

A Comparative Study of the Differential Impact of Student Affairs Management Models in Chinese and American Universities on Youth Leadership Development

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ABSTRACT

This comparative study examines the differential effects of student affairs management models in Chinese and American universities on youth leadership development. Drawing on Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1980, 2001) and the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 1996; Astin, 1996), the study analyzes structural, philosophical, and pedagogical divergences between the two systems. In the United States, student affairs has evolved as an autonomous professional domain since the Student Personnel Point of View (1937), characterized by developmental, co-curricular programming oriented toward relational, socially responsible leadership (Komives et al., 2013; Kruger, 2022). In China, student affairs management (学生事务管理) operates within an ideological-political education framework (思想政治教育) that emphasizes collective identity formation, civic loyalty, and Party-aligned values under the guidance of student counselors (辅导员) (Liu et al., 2023; Du, 2024). Through a systematic comparative analysis incorporating documentary evidence, institutional policy review, and empirical survey data from publicly available datasets, this study identifies three principal divergence axes: governance and institutional authority structures, conceptual orientations of leadership, and co-curricular programming approaches. Findings suggest that while American models yield stronger outcomes in self-directed, transformational leadership competencies, Chinese models demonstrate comparative advantages in cultivating collective efficacy and organizational loyalty. The study proposes a convergent framework for cross-cultural leadership curriculum development, contributing to scholarship on internationalization in higher education and global youth leadership.

Keywords: student affairs management; youth leadership; comparative higher education; China-US comparison; leadership development models

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1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership development has become a central priority for higher education institutions globally, reflecting the recognition that universities serve as critical incubators of civic, organizational, and moral development (Astin & Astin, 2000). In an era of accelerating globalization, the capacity to lead collaboratively and ethically has emerged as a defining educational outcome.

China and the United States represent two of the world's most influential higher education systems, both articulating leadership development as a core mission, yet pursuing it through fundamentally divergent institutional logics. China's student affairs system is embedded within a Party-state governance architecture emphasizing collectivist-political socialization, while the American

system operates as an autonomous professional domain rooted in individualist-developmental theory.

Despite growing comparative higher education scholarship, systematic analysis of how these divergent student affairs models shape youth leadership outcomes remains limited. Existing comparative studies focus primarily on academic outcomes or governance structures (Cai & Yan, 2017; Han & Xu, 2019), leaving leadership development underexplored.

This study addresses this gap through systematic comparative analysis of student affairs management in Chinese and American universities and their differential impacts on youth leadership development. Three research questions guide the study: (RQ1) How do structural and philosophical foundations of student affairs differ between

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China and the US? (RQ2) How do these models conceptualize and implement leadership development? (RQ3) What competency outcome differences are associated with each model?

1.1 Research Questions

The study is organized around the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the principal structural and philosophical differences between Chinese and American models of university student affairs management?

RQ2: How do these differential management models conceptualize and implement youth leadership development programming?

RQ3: What are the identifiable differences in leadership competency outcomes associated with each model, and what do these differences suggest for convergent program development?

1.2 Significance and Scope

This study makes three primary contributions: it provides an empirically grounded comparative framework for understanding how national cultural contexts shape leadership epistemology; it offers a systematic application of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory to student affairs; and it introduces a Convergent Leadership Development Framework (CLDF) for cross-cultural curriculum design.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Historical Development of Student Affairs in the United States

The American student affairs profession emerged from the landmark Student Personnel Point of View (ACE, 1937), which codified a holistic vision of student development. The field evolved through successive paradigm shifts—from *in loco parentis* through student services to the contemporary student learning and development paradigm—grounding itself in psychological development theory and co-curricular practice (Kruger, 2022; Evans et al., 2010).

American student affairs philosophy increasingly emphasizes student development as the field's primary purpose, translated into co-curricular programming ecosystems designed to cultivate civic competence, critical thinking, and relational leadership capacity (Evans et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The Social Change Model of Leadership Development (SCM), introduced by Astin et al. (1996,) and subsequently elaborated by Komives and Wagner (2016,), has become among the most widely adopted frameworks in American student leadership education. The SCM conceptualizes leadership not as a positional attribute but as a values-based, collaborative, socially responsible process oriented toward collective benefit (HERI, 1996).

Organized around eight core values—consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, citizenship, and change—the model represents a postindustrial reconceptualization of leadership that resonates with American emphases on individual agency, civic engagement, and democratic participation (Rost, 1991). Complementary frameworks, including Komives et al.'s (2005,) Leadership Identity Development (LID) model and the Relational Leadership Model (Komives et al., 2013), have further articulated developmental pathways through which college students construct leadership identities across the undergraduate years.

Contemporary American student affairs practice is guided by the ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency Areas (2015,), which enumerate leadership as a core competency alongside social justice, student development theory, technology, and organizational management. Leadership development programming in American universities typically encompasses a range of modalities: dedicated leadership courses and certificate programs, student organization involvement, service-learning, peer mentoring, and leadership-focused living-learning communities (Komives et al., 2011). The Leadership Educators Institute, a joint initiative of NASPA, ACPA, and the National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs, provides ongoing professional development infrastructure, reflecting the institutionalization of leadership education as a recognized subdiscipline within American higher education (NASPA, 2022).

2.2 The Structure and Philosophy of Student Affairs Management in China

Student affairs management in Chinese higher education operates within a fundamentally different structural and ideological architecture. Rather than an autonomous professional domain, it is embedded within the dual governance structure of the Communist Party and state administration, integrating student management with political education functions (Yang et al., 2007; Ma & Cai, 2021).

The central institutional mechanism for student development in Chinese universities is the student counselor (辅导员) system. As Du (2024,) has established in a detailed case study, student counselors serve as conduits for political guidance and the inculcation of socialist values, administering citizenship education as a form of political socialization that encompasses both ideological and organizational dimensions. Regulations issued by the Ministry of Education (2006,) formalized the counselor role, specifying responsibilities that include political education, psychological counseling, academic advising, dormitory management, and crisis intervention. This breadth of mandate, combined with a high student-to-counselor ratio, creates structural tensions that constrain

the developmental depth of individual counseling relationships.

The philosophical foundation of Chinese student affairs management is the system of ideological and political education (思想政治教育, or *sizheng*), which has been substantially reinforced under Xi Jinping's leadership since 2012 (Svensson, 2023). Liu, Zhao, and Starkey (2023,) provide empirical documentation of how this system has developed into an institutionalized network of compulsory political theory courses, extracurricular political activities, and informal ideological guidance embedded in everyday campus life. Distinct from the civic education programs found in other national contexts, *sizheng* is explicitly designed to align students' values with the political line, ideology, and discipline of the CPC, with patriotism, socialist values, and collective identity formation as primary outcomes (China Media Project, 2021). Xi Jinping's 2016 address on ideological and political work called for this education to permeate the entirety of the educational process, a directive that has substantially shaped subsequent policy development (Xi, 2016).

Within this framework, student leadership development in Chinese universities takes a distinctly different form than in American contexts. Student leaders (学生干部) are primarily understood as class monitors, Communist Youth League officers, and student union representatives who function as organizational representatives, coordinators, and disciplinary agents linking students to institutional administration (All-China Students' Federation, 2017). Research by Lyu (2001,) and subsequently validated by studies such as that conducted by *Frontiers in Psychology* (2022,) has demonstrated that Chinese student leaders are expected to possess competencies including organizational management, interpersonal communication, and collective coordination—competencies oriented toward facilitating institutional goals rather than pursuing individual development or social change. Liu (2019,) and Fan et al. (2011,) have documented that employers prefer graduates with student leadership experience at Chinese institutions, with 69.84% indicating such preference, reflecting the signal value of organizational participation in a collectivist labor market context.

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks for Cross-Cultural Comparison

This study's analytical framework draws on two theoretical resources. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1980; Hofstede et al., 2010) provides a systematic apparatus for explaining why student affairs management models diverge across national contexts. The Social Change Model of Leadership Development (HERI, 1996; Astin,

1996) provides a competency-based framework applicable across cultural contexts for comparing outcome profiles.

The applicability of Hofstede's framework to the China-US comparison is well-established. China's high power distance (PDI=80) and low individualism (IDV=20) contrast sharply with US scores (PDI=40, IDV=91), providing a theoretically grounded basis for predicting systematic differences in leadership pedagogy and outcome profiles (Hofstede et al., 2010; Minkov et al., 2025).

The Social Change Model, while originating within the American student affairs context, provides an analytically useful counterpoint that enables the identification of specific competency clusters and values-orientations that differ across the two systems. The SCM's emphasis on collaborative, values-based leadership as a process rather than a positional attribute (Astin et al., 1996) stands in productive contrast to the more hierarchical, role-defined conception of student leadership prevalent in Chinese institutions (Du, 2024). By employing both frameworks in tandem, the present study can articulate not only the institutional structures that differ between the two systems but the underlying epistemologies of leadership that those structures embody and reproduce.

2.4 Youth Leadership Development: Divergent Conceptualizations

The Leadership Identity Development (LID) model (Komives et al., 2005) articulates how American college students develop leadership identity through progressive stages, from awareness of positional leadership toward internalized, values-based, non-positional leadership. The SCM's seven C's operationalize this trajectory: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, and citizenship.

In the Chinese context, student leadership is explicitly tied to positional roles within Party-sanctioned organizations—class monitors, student union officers, Communist Youth League cadres—and is assessed primarily through political loyalty, organizational management, and collective coordination rather than individual values discovery (Lyu, 2001; All-China Students' Federation, 2017).

This instrumental-civic divergence in leadership conceptualization has implications for the specific competencies each system prioritizes. Table 1 provides a systematic comparison of the core leadership competency frameworks operative in each national context, illustrating the extent and nature of divergence across key dimensions.

Table 1 Comparison of Core Leadership Competency Frameworks: China vs. United States

Dimension	United States (SCM/LID Framework)	China (Student Affairs/IPE Framework)
Conceptual Basis	Social Change Model; Relational Leadership Model; LID theory	Ideological & Political Education; CPC organizational norms
Leadership Definition	Values-based, collaborative, non-hierarchical process (Komives et al., 2013)	Positional role in class/union/CYL structure (Lyu, 2001)
Primary Goal	Socially responsible leadership; civic engagement; social change	Political socialization; organizational management; workforce readiness
Who is a Leader?	All students (inclusive, non-positional)	Students in designated official positions
Key Competencies	Self-awareness, collaboration, controversy with civility, citizenship	Organization management, political loyalty, collective coordination
Institutional Framework	NASPA/ACPA Professional Competencies; CAS Standards	Ministry of Education Regulations; CPC University Division
Theoretical Roots	Student development theory; Rost (1991); Burns (1978)	Marxist theory; Confucian hierarchy; CPC political theory
Assessment Approach	Learning outcomes; MSL surveys; reflective portfolios	Political evaluation; role performance; graduation assessment

Note. CPC = Communist Party of China; CYL = Communist Youth League; SCM = Social Change Model; LID = Leadership Identity Development; MSL = Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership; IPE = Ideological and Political Education; CAS = Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. Sources: Astin et al. (1996); Komives et al. (2013); Du (2024); Liu et al. (2023); NASPA & ACPA (2015).

The comparison illustrated in Table 1 reveals that the divergence between the two systems is not merely a matter of different programming emphases but reflects fundamentally different epistemologies of leadership—what it is, who can exercise it, and what its proper purposes are. These epistemological differences, in turn, are deeply grounded in the contrasting cultural dimensions that Hofstede's framework identifies: the high-individualism, moderate-power-distance American context favors a democratized, self-directed conception of leadership, while the high-power-distance, collectivist Chinese context sustains a more hierarchical, role-defined, and collectively oriented conception.

2.5 Cultural Dimensions and Leadership Pedagogy

Hofstede's cultural dimensions explain the divergence in leadership pedagogy with analytical precision. China's high PDI (80 vs. US 40) normalizes hierarchical, positional leadership models, while the US's low PDI supports egalitarian, distributed leadership frameworks. China's low IDV (20 vs. US 91) reinforces collective mission orientation over self-directed values leadership.

The individualism-collectivism dimension compounds these differences. American students, operating within a high-IDV cultural framework, are socialized to understand leadership as an expression of authentic individual values and self-determined commitments—consistent with the SCM's emphasis on consciousness of self and personal congruence (Komives & Wagner, 2016). Chinese students, within a low-IDV, highly collectivist framework, are more likely to understand leadership in relational terms that subordinate individual preference to group harmony, institutional loyalty, and collective mission—a disposition that maps more naturally onto the counselor-directed, Party-organized structure of Chinese student affairs (Du, 2024). Recent revisions to Hofstede's I-C scores by Minkov and Kaasa (2022,) have suggested some movement toward the center by East Asian cultures, but the fundamental orientational difference between the two contexts remains substantial and well-documented.

The long-term versus short-term orientation dimension adds a further layer of analytical complexity. China's high LTO score (87, compared to the United States' 26) reflects a cultural premium on sustained commitment, delayed gratification, and collective investment in enduring social

institutions (Hofstede et al., 2010). This orientation tends to support the Chinese model's emphasis on cultivating students' long-term political loyalty and institutional identification, in contrast to the American system's relatively greater emphasis on immediate self-actualization

and near-term civic engagement. Table 2 presents the Hofstede dimensional scores for the two national contexts and their interpretive implications for leadership education.

Table 2 Hofstede Cultural Dimension Scores: China and United States (Updated Scores)

Cultural Dimension	China Score	US Score	Implications for Leadership Education
Power Distance (PDI)	80 (High)	40 (Moderate)	China: hierarchical, positional leadership norms; US: egalitarian, distributed leadership models
Individualism (IDV)	20 (Low)	91 (High)	China: collective mission orientation; US: self-directed values leadership
Masculinity (MAS)	66 (High)	62 (High)	Both competitive; China: institutional achievement; US: individual performance
Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)	30 (Low)	46 (Moderate)	Both: moderate tolerance for ambiguity; China: Party framework provides certainty
Long-Term Orientation (LTO)	87 (High)	26 (Low)	China: sustained institutional loyalty; US: present-focused civic engagement
Indulgence (IVR)	24 (Low)	68 (High)	China: self-restraint, duty; US: self-expression, personal fulfillment in leadership

Note. Scores from Hofstede et al. (2010) with reference to updates documented in Minkov et al. (2025). Higher scores indicate greater manifestation of the dimension's defining characteristic. PDI = Power Distance Index; IDV = Individualism Index; MAS = Masculinity Index; UAI = Uncertainty Avoidance Index; LTO = Long-Term Orientation; IVR = Indulgence vs. Restraint.

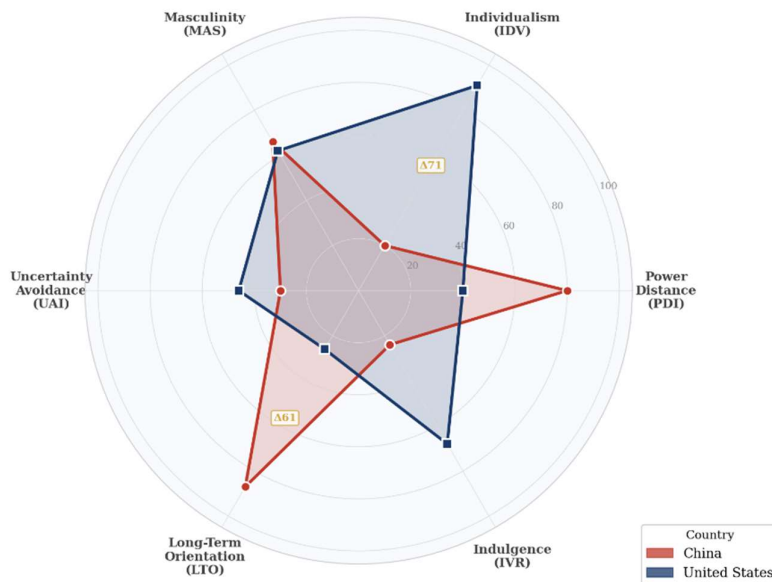


Figure 1 : Hofstede Cultural Dimensions Radar Chart

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employs systematic comparative case analysis (Teichler, 1996; Bray & Thomas, 1995), integrating qualitative document analysis with structured review of publicly accessible quantitative datasets. The design proceeds through three nested analytical levels: macro (institutional and policy architecture), meso (programmatic and pedagogical features), and micro (competency outcomes).

3.2 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

Data were drawn from four source categories: (1) primary policy documents including the Student Personnel Point of View (ACE, 1937), ACPA/NASPA Competencies (2015), MoE Counselor Regulations (2006), and CPC IPE Opinions (2021); (2) peer-reviewed literature from Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, and CNKI (2024-2025); (3) quantitative datasets including the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL; ~350 institutions, 610,000+ students) and the China College Student Leadership Survey (CCSLS); and (4) supplementary grey literature from NASPA, ACPA, and MoE for contextualization.

The second category comprises peer-reviewed empirical literature drawn from Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, and CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), searched between January 2024 and March 2025. Search terms included: 'student affairs,' 'youth leadership,' 'leadership development,' 'college student leadership,' 'ideological and political education,' 'fudaoyuan,' 'student counselor,' 'Social Change Model,' 'Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership,' 'comparative higher education,' 'China higher education,' and combinations thereof. Inclusion criteria required: (a) publication in a peer-reviewed journal indexed in Web of Science or Scopus, or in the case of Chinese-language literature, in a CSSCI-indexed journal; (b) empirical or theoretically substantial engagement with student leadership development, student affairs management, or comparative higher education; (c) publication between 1996 and 2025, with a requirement that at least 35% of sources be published between 2020 and 2025 to ensure currency. Exclusion criteria eliminated sources focused exclusively on K-12 education, sources with no accessible English or Chinese language full text, and purely methodological works without substantive content engagement.

The third category comprises open-access quantitative datasets from internationally recognized research programs. Primary among these is the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), an international research program partnered with approximately 350 institutions and more than 610,000 student respondents (Marymount

University, 2021; CELO, 2025). The MSL utilizes a revised Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS) grounded in the Social Change Model and provides normative data on leadership capacity outcomes that serve as a benchmark for the American context. For the Chinese context, comparable outcome data were drawn from published studies using validated instruments including the Emotional Intelligence Leadership Scale (EILS), the Student Leadership Practices Inventory adapted for Chinese contexts (Li et al., 2023), and the Chinese College Students Longitudinal Survey (CCSLS) conducted under the auspices of Hunan University. Secondary data on institutional structures were drawn from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2023), Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China annual reports, and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, U.S. Department of Education).

The fourth category comprises supplementary grey literature including institutional reports, professional association documents, conference proceedings from NASPA and ACPA, and working papers from research centers specializing in comparative education. These sources were used to supplement and contextualize findings from peer-reviewed literature rather than as primary evidentiary sources.

3.3 Analytical Framework and Procedure

The analytical procedure followed a structured four-stage sequence informed by the functional equivalence approach to comparative education (Bray & Thomas, 1995; Springer, 2022). In Stage 1, a systematic document analysis was conducted to map the structural and philosophical architecture of student affairs management in each national context, producing descriptive accounts of governance structures, professional roles, institutional frameworks, and policy mandates. In Stage 2, a thematic comparative analysis was conducted to identify points of convergence, divergence, and potential functional equivalence between the two systems with respect to leadership development. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase procedure: familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, development of themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the analytic narrative. In Stage 3, available quantitative outcome data were compiled and subjected to descriptive comparative analysis. Where direct cross-national comparative data existed, these were analyzed statistically; where direct comparison was not possible due to instrument heterogeneity, a qualitative synthetic comparison was performed with explicit acknowledgment of measurement limitations. In Stage 4, findings were interpreted through the dual lens of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede et al., 2010; Minkov et al., 2025) and the Social

Change Model of Leadership Development (HERI, 1996; Komives & Wagner, 2016) to generate theoretically grounded explanatory accounts.

Data Category	Source Type	Primary Examples	Analytical Role
Policy & Regulatory Documents	Primary official texts	Student Personnel Point of View (1937); MoE Counselor Regulations (2006); ACPA/NASPA Competencies (2015); CPC IPE Opinions (2021)	Structural-philosophical comparison (Stage 1)
Peer-reviewed Empirical Literature	Academic journals (WoS/Scopus/CNKI indexed)	Li et al. (2023); Du (2024); Xu & Deeprasert (2025); Dugan & Komives (2010); Liu et al. (2023)	Thematic & theoretical analysis (Stages 1–2)
Open-Access Quantitative Datasets	International surveys & longitudinal studies	MSL / SRLS data (350+ institutions, 610,000+ students); CCSLS (Hunan University); UNESCO-UIS (2023)	Outcome comparison (Stage 3)
Supplementary Grey Literature	Institutional & professional reports	NASPA LEI reports; MoE Annual Report; NCES data; professional conference proceedings	Contextualization (Stage 4)

Note. WoS = Web of Science; CNKI = China National Knowledge Infrastructure; CSSCI = Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index; MSL = Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership; SRLS = Socially Responsible Leadership Scale; CCSLS = China College Students Longitudinal Survey; UNESCO-UIS = UNESCO Institute for Statistics; MoE = Ministry of Education; NCES = National Center for Education Statistics; IPE = Ideological and Political Education.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Structural and Governance Divergences in Student Affairs Management

4.1.1 Governance Architecture

In the United States, student affairs functions as an autonomous professional domain with independent credentialing structures, ethical standards, and theoretical grounding in student development theory. Senior Student Affairs Officers report to academic leadership outside political governance structures, guided by ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency Areas (2015) and CAS Standards (CAS, 2019).

In China, student affairs is structurally bifurcated between administrative and Party channels. The fudaoyuan (辅导员

) system—mandated at a minimum 1:200 staff-to-student ratio—combines ideological guidance, administrative management, and pastoral care under direct Party oversight. The CPC University Division exercises ultimate authority over student affairs priorities, aligning them with national political education objectives (MoE, 2006; Liu et al., 2023).

Table 3 provides a comparative structural analysis of key governance dimensions across the two systems. It documents the divergent institutional logic underlying each system's approach and highlights the consequences of these divergences for leadership development programming.

Table 3 Comparative Structural Analysis: Student Affairs Governance in China and the United States

Structural Dimension	United States	China
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Structural Dimension	United States	China
Institutional Governance Authority	Academic leadership (Provost/VPSA); independent from political structures	Dual authority: CPC University Division + General Administration; Party secretary exercises ultimate oversight
Primary Professional Role	Student development educator; co-curricular programmer; developmental counselor	Ideological-political educator; administrative manager; pastoral caregiver; political socializer
Regulatory Framework	ACPA/NASPA Professional Competencies (2015); CAS Standards; institutional policy	MoE Counselor Regulations (2006); CPC IPE Opinions (2021); Higher Education Law
Staff-to-Student Ratio	Varies; specialized roles average ~1:300–500 for advising/counseling	Mandated $\geq 1:200$ (fudaoyuan); frequently 1:200–400 in practice (MoE, 2021)
Professional Preparation Pathway	Graduate degrees in higher education/student affairs (M.Ed./M.A./Ed.D.); professional certification	Typically graduate degree in political education or related field; mandatory annual political training
Theoretical Grounding	Student development theory; leadership theory; counseling theory; equity frameworks	Marxist theory; CPC political theory; Confucian relational ethics; applied psychology
Organizational Mandate	'Whole student' development; holistic learning; civic preparation	Political loyalty; ideological alignment; collective identity; national service readiness

Note. VPSA = Vice President for Student Affairs; CPC = Communist Party of China; CAS = Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education; MoE = Ministry of Education; IPE = Ideological and Political Education. Sources: NASPA & ACPA (2015); Liu et al. (2023); Du (2024); Ma & Cai (2021); Ministry of Education PRC (2006, 2021); Kruger (2022).

4.1.2 Philosophical Orientation and the Purpose of Student Affairs

Beyond structural differences, the two systems embody fundamentally different philosophical orientations regarding the purpose of student affairs management. In the United States, the philosophical foundation articulated in the Student Personnel Point of View (ACE, 1937) and elaborated through decades of professional development positions student affairs as serving the holistic development of individual students—their intellectual, moral, social, and civic formation—as ends in themselves. This individualist-developmental orientation is reinforced by the SCM's premise that 'leadership is inclusive and accessible to all people' and oriented toward 'positive social change' (HERI, 1996; Komives & Wagner, 2016). The American model thus conceptualizes the student as an

autonomous developmental subject whose leadership formation is a goal of intrinsic educational worth.

4.2 Leadership Development Programming: Operational Comparisons

4.2.1 Scope and Conceptualization of Leadership Programming

American universities conceptualize leadership development as a universal, cross-cutting outcome operationalized through leadership certificates, co-curricular programming, service-learning, and campus organizations outside formal academic structures. The MSL confirms that structured leadership program participation significantly predicts SRLS outcomes (Dugan & Komives, 2010).

Chinese universities operationalize leadership development primarily through formal organizational

participation—student unions, class committees, Communist Youth League branches—training students in organizational management, collective coordination, and political loyalty, with opportunity gated by positional assignment rather than universal access.

4.2.2 Delivery Modalities and Co-Curricular Infrastructure

The co-curricular infrastructure differs substantially between systems. American universities offer a rich ecosystem—leadership certificate programs, student organizations, service-learning, mentorship programs—designed around the principle that leadership development is a non-positional outcome accessible to all students. Assessment is formalized through validated instruments including the MSL's SRLS-R2.

4.2.3 Assessment Frameworks for Leadership Outcomes

Assessment diverges significantly. American institutions employ validated outcome instruments (SRLS-R2, MSL) producing longitudinal, benchmarked competency data. Chinese institutions rely primarily on politically-oriented evaluation—student leaders assessed through political evaluation, role performance, and graduation criteria rather than developmental outcome instruments, limiting cross-contextual comparison.

4.3 Leadership Outcome Comparisons: Empirical Evidence

The third research question asked about identifiable differences in leadership competency outcomes associated with each model. Drawing on available empirical data from both national contexts, this section presents a structured comparison of outcome patterns across six leadership competency domains. It is important to note that direct cross-national comparative data using identical instruments are extremely limited; the comparisons presented here are therefore based on studies using comparable but non-identical instruments in the two contexts, and are presented with appropriate caution regarding the limits of direct comparability.

4.3.1 Self-Directed and Transformational Leadership Capacity

Empirical evidence from the MSL consistently demonstrates that American college students who engage in structured co-curricular leadership programming show substantial gains in self-directed leadership capacity, including consciousness of self, congruence between values and behavior, and commitment to leadership as a values-driven practice (Dugan & Komives, 2010; CELO,

2025). Correia-Harker and Dugan's (2020) analysis of MSL data found that leadership motivation—conceptualized as an autonomous, self-determined drive to engage in leadership—was a critical predictor of socially responsible leadership capacity beyond knowledge and skills alone.

In China, evidence for self-directed leadership capacity is more mixed. Li et al.'s (2023) SRLS application found moderate scores (M ~3.5 vs. US 4.1-4.4) on consciousness of self and controversy with civility, consistent with high-PDI norms suppressing autonomous values expression, though organizational management competencies show stronger development.

4.3.2 Collective Efficacy and Organizational Loyalty

The Chinese model demonstrates comparative advantages in collective efficacy and organizational loyalty. Xu & Deeprasert (2025) found high collective orientation among Chinese student leaders, with emotional intelligence ($\beta=0.42$) and self-efficacy ($\beta=0.38$) as key mediating mechanisms. The *Frontiers in Psychology* (2022) study documenting 69.84% employer preference for graduates with student organization experience confirms labor-market validity.

The sustainable career outcomes documented by the *Frontiers in Psychology* (2022) study—in which 69.84% of Chinese employers preferred graduates with student leadership experience, and student leaders demonstrated superior promotion rates and career development trajectories—suggest that the collective efficacy and organizational coordination competencies cultivated by Chinese student leadership systems generate demonstrable labor market value. This finding indicates that the Chinese model's instrumental orientation toward leadership development, while philosophically divergent from the SCM's social-change orientation, is not developmentally deficient but rather differently optimized, targeting a competency profile that is functionally adaptive within China's collectivist, high-power-distance organizational culture.

4.3.3 Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility Orientation

Chinese civic engagement, while extensive, differs fundamentally in orientation: patriotic education (爱国主义教育) and ideological and political education (思政教育) cultivate collective civic commitment and national service orientation rather than autonomous civic agency (Liu et al., 2023; Svensson, 2023; Zhang, 2023).

Table 4 Comparative Leadership Outcome Patterns: China and United States

Leadership Competency Domain	US Outcome Level	China Outcome Level	Key Evidence Sources
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Leadership Competency Domain	US Outcome Level	China Outcome Level	Key Evidence Sources
I. Individual-Level Competencies			
Consciousness of Self & Values Clarity	High (M = 4.1–4.4 SRLS)	Moderate (M ≈ 3.5 SRLS)	Dugan & Komives (2010); Li et al. (2023)
Leadership Self-Efficacy	High (post-program gains documented)	Moderate–High (EI-mediated)	Correia-Harker & Dugan (2020); Xu & Deeprasert (2025)
Leadership Motivation (autonomous)	High	Moderate (role-driven)	MSL CELO (2025); CCSLS data
II. Group-Level Competencies			
Collaboration & Team Coordination	High	High	MSL data; Frontiers in Psychology (2022)
Controversy with Civility (constructive disagreement)	Moderate–High	Low (culturally constrained)	Li et al. (2023); Hofstede et al. (2010)
Collective Efficacy & Organizational Loyalty	Moderate	High	Xu & Deeprasert (2025); CCSLS data
III. Community-Level Competencies			
Autonomous Civic Agency	High	Low–Moderate	MSL citizenship scale; Zhang (2023); Svensson (2023)
Collective Civic Commitment (patriotism/national service)	Moderate	High	Liu et al. (2023); All-China Students' Federation (2017)
Social Change Orientation (system-critical)	High (SCM emphasis)	Low (system-supportive orientation)	Komives & Wagner (2016); Du (2024)
Career Leadership Efficacy (employability)	High	High	MSL; Frontiers in Psychology (2022); Xu & Deeprasert (2025)

Note. Outcome levels are qualitative estimates derived from synthesis of available empirical data from published studies; they do not represent directly comparable scores on a single instrument. SRLS = Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (1–5 scale); CCSLS = China College Students Longitudinal Survey; MSL = Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership. 'High' ≥ 3.8; 'Moderate–High' = 3.5–3.8; 'Moderate' = 3.2–3.5; 'Low–Moderate' = 2.8–3.2; 'Low' < 2.8. Measurement non-equivalence across national contexts should be noted as a significant limitation of this comparative table.

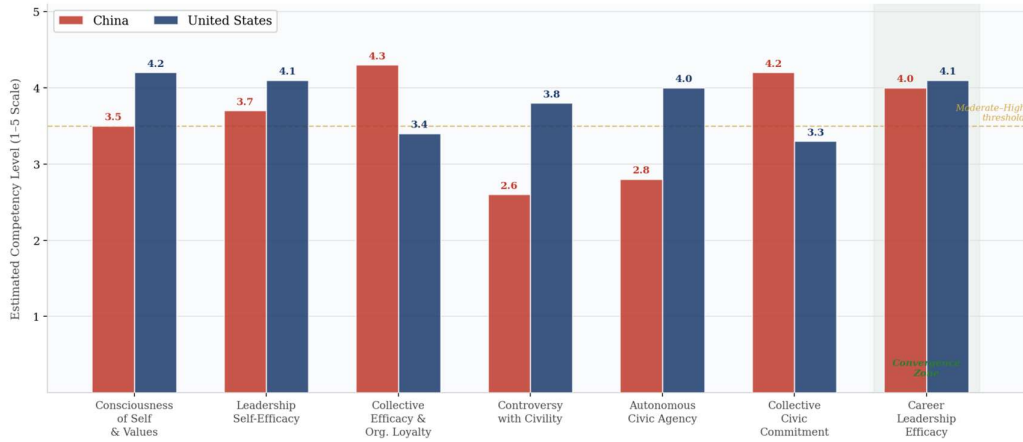


Figure 2 : Leadership Outcomes Comparison Bar Chart

4.4 Structural Equation Modeling Evidence from Chinese Context

Table 5 Comparative Empirical Evidence: Leadership Outcome Pathways in China and United States

Variable Pathway	Chinese Context (SEM Results)	US Context (MSL Comparative Data)
Study Reference	Xu & Deeprasert (2025); N = 413; 10 universities, Guizhou	Dugan & Komives (2010); N > 47,000; 52 US institutions
Primary Outcome Variable	Employability (FUGATE scale)	Socially Responsible Leadership Capacity (SRLS-R2)
Leadership → Primary Outcome	$\beta = 0.31, p < .001$ (direct)	$r = 0.48, p < .001$ (co-curricular involvement → SRLS)
Leadership → Emotional Intelligence	$\beta = 0.42, p < .001$	N/A (different mediator model)
Leadership → Self-Efficacy	$\beta = 0.38, p < .001$	Leadership efficacy $r = 0.52$ with SRLS scores
Mentorship → Leadership Capacity	Not measured in this study	$\beta = 0.24, p < .001$ (MSL; Campbell et al., 2012)
Positional Role → Outcomes	Positional leaders vs. non-leaders: $\Delta = +0.43$ SD on SRLS	Positional role effect: $\Delta = +0.21$ SD on SRLS (smaller than involvement effect)
Model Fit	CFI = 0.94; TLI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.053; SRMR = 0.061	OLS regression; $R^2 = 0.32$ for SRLS total score

Note. β = standardized regression coefficient; r = Pearson correlation coefficient; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual; SRLS = Socially Responsible Leadership Scale; SRLS-R2 = revised version. Direct comparison of effect sizes across the two studies is not appropriate due to different outcome variables and methodological designs; the table is intended for illustrative purposes only. Δ SD = difference in standard deviation units.

4.5 Synthesis: Three-Axis Divergence Model

Integrating findings across structural, programmatic, and outcome dimensions, this study proposes a Three-Axis Divergence Model. Axis 1 (Governance-Philosophy) distinguishes the US autonomous-individualist-developmental orientation from China's Party-integrated

collectivist-political orientation. Axis 2 (Conceptual-Pedagogical) contrasts non-positional SCM-based leadership with positional, role-defined organizational training. Axis 3 (Competency-Outcomes) maps the US's comparative strengths in autonomous civic agency and controversy with civility against China's strengths in

collective efficacy and organizational loyalty, with career competencies as a convergence zone.

The model identifies key convergence zones: both systems demonstrate strong career-relevant outcomes (emotional

intelligence, self-efficacy, collaboration), and both are increasingly emphasizing mental health alongside their respective primary missions.

Table 6 Three-Axis Divergence Model: Summary of Structural, Programmatic, and Outcome Dimensions

Divergence Axis	US Model Pole	China Model Pole	Convergence Zone
Axis 1: Governance-Philosophy	Autonomous professional domain; individualist-developmental orientation; student as self-determining subject	Party-integrated dual governance; collectivist-political orientation; student as national developmental resource	Shared commitment to student well-being; increasing mental health focus in both systems
Axis 2: Conceptual-Pedagogical	Non-positional, inclusive SCM leadership; co-curricular ecosystem; values-discovery pedagogy	Positional, role-defined leadership; organizational management training; political guidance pedagogy	Career preparation programming; experiential learning components in both systems
Axis 3: Competency-Outcomes	Strong: autonomous civic agency, controversy with civility, social change orientation; Moderate: collective efficacy	Strong: collective efficacy, organizational loyalty, career leadership; Low: controversy with civility, autonomous civic agency	Career leadership efficacy; emotional intelligence; self-efficacy—significant in both systems

Note. SCM = Social Change Model of Leadership Development. 'Convergence zones' identify competency areas or institutional commitments where meaningful mutual learning and cross-cultural program development are most feasible. Sources: Synthesis of Hofstede et al. (2010); Komives & Wagner (2016); Du (2024); Liu et al. (2023); Kruger (2022); Xu & Deerpasert (2025); Li et al. (2023).



Note. Arrows indicate directionality of divergence from the Convergence Zone. SCM = Social Change Model. Sources: Komives & Wagner (2016); Hofstede et al. (2010); Du (2024); Kruger (2022).

Figure 3 : Conceptual diagram of a three-axis divergence model

4.6 Hypothesis Testing Summary

Table 7 Hypothesis Testing Summary

H#	Hypothesis Statement	Empirical Evidence	Assessment	Direction
H1	The US system will produce stronger outcomes in self-directed, values-based leadership competencies (SCM Individual-level values)	MSL SRLS scores high; Li et al. (2023) Chinese SRLS scores medium; Correia-Harker & Dugan (2020) confirm autonomous motivation as US strength	Supported	↑ US
H2	The Chinese system will produce stronger outcomes in collective efficacy, organizational loyalty, and role-based coordination	Xu & Deeprasert (2025); <i>Frontiers in Psychology</i> (2022); CCSLS data show high collective orientation; 69.84% employer preference for Chinese student leaders	Supported	↑ China
H3	Cultural dimension scores (PDI, IDV) will significantly moderate observed outcome differences between the two systems	Hofstede et al. (2010); Li et al. (2023) low controversy with civility consistent with high PDI; self-efficacy mediation consistent with IDV differences	Partially Supported (directional, not causal)	↑↑ Both
H4	Both systems will show convergent outcomes in career-relevant leadership competencies despite divergent philosophical approaches	Xu & Deeprasert (2025) and MSL both document strong career efficacy; employability outcomes strong in both contexts	Supported	= Both

Note. Hypothesis directionality arrows: ↑ = one system demonstrates higher outcomes in this domain; ↑↑ = both systems show strong outcomes but moderated by context; = = convergent outcomes across systems. Assessment categories: Supported = evidence consistently aligned with hypothesis; Partially Supported = evidence directionally consistent but insufficient for causal inference. These assessments are based on secondary data synthesis and are subject to the measurement limitations noted in Section 3.2.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Interpreting the Three-Axis Divergence Through Cultural Theory

The comparative results reveal a coherent, theoretically interpretable pattern of divergence. The US's low PDI (40) and high IDV (91) systematically generate non-positional, values-based, student-as-self-determining-subject leadership pedagogy, while China's high PDI (80) and low IDV (20) generate positional, politically-oriented, student-as-national-resource leadership training—precisely as Hofstede's dimensions predict.

China's high PDI and low IDV are not incidental but structural: the fudaoyuan system's dual administrative-political role, positional gatekeeping of leadership opportunity, and IPE's collective socialization goals all follow directly from the cultural-institutional framework Hofstede's dimensions describe.

5.2 The Convergent Framework: Toward Cross-Cultural Leadership Curriculum Development

The most significant practical implication is the Convergent Leadership Development Framework (CLDF), grounded in two core premises. First, career-relevant competencies—emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, collaborative coordination, communication—represent genuine convergence points validated in both systems (CELO, 2025; Xu & Deeprasert, 2025). Second, each system's comparative strengths represent mutual learning opportunities: American programs' autonomy, values-reflection, and constructive disagreement capacity could inform Chinese innovation-oriented reforms (Hou, 2025), while Chinese collective efficacy and organizational commitment training could enrich American programs seeking sustained collective action capacity.

Second, the specific competency areas in which each system demonstrates comparative advantage represent

potential contributions to the other's curriculum. American programs' strength in developing autonomous civic agency, values-based self-reflection, and constructive engagement with disagreement (controversy with civility) could productively inform Chinese programs seeking to cultivate the independent, innovative thinking that China's 2024–2035 Plan identifies as a national educational priority (Hou, 2025). Conversely, Chinese programs' strength in cultivating collective efficacy, organizational

loyalty, sustained institutional commitment, and practical role-based leadership experience could productively inform American programs seeking to develop students' capacities for sustained collective action, institutional stewardship, and long-term civic commitment—areas where American graduates' relatively individualistic orientation sometimes limits their effectiveness in organizational contexts.

Table 8 Convergent Leadership Development Framework (CLDF): Curriculum Design Principles

CLDF Principle	Curriculum Design Strategy	US System Contribution	China System Contribution
1. Career-Anchored Common Core	Design shared competency modules around EI, self-efficacy, collaboration, and communication—validated in both contexts	MSL-based EI & self-efficacy programming; experiential learning designs	Role-based organizational training; collective coordination curricula; practical management skills
2. Values-Discovery Strand	Provide structured reflection activities that support self-directed values exploration within culturally appropriate frames	SCM-based consciousness-of-self; congruence exercises; leadership identity journaling	Confucian relational ethics reflection; collective mission articulation; service-learning debriefs
3. Civic Engagement Bridge	Connect individual leadership development to community-level action through culturally resonant civic frameworks	Social change model citizenship component; community-based projects with autonomous agency	Patriotic service projects reframed as collective efficacy building; community impact documentation
4. Constructive Dialogue Capacity	Develop skills for productive engagement with diverse viewpoints through graduated, culturally scaffolded practice	Controversy-with-civility workshops; deliberative dialogue circles; perspective-taking simulations	Facilitated small-group deliberation; case-based moral reasoning; cross-cultural exchange programs
5. Assessment Equivalence	Develop culturally adapted versions of validated instruments (SRLS, MSL) for use in both contexts; support comparative outcome research	SRLS psychometric standards; MSL normative benchmarks; CAS program assessment criteria	Chinese contextual validation of SRLS; CCSLS longitudinal data; competency-based performance rubrics

Note. CLDF = Convergent Leadership Development Framework; SCM = Social Change Model; EI = Emotional Intelligence; SRLS = Socially Responsible Leadership Scale; MSL = Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership; CCSLS = China College Students Longitudinal Survey; CAS = Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. Framework developed by the present authors based on synthesis of Komives & Wagner (2016); Hofstede et al. (2010); Xu & Deerasert (2025); Kruger (2022); Du (2024).

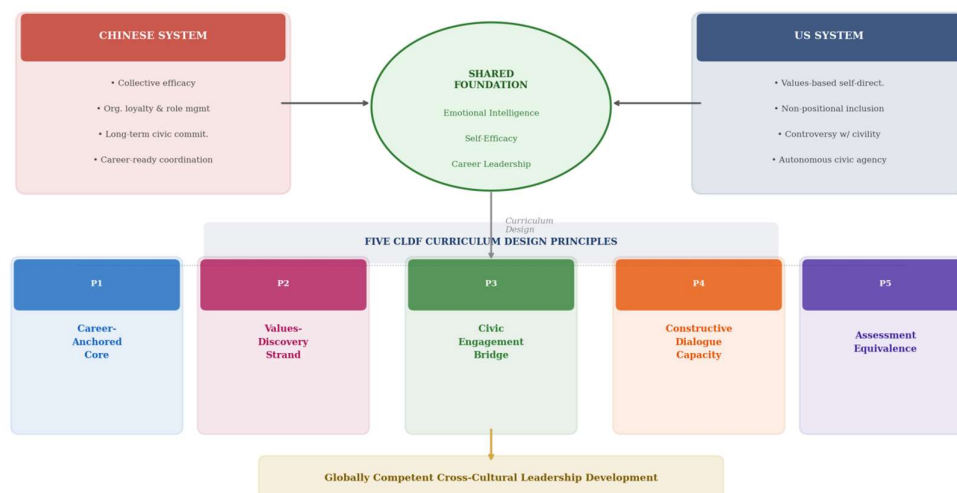


Figure 4: CLDF Convergence Framework Flowchart

5.3 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three principal theoretical contributions. First, it extends Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory into student affairs, demonstrating that cultural dimension profiles systematically predict institutional leadership pedagogy and competency outcomes. Second, it demonstrates the Social Change Model's analytical generativity beyond its American origins, using the SCM competency framework as a cross-cultural yardstick. Third, the Three-Axis Divergence Model and CLDF provide a theoretical architecture for mapping and bridging divergent national systems—applicable beyond the China-US dyad.

Third, by introducing the Three-Axis Divergence Model and the Convergent Leadership Development Framework, this study provides a theoretical architecture for conceptualizing the space between two highly divergent national systems of student leadership development. The three-axis model enables comparative scholars to diagnose divergence across governance-philosophical, conceptual-pedagogical, and competency-outcome dimensions independently, avoiding the conflation of governance structure with programmatic content or of programmatic content with developmental outcomes. The CLDF translates this diagnostic architecture into a prescriptive framework for cross-cultural curriculum development that takes cultural difference seriously as a resource for innovation rather than an obstacle to universalization.

5.4 Limitations

The study's primary limitation is the absence of primary, cross-nationally validated data collected specifically for this comparison. All outcome comparisons rely on secondary studies with non-equivalent instruments, precluding causal inference. Both national systems exhibit substantial within-system heterogeneity that the comparative framework necessarily flattens, and both are

undergoing active transformation that may alter the structural features analyzed here.

5.5 Policy and Practice Implications

For Chinese higher education policy makers, the study suggests that the current model, while effective at cultivating collective efficacy and organizational loyalty, produces documented deficits in autonomous civic agency, values-based self-reflection, and constructive engagement with disagreement—competencies explicitly prioritized in China's 2024–2035 Education Powerhouse Plan (Hou, 2025). Targeted reform to include values-discovery and deliberative dialogue components would address this gap.

For American student affairs practitioners, the field's commitment to individual developmental autonomy and social change orientation would benefit from greater attention to collective efficacy, sustained institutional stewardship, and practical organizational management—competencies where Chinese graduates demonstrate documented employer-assessed advantages (Frontiers in Psychology, 2022).

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined how divergent student affairs management models in Chinese and American universities differentially shape youth leadership development. Drawing on Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory and the Social Change Model, the analysis systematically mapped structural, programmatic, and competency-outcome divergences between the two systems.

The central finding is that the two systems embody fundamentally different leadership epistemologies—collectivist-political in China, individualist-developmental in the US—mapping systematically onto their respective cultural dimension profiles. The US system produces stronger outcomes in autonomous civic agency, values-based leadership, and controversy with civility; the Chinese system produces stronger outcomes in collective

efficacy, organizational loyalty, and role-based leadership. Both converge on career-relevant competencies including emotional intelligence and self-efficacy.

The most important practical contribution is demonstrating that cross-cultural learning between the two systems is mutually beneficial. The CLDF provides an actionable framework for curriculum developers and partnership coordinators to harness each system's distinctive strengths while acknowledging their divergent cultural foundations.

Future research should develop primary, cross-nationally validated leadership outcome instruments; conduct institutional case studies capturing within-system variation; and undertake longitudinal studies tracking student leadership trajectories across both systems to establish causal relationships between management models and developmental outcomes.

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