBO, 2014, 2022) specifies the methodological conditions for interdisciplinary conversion: concept-driven inquiry, interdisciplinary unit design, authentic-audience products, and Approaches to Learning (ATL) skill development. China's Core Competencies framework (MOE, 2016), interpreted through Banks (2004), Mezirow (1991), and Phinney (1992), supplies value direction: not knowledge accumulation but transformed relationship with heritage.

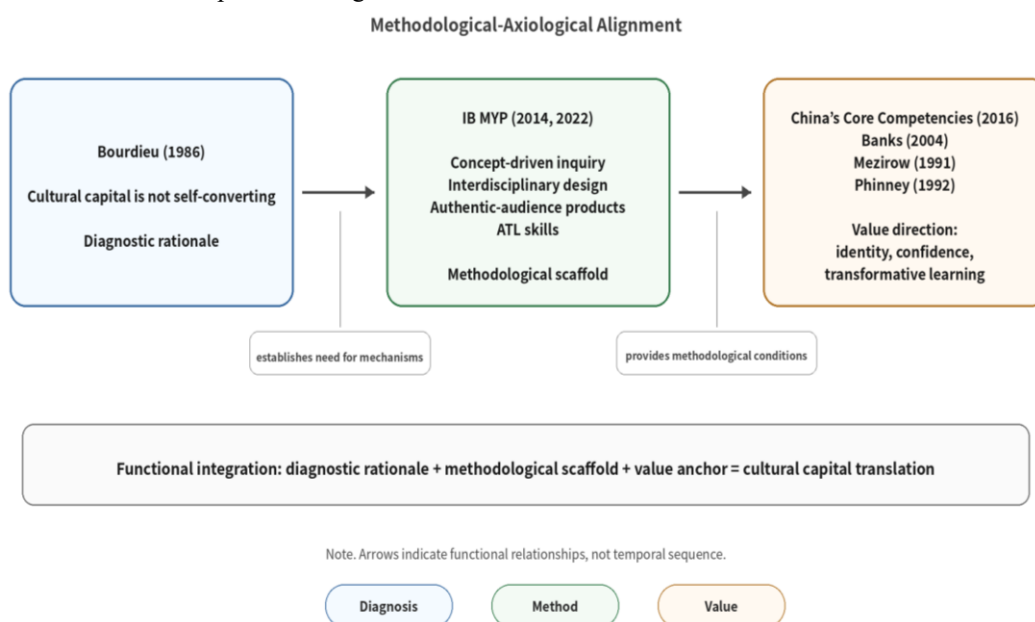


Figure 1. Integrative Model of Cultural Capital Translation through Interdisciplinary Curriculum

Note. The model shows a sequential integration logic: Bourdieu (1986) establishes the need for institutional mechanisms; IB MYP (IBO, 2014, 2022) provides methodological conditions; China's Core Competencies framework (MOE, 2016), interpreted through Banks (2004), Mezirow (1991), and Phinney (1992), supplies value direction. Arrows indicate functional relationships, not temporal sequence.

The alignment is not synthesis in the sense of blending frameworks into a unified whole; it is *functional integration*—each framework contributing what it does best: Bourdieu the diagnostic rationale; IB the methodological scaffold; Core Competencies the value anchor. Borrowing IB's methodology therefore does not entail importing its cultural-political values, directly addressing Bunnell's (2010) critique of Western liberal-humanist assumptions in non-Western educational settings.

3.2 Three Conversion Mechanisms and the Three-Step Model

The integrated framework generates three curriculum-level conversion mechanisms: (1) Cultural Coding and Pedagogisation makes implicit cultural values textually accessible through concept-driven driving questions (IB inquiry; Phinney's identity-search); (2) Value Reframing through Contemporary Dialogue creates conditions for personally held judgements about heritage relevance (Banks' transformative level; Mezirow's perspective transformation); and (3) Embodied Transmission through Authentic-Audience Products converts internal cultural understanding into publicly defensible civic action (IB's action and service; Banks' social-action level).

These three mechanisms correspond to the three-step Competency Activation–Cultural Internalisation–Confidence Growth model. Figure 2 shows how the mechanisms are operationalised in the curriculum's five-phase inquiry cycle.

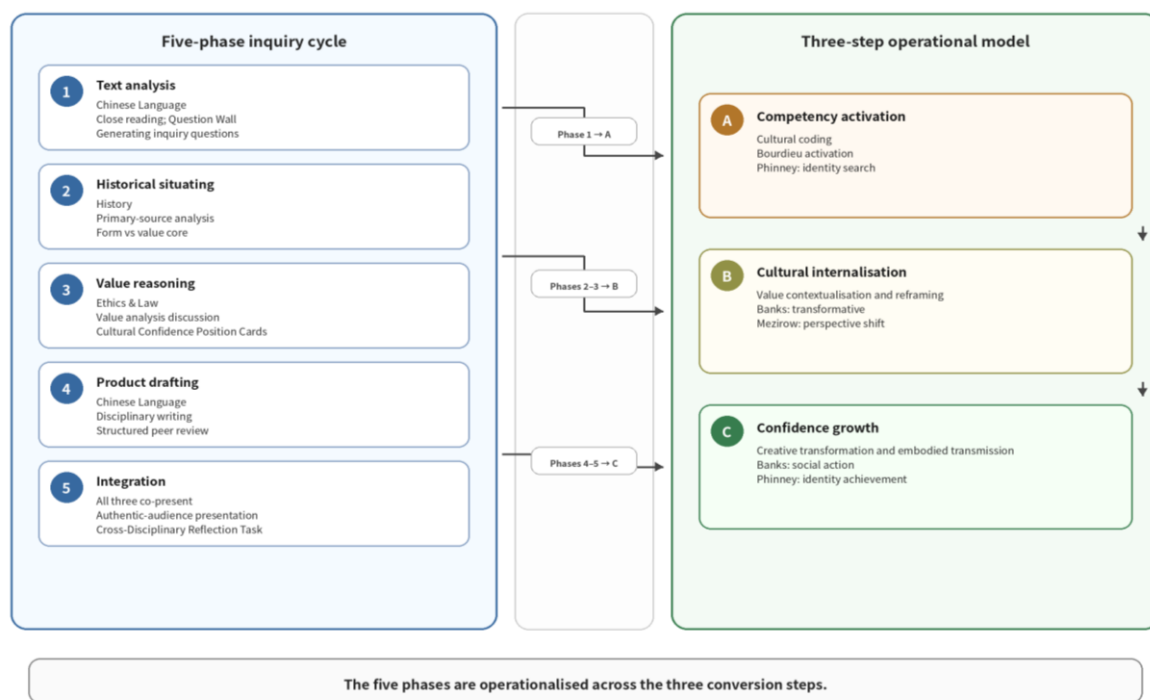


Figure 2. Mapping the Five-phase Inquiry Cycle onto the Three-step Operational Model

3.3 Scope Conditions for Methodological-Axiological Alignment

As a theoretical framework, *methodological-axiological alignment* requires scope conditions to be analytically useful. We theorise it as most viable when three conditions hold: (a) borrowed methodology and local values are not epistemologically contradictory; (b) the institution has sufficient capacity (research partnership, professional development, or sustained leadership) to maintain the methodology–value distinction; and (c) teachers develop sufficient collaborative capacity for interdisciplinary unit design. Table 1 positions the concept against related frameworks.

Table 1. Methodological-Axiological Alignment Compared to Related Concepts

Concept	Key theorist(s)	Focus	How M-A Alignment Differs
Glocalisation	Robertson (1995)	Global forms adapted to local markets	Names the deliberate method-borrowing / value-sovereignty logic explicitly
Vernacular globalisation	Appadurai (1996)	Local appropriation of global cultural flows	Prescriptive curriculum design principle, not descriptive cultural observation
Policy enactment	Ball et al. (2012)	How actors interpret and enact policy texts	Addresses curriculum design methodology, not policy translation dynamics
Curriculum adaptation	Deng & Luke (2008)	Contextual adjustment of curriculum content	Specifies a method/axiology split that adaptation does not require

Note. M-A = Methodological-Axiological.

The *methodological-axiological alignment* concept is analytically distinct from related frameworks (Table 1) in its explicit separation of borrowed methodology from locally determined values, enabling what Bunnell (2010) and Tarc and Beatty (2012) identify as problematic to become generative rather than colonising. The concept also has identifiable failure modes: where methodology and local values are epistemologically contradictory, alignment risks collapsing into methodological abandonment or value erosion; without institutional capacity, teachers may conflate methodological with value adoption; without collaborative capacity, the Three-Map Co-Design protocol risks becoming compliance ritual.

4. Methods

4.1 Research Design: Design-Based Research as Theory-Building

Epistemic Scope Declaration: This review builds theory and elicits mechanisms through single-site design-based research. Without a control group, pre-test, or validated outcome instruments, it does not test causal claims. The contribution is a theorised framework and curriculum architecture for adaptation

and testing in other contexts.

The curriculum was developed through four iterative DBR cycles (2021–2025) at a junior secondary school affiliated with a municipal institute of educational sciences in a large city in western China. DBR was selected (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; McKenney & Reeves, 2012) because the problem was both theoretically underdeveloped—no validated model for interdisciplinary humanistic heritage curriculum existed—and practically urgent, requiring guidance for the 2022 Curriculum Plan’s 10% interdisciplinary mandate. Each cycle followed Sandoval’s (2014) conjecture mapping (articulating conjectures, embodying them in features, tracing mediating processes, revising the model), constituting theory-building iteration (Penuel et al., 2011).

The study received institutional approval from the affiliated municipal institute of educational sciences. Teacher participation was voluntary with written consent; student survey participation was approved by school administration following standard practice for institutional educational research in China’s state school system.

4.2 Research Setting, Participants, and Data Sources

The primary case school serves approximately 1,400 students from mixed socioeconomic backgrounds in a peri-urban district. Four teachers (two in Chinese Language, one each in History and Ethics and Law) participated throughout all four cycles; a partner school in the same city’s high-tech development zone provided supplementary survey data. We acknowledge elite case bias: the institute affiliation provides external research support atypical of ordinary schools, limiting direct generalisability.

Survey participants comprised 1,077 students (Grade 7: 32.50%; Grade 8: 34.17%; Grade 9: 33.33%; female 51.53%) and 74 teachers (Chinese Language 74.32%; History 14.86%; Ethics and Law 10.81%). Surveys were administered in class during instructional time with response rates above 95% at both sites; social-desirability effects on attitudinal items remain a limitation on the descriptive percentages reported below. Qualitative data comprised 24 unit-planning documents, 18 collaborative session records (~36 hours), student portfolio artefacts from six units across three year-groups, teacher reflective journals from each cycle, and the affiliated institute’s curriculum review reports.

The student and teacher surveys (13 items each) capture four student constructs (heritage interest and value perception, learning barriers, learning preferences, cross-disciplinary receptivity) and four teacher constructs (current practice, implementation barriers and support needs, competency priorities, reform receptivity). Content validity was established by three subject specialists (88% inter-reviewer agreement). Cronbach’s α ranged 0.72–0.84 (student) and 0.68–0.81 (teacher); the instruments are not validated scales and results are descriptive rather than inferential. Qualitative analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis with dual coding (82% agreement for teacher documents; Cohen’s $\kappa = 0.79$ for portfolio artefact coding).

5. Findings: The Demand-Supply Mismatch

5.1 Student Demand: High Interest, Structural Barriers, and Identity-Search Orientation

Survey data reveal substantial cultural engagement alongside structural pedagogical barriers (Table 2). About three-quarters (74.75%) of students expressed positive interest in traditional cultural learning, and 90.25% identified cultural confidence enhancement as a perceived benefit, challenging deficit narratives. However, 51.62% reported classical text difficulty and 49.03% insufficient historical contextual understanding as primary barriers—both inherently interdisciplinary. A further 36.30% characterised learning as rote memorisation without flexible application, consistent with affirmative-conversion accounts of failed cultural-capital activation.

Table 2. Student Cultural Heritage Learning Demand and Barrier Indicators (N = 1,077)

Domain	Survey item	Case schools %	Partner school %
Interest and value	Positive interest in heritage learning (Q3)	74.75	68.20
	Perceived benefit: cultural confidence (Q12)	90.25	79.40
Cross-disciplinary interest	Interest in 3-subject integrated course (Q10)	88.21	—
Barriers (Q4; multi-select)	Classical text comprehension difficulty	51.62	—
	Insufficient historical context	49.03	—
	Rote memorisation without application	36.30	—
Preferred modalities (Q11)	Field-based learning (museums, heritage sites)	90.99	—
	Experiential / project-based learning	77.62	—

Note. Multi-select items sum to more than 100%. Partner school comparison data collected for overlapping items only. All figures are descriptive proportions; no inferential statistics are claimed.

The cross-disciplinary interest data are noteworthy: 88.21% expressed interest in integrated three-subject courses, and modality preferences (90.99% favouring field-based learning, 77.62% experiential learning) align with IB MYP's global-context and action-and-service principles. Interpreted through Phinney's (1992) identity development model, the overall pattern—high cultural value orientation alongside impeded access—is consistent with many students in the identity-search stage. The partner-school comparison (68.20% positive interest; 79.40% perceived confidence benefit) points in the same direction, suggesting the demand side of the mismatch is not an artefact specific to the case school.

5.2 Teacher Supply: Structural Capacity Gaps and Reform Readiness

The teacher data show a mirror-image structural problem: substantial reform readiness alongside capacity deficits (Table 3). Three barriers stood out: collaboration difficulties (70.27%), insufficient interdisciplinary design capacity (68.92%), timetabling constraints (66.22%). Although 79.73% already made some cross-disciplinary connections, only 24.32% had developed systematic patterns—the gap the

Three-Map Co-Design protocol was designed to address.

Table 3. Teacher Barriers, Support Needs, and Reform Receptivity (N = 74)

Category	Item	N	%
Implementation barriers (Q8)	Inter-subject collaboration difficulties	52	70.27
	Lack of interdisciplinary design capacity	51	68.92
	Timetabling constraints	49	66.22
	Insufficient resources and worked examples	45	60.81
Support needs (Q9)	Clear curriculum design framework and guidance	65	87.84
	Ready-made teaching resource library	56	75.68
Current practice (Q6)	Regular, established cross-disciplinary pattern	18	24.32
	Occasional but unsystematic connections	41	55.41
Reform receptivity (Q11)	Willing to trial 3-year progressive model	62	83.79

Note. Multi-select items sum to more than 100%. Comparable structural barriers are documented across Singapore and Hong Kong teacher studies (Lo, 2012; Tan, 2021), suggesting these may reflect broader East Asian teacher-culture features rather than China-specific conditions.

The 87.84% demand for a clear curriculum design framework, combined with 83.79% willingness to trial the three-year progressive model, characterises the teacher challenge as structural rather than dispositional, directly shaping the Three-Map Co-Design protocol.

6. Curriculum Design and Mechanism Analysis

6.1 Architecture: Three Years, Six Humanistic Inquiries

The curriculum organises three years of junior secondary education (Grades 7–9) around six escalating humanistic inquiries (Table 4), structured through the *methodological-axiological alignment* principle: IB's global contexts provide the inquiry architecture; the six inquiries themselves are grounded in the culturally specific progression from personal origins to civilisational responsibility.

Table 4. Six-Unit Curriculum Architecture: Humanistic Inquiry Sequence

Term	Unit	Inquiry	Driving Question (IB Debatable)	Product and Audience
Yr1 S1	Classics	Where do I	What can the ancients' choices offer	Annotated classics +
	Explored	come from?	me today?	school performance
Yr1 S2	Tracing Virtue	Who am I?	Does the junzi ideal still matter at	Virtues declaration +
			school?	showcase (parents)
Yr2 S1	Mountains & Waters	I and nature	Is ancient landscape mindfulness the same as modern stress relief?	Field study report + poetry anthology (library)

Yr2 S2	Rites Transform People	I and others	Should campus etiquette be rule or genuine feeling?	Etiquette proposal (school administrative review)
Yr3 S1	Family and Nation	I and my country	Were those who sacrificed compelled or genuinely willing?	Debate + individual speech (grade-level forum)
Yr3 S2	Flame of Inheritance	I and the future	Is there traditional wisdom you truly find useful—can you explain it?	Research report + graduation performance

Note. Year 3 Semester 2 runs eight lessons; all others six. Lesson allocation per unit: Chinese Language (2) + History (2) + Ethics and Law (1) + cross-disciplinary integration lesson with all three teachers co-present (1). Unit products form a cumulative Cultural Confidence Portfolio presented at the Grade 9 graduation ceremony.

Longitudinally, the sequence is designed to instantiate Banks' (2004) integration levels across the three years: Grade 7 units at contributions and additive levels, Grade 8 units inviting transformative-level engagement, Grade 9 units creating conditions for social-action-level cultural transmission. We use 'designed to' advisedly—whether students progress as intended is an empirical question that the cross-sectional artefact analysis cannot answer. The progression is theoretically coherent with Mezirow's (1991) transformative arc and Phinney's (1992) identity development model, and generates specific testable hypotheses for future longitudinal research.

6.2 The Five-Phase Inquiry Cycle: Mechanism Design

Each unit follows a five-phase cross-disciplinary cycle (Table 5) in which the three subjects serve functionally distinct epistemic roles: Chinese Language provides textual access; History provides historical contextualisation; Ethics and Law enables value reasoning. This functional differentiation embodies the subject-function differentiation mechanism.

Table 5. Five-Phase Cross-Disciplinary Inquiry Cycle with IB MYP and Theoretical Alignment

Phase	Disciplinary Lead	Core Activity	IB MYP Element	Conversion Mechanism
1. Text Analysis	Chinese Language	Close reading; generating inquiry questions; Question Wall	Concept-driven inquiry; ATL research	Cultural coding (Bourdieu activation; Phinney: search)
2. Historical Situating	History	Primary-source analysis; distinguishing form from value core	Factual and conceptual inquiry	Value contextualisation (historical epistemology)
3. Value Reasoning	Ethics & Law	Value analysis discussion; Cultural Confidence Position Cards	Debatable inquiry; global contexts	Value reframing (Banks: transformative; Mezirow)

4. Product Drafting	Chinese Language	Disciplinary structured peer review	writing; ATL communication and social skills		Creative transformation (Bourdieu conversion)
5. Integration	All three co-present	Authentic-audience presentation; Disciplinary Reflection Task	Cross-service; ATL self-management	Action and	Embodied transmission (Banks: social action; Phinney: achievement)

7. Illustrative Case: ‘Rites Transform People’ (Grade 8, Semester 2)

The ‘Rites Transform People’ unit illustrates the cycle in operation. Phase 1 (Chinese Language): close reading of selected passages from the Liji and Shijing identifies how ritual encodes both social order and emotional connection; inquiry questions populate the Question Wall. Phase 2 (History): students trace the arc from Western Zhou ritual systems through Spring–Autumn ‘ritual collapse’ to New Culture Movement critiques, distinguishing ritual’s historical form from its enduring value core. Phase 3 (Ethics and Law): a structured campus etiquette observation survey and value-analysis discussion address the driving question (‘Should campus etiquette be rule or genuine feeling?’); one Cultural Confidence Position Card read, ‘Bowling to teachers feels fake if forced—but the respect behind it is real and worth keeping; we should keep the heart, not the empty form.’ Phase 4 (Chinese Language): students draft a Campus Etiquette Initiative proposal. Phase 5 (all three co-present): groups present to the Deputy Principal for Student Affairs—an authentic audience with capacity to implement, transforming the educational act into cultural-civic agency at Banks’ (2004) social-action level.

7.1 The Three-Map Co-Design Protocol: Structural Response to Collaboration Barriers

The teacher collaboration barrier (70.27%) was addressed through the Three-Map Co-Design protocol, which localises IB MYP’s mandatory annual interdisciplinary unit requirement as a repeatable mechanism. Before each unit, the three subject teachers collaboratively produce (a) a concept-network map identifying shared conceptual nodes; (b) an activity-structure map sequencing the five phases with lesson-level tasks and explicit IB concept connections; and (c) an implementation-flow map coordinating teacher responsibilities. A shared written statement of the unit’s cultural-confidence goal and each subject’s functional contribution completes the protocol.

Thematic analysis of collaborative session records across four DBR cycles identified a consistent professional development trajectory: in Cycle 1, teachers struggled to articulate their subject’s functional contribution beyond ‘covering content’; by Cycle 4, all three could articulate their disciplinary function within the shared inquiry structure. One history teacher’s Cycle 4 reflection: ‘I used to think my job was to cover the historical facts. Now I see I’m providing the temporal depth that makes the classical text meaningful. The Chinese teacher opens the text, I situate it, and the Ethics teacher helps students decide what it means for them.’ With caution about social-desirability bias, this is consistent with Mezirow’s (1991) perspective transformation.

7.2 Portfolio Artefact Analysis: Process Observations

A corpus of 54 anchor artefacts (one per unit per participating class across three year-groups) was coded against the framework in Table 6, operationalising Banks' (2004) integration levels and Phinney's (1992) identity stages (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.79$).

Table 6. Artefact Coding Framework: Operationalising Banks (2004) and Phinney (1992)

Level (Banks / Phinney)	Observable textual features in student artefacts
Contributions / Unexamined	Describes cultural content; cites facts; little personal stance or critical analysis visible
Additive / Early search	Connects content across subjects; begins comparing past and present; tentative personal orientation
Transformative / Search	Reframes cultural value for contemporary context; weighs contemporary relevance; expresses personal position
Social action / Achievement	Articulates first-person commitment; proposes or enacts cultural transmission; defends heritage relevance to a public audience

Coding indicated a grade-consistent distribution: Grade 7 artefacts at contributions/additive levels; Grade 8 at additive/transformative; Grade 9 at transformative/social-action. One student wrote in their 'Flame of Inheritance' report: '礼的外在形式会变，但尊重他人的内核不会变。我们这代人要找到属于我们时代的表达方式。' [The external form of ritual changes, but the core of respecting others does not. Our generation must find expressions that belong to our era.] This exemplifies Banks' (2004) social-action level: personal commitment articulated alongside a culturally grounded contemporary proposal. Three qualifications apply. First, post-hoc pattern-matching against a chosen theoretical model carries confirmation-bias risk. Second, portfolio artefacts are public performances shaped by task demands and genre conventions, not validated measures of internal identity states. Third, the cross-sectional design cannot establish individual developmental trajectories. These patterns are consistent with the proposed model and generate testable hypotheses for longitudinal research; they do not demonstrate causality.

8. Discussion

8.1 The Cultural Capital Translation Paradox and Its Pedagogical Resolution

The most analytically significant pattern is the juxtaposition of high cultural interest (74.75%) with high structural barriers (51.62% text difficulty; 49.03% historical-context deficit). This configuration—which we term the *cultural capital translation paradox*—extends Zou's (2025) cultural distance paradox from higher education to compulsory schooling, articulating a dynamic that Yosso (2005) and the funds-of-knowledge tradition (Zipin et al., 2015) identify but have not theorised in majority-culture heritage contexts. Cultural resources that students value are rendered inaccessible by their delivery (linguistic

archaism, historical distance, rote-learning associations); the curriculum response—conceptual access via inquiry, contextualisation via subject-function differentiation, personal meaning via value reasoning—converts opacity into accessibility.

8.2 Methodological-Axiological Alignment: Contribution and Limitations

The *methodological-axiological alignment* concept advances the policy-borrowing literature (Deng & Luke, 2008; Tan, 2021) with a finer-grained account of how schools can mobilise international curriculum frameworks without surrendering local cultural-educational sovereignty. It responds to Bunnell's (2010) critique by specifying that wholesale programme adoption imports values while methodological borrowing need not, consistent with Doherty and Shield's (2012) account of IB adaptation and Lin's (2019) synthesis on IB methodology's greater transferability than its value emphases. The concept's limitations must equally be acknowledged. First, the three scope conditions are theoretically derived; which combinations prove necessary versus sufficient requires multi-site empirical investigation. Second, the concept is tested here in one pairing—IB methodology and Chinese core competency values—in one educational culture; whether it generalises to other global-local pairings is an open question. Third, the alignment-in-practice analysis relies on researcher accounts of curriculum documents and teacher reflections; independent observation would be required to validate classroom-level claims.

8.3 Authentic Audiences as Transformative Learning Catalysts

The authentic-audience mechanism connects directly to Mezirow's (1991) account of transformative learning as fundamentally communicative: perspective transformation is consolidated through discourse with others able to contest one's emerging meaning perspective. Reading the five-phase cycle against Mezirow's phases clarifies why Phase 5 is, in artefact analysis, associated with the strongest cultural-confidence expression: Phase 1 triggers the disorienting dilemma; Phases 2–3 enable critical self-examination; Phase 4 builds competence; Phase 5's institutional audience provides the communicative space for consolidation. The educational event becomes cultural-civic agency rather than assessment, aligning with Banks' (2004) social-action level.

8.4 Scalability: Structural Conditions and Modular Adaptation

The institutional conditions analysis points to elite case bias as the study's primary generalisability constraint. The Three-Map Co-Design protocol is the mechanism through which this constraint can be most plausibly relaxed for typical schools: it translates the collaboration requirement into a structured procedure (~2 hours per unit) that does not depend on a research partnership. With 87.84% of teachers needing a clear framework and 83.79% willing to trial the three-year model, modular adoption (one or two units per year using published plans as templates) is more feasible than the full sequence.

Paradoxically, the elite-site context enabled the development of the Three-Map Co-Design protocol as a low-resource, transferable procedure that does not require research-partner support—making the protocol testable in typical schools precisely because it was refined in a resource-rich setting. The institutional capacity that constrains the study's generalisability simultaneously made possible the methodological

artefact whose value lies in its independence from such capacity.

For policymakers implementing cross-disciplinary mandates—China’s 10% requirement (MOE, 2022) or similar Singaporean and Korean initiatives—mandate alone is insufficient. Effective implementation requires three supports: (1) protected co-planning time (the Three-Map Co-Design protocol requires ~2 hours per unit); (2) worked design templates that operationalise abstract frameworks; and (3) professional development focused on functional differentiation rather than parallel content coverage.

The framework speaks to a configuration recurring across Asia-Pacific systems. Singapore’s Character and Citizenship Education curriculum has long balanced global pedagogical methods with locally determined Confucian-inflected values (Tan, 2021); Hong Kong’s post-2020 reforms have re-centred Chinese cultural and national identity within existing pedagogical structures (Lam, 2025); South Korea is negotiating analogous tensions between IB-style competency frameworks and national heritage curricula. Methodological–axiological alignment offers an analytical vocabulary across these systems.

9. Conclusion

This review synthesises the theoretical foundations, survey evidence, design architecture, and preliminary implementation observations of a school-based interdisciplinary curriculum for Chinese cultural heritage education, from which three contributions emerge.

Theoretically, the *methodological-axiological alignment* concept—this article’s central innovation—provides an analytical tool for mobilising international curriculum frameworks without surrendering locally determined educational values, extending Bourdieu’s cultural capital framework toward affirmative conversion and articulating scope conditions that render the concept empirically testable. Methodologically, the Three-Map Co-Design protocol localises IB’s interdisciplinary unit requirement as a repeatable mechanism responsive to the 70.27% teacher collaboration barrier, while the five-phase cycle operationalises the conversion mechanisms in observable classroom activities. Practically, the six-unit humanistic inquiry sequence offers an adaptable architecture for junior secondary cultural heritage education across the Asia-Pacific region.

Two limitations are fundamental. First, this is an exploratory case study: without a control group, pre-test, or validated outcome instruments, no pattern can be causally attributed to the curriculum. Second, researcher involvement throughout design, implementation, and analysis creates confirmatory-interpretation risk that dual coding and member checking mitigated but did not eliminate. The two-school sample further means the percentages in Tables 2 and 3 are indicative of this context, not population estimates.

Three designs are needed to test effectiveness: quasi-experimental studies with matched comparison schools and pre-post validated instruments (H1: identity achievement; H2: interdisciplinary versus single-subject effects); multi-site implementation studies (H3: implementation fidelity and institutional maturity); and comparative case studies in Singapore, South Korea to assess cross-contextual generalisability.

For future expansion, a phased dissemination strategy is envisaged. Two to three schools within the same high-tech development zone would first pilot the curriculum, allowing the design to be tested across institutional contexts with varying research support. Following evaluation and refinement, the programme would extend to primary schools and other junior secondary schools, with longitudinal tracking of implementation fidelity and student outcomes. These plans depend on institutional support, ethical approvals, and partner-school collaboration.

9.1 Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

For the academic field, this review offers *methodological-axiological alignment* as a portable analytical lens that other researchers can apply—and challenge—wherever curriculum borrowing and national value mandates intersect. Because the scope conditions are stated explicitly, future studies can falsify or refine the concept rather than citing it as a label.

For practitioners, the article offers an adaptable architecture rather than a prescriptive programme. Schools can implement one or two units per year using published unit plans as templates, adapting driving questions and product audiences locally. The core design principles—concept-driven inquiry, subject-function differentiation, five-phase cycles, authentic-audience products—transfer across heritage content and educational systems; the Three-Map Co-Design protocol offers a low-cost entry point requiring no research partnership.

For policymakers, interdisciplinary mandates such as China's 10% requirement are more likely to be implemented with fidelity when accompanied by worked templates and protected co-planning time, consistent with the teacher-reported demand for 'a clear curriculum design framework' (87.84%, Table 3). Methodological-axiological alignment offers policymakers a vocabulary for distinguishing productive international curriculum borrowing from value-importing adoption (Poole & Qin, 2024; Wu & Koh, 2023).

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Appendix: Survey Instrument Construct Mapping

Table A1. Item-to-Construct Mapping for Student and Teacher Survey Instruments

Instrument	Construct	Items (of 13)
Student	Cultural heritage interest and value perception	3, 12
Student	Learning barriers (multi-select)	4
Student	Learning preferences (multi-select)	8, 11
Student	Cross-disciplinary receptivity	9, 10
Student	Knowledge self-assessment across three cultural domains	5, 6, 7
Teacher	Current instructional practice and frequency	3, 4, 5, 6
Teacher	Implementation barriers and support needs	7, 8, 9
Teacher	Competency-development priorities	10
Teacher	Reform receptivity and willingness	11, 12

Note. Items 1-2 in each instrument collected demographic data (student: grade, gender; teacher: grade taught, subject). The full survey instruments are available as supplementary materials from the author.