

Value reconstruction and ideological and political integration of the organizational behavior course from a Sino-Western comparative perspective

Shanshan YUAN

South China Business College, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou 510420, China

Abstract: This study conducts a comparative analysis of two seminal organizational behavior (OB) textbooks—a Marxist-oriented Chinese edition and the widely adopted Western text by Robbins and Judge—focusing on their theoretical foundations, core frameworks, key theories, and value orientations. Findings reveal that while both employ an "individual-group-organization" framework, the Chinese text emphasizes Marxist methodology and contextual adaptation, whereas the Western text prioritizes empirical logic and purported universality. Building on this analysis, the paper proposes a four-dimensional pathway for curricular value reconstruction (theory-value-practice-technology) and designs a closed-loop integration mechanism. This mechanism incorporates explicit, implicit strategies. The research aims to inform an OB education that cultivates management talent with both international perspectives and local problem-solving capabilities.

Keywords: organizational behavior; Sino-Western textbook comparison; value reconstruction; ideological-political integration

1 Introduction

As a core course in management education, organizational behavior (OB) investigates behavioral patterns at individual, group, and organizational levels. Consequently, it bears the dual mission of uncovering scientific principles while shaping students' values and governance competencies. This mission is particularly urgent in light of China's initiative to integrate ideological-political education across curricula. For OB—an inherently practical and value-laden discipline, this necessitates harmonizing international knowledge with local relevance, and blending knowledge transmission with value guidance.

Globalization has facilitated the dissemination of Western OB theories, thereby enriching teaching practices in Chinese universities. However, China's unique social system and developmental trajectory have fostered distinct organizational practices, resulting in a disconnect that necessitates the OB curriculum to engage deeply with local realities. Current OB teaching in China is predominantly shaped by two textbook types: a Marxist-oriented text that frames OB through a Marxist lens, hereinafter referred to as Marxist OB textbook and the canonical Western text by Robbins and Judge (authorized reprint edition of China Renmin University Press, hereinafter referred to as Robbins textbook), grounded in empirical research. Their concurrent use exposes pedagogical dilemmas. First, a lack of nuanced comparison between their theoretical underpinnings can lead to instructional extremes: uncritically adopting Western frameworks or

overemphasizing local particularity. Second, ideological-political integration often remains superficial, reduced to "tagging" content rather than achieving organic synthesis.

To address these challenges, this study provides a detailed comparative analysis of the two textbooks. Based on this, it proposes a pathway for curricular value reconstruction centered on a "theory-value-practice-technology" framework and a corresponding closed-loop integration mechanism.

2 Comparative analysis: Marxist OB textbook vs. Robbins textbook

2.1 Theoretical foundation: Marxist methodology vs. Positivist logic

The two textbooks diverge fundamentally in their theoretical roots. Marxist OB textbook is grounded in Marxist dialectical and historical materialism [1]. It presents organizational behavior as a unity of material reality and consciousness, governed by objective laws knowable through practice. It emphasizes the dialectical relationship where individuals are influenced by, yet can transform, their environment. Historical materialism situates organizational behavior within specific socio-historical contexts, defining human nature as "the sum of social relations". This gives rise to a Marxist theory of human needs, characterizing them as hierarchical (subsistence, enjoyment, development) and socio-historical. Consequently, the textbook applies a people-centered philosophy, focusing on the coordinated development of organizations and individuals. For example, its analysis of organizational change explores the intrinsic links to social development stages and institutional environments, using China's state-owned enterprise (SOE) reforms as a case study.

In contrast, *Essentials of Organizational Behavior* is rooted in the Western positivist tradition and methodological individualism [2]. It defines OB as "the study of how individuals, groups, and structures affect behavior within organizations" to enhance effectiveness. Its constructs prioritize operational definitions and empirical testability. The Robbins textbook employs empirical methods to validate theories. Its discussion of motivation details Maslow's hierarchy, expectancy theory, and equity theory, supported by empirical findings. However, it largely lacks critical reflection on underlying value assumptions, treating individualism as a self-evident premise and frequently neglecting the social embeddedness of behavior. It prioritizes the operationalization of theory into management tools, often at the cost of theoretical depth.

2.2 Core framework: shared structure, divergent focus

Both textbooks adopt the "individual-group-organization" framework, but with different emphases. At the individual level, both cover perception, personality, and motivation. The Marxist textbook stresses the interaction between individual and social factors, while the Robbins textbook focuses on inherent individual characteristics and practical tools. At the group level, both address formation and dynamics. The Marxist textbook highlights the social nature of groups as system components, whereas the Robbins textbook concentrates on internal interaction mechanisms and performance. At the organizational level, both cover structure, culture, and change. The Marxist textbook emphasizes the organization's societal embeddedness, while the Robbins textbook focuses on internal operational mechanisms.

2.2.1 Contextual adaptability

The Marxist OB textbook is grounded in the practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics, making contextual adaptation a core principle. It features chapters on topics like incentive practices in China and integrates abundant local cases. For example, its leadership analysis integrates Western theories with Chinese phenomena like paternalistic leadership [3]. Conversely, the Robbins textbook adopts a global perspective, assuming OB laws are largely transcendent. Although it includes cross-cultural content, its analysis relies primarily on Western-derived frameworks, making Chinese contexts appear supplementary. Its case selection caters to Western corporate management needs, potentially limiting relevance for Chinese students.

2.2.2 Theoretical depth vs. Application orientation

The Marxist OB textbook prioritizes systematic and dialectical theoretical exploration. It details historical and philosophical underpinnings and subjects Western concepts to critical analysis, aiming to foster critical thinking. The Robbins textbook is firmly application-oriented, treating OB primarily as a toolset. It focuses on converting theories into actionable tools, supported by cases and skill-training modules. This strong emphasis on practical applications often comes at the expense of exploring philosophical foundations or contextual limits.

2.2.3 Integration of ideological-political elements

The Marxist OB textbook systematically weaves ideological-political elements into professional content, achieving a synthesis of knowledge transmission and value guidance. It advocates aligning management with socialist core values and China's cultural heritage. The Robbins textbook adheres to the principle of value neutrality, positioning OB as an instrumental science focused on efficiency. It deliberately avoids advocating specific social values, resulting in a text devoid of explicit value-guidance functions.

2.3 Value orientation: Collectivism vs. Individualism

Value orientation forms the philosophical core. The Marxist textbook is rooted in collectivism, advancing the dialectical unity of individual-organization-society. It posits that individual development requires collective support, and collective progress depends on individual contribution. It frames corporate culture as integrating socialist core values and patriotic sentiment, highlighting the organization's social role.

The Robbins textbook is fundamentally individualistic, positioning the individual as the central purpose of organizational existence. It prioritizes satisfying individual needs and enhancing performance. While collaboration is addressed, its rationale is tied to aligned individual interests. It offers limited discourse on collective interests or social responsibility, reflecting its roots in Western liberal traditions.

3 Value reconstruction: A four-dimensional pathway

The comparative analysis reveals fundamental tensions between localization and internationalization, value guidance and instrumental utility, and humanistic versus empirical orientations. Moving beyond a binary either/or approach, value reconstruction should be guided by the principle of making foreign contributions serve China. It seeks to integrate an international perspective with a localized foundation through a cohesive "theory-value-practice-technology" framework.

3.1 Theoretical dimension: Integrating universal knowledge with localized innovation

This dimension lays the conceptual groundwork by constructing a system grounded in Western scientific theories, guided by Marxism, and driven by local practice. This tripartite integration involves: (1) critically assimilating empirically validated Western tools and paradigms (e.g., the Big Five model, expectancy theory) while examining their contextual limits; (2) employing Marxist dialectical and historical materialism as analytical lenses to evaluate theoretical assumptions, notably using the premise that human nature is the sum of social relations to critique individualism [4]; and (3) systematically incorporating indigenous Chinese management concepts, such as paternalistic leadership and team harmony, transforming distinctive local practices into teachable cases that illuminate Chinese managerial logic.

3.2 Value dimension: Balancing scientific spirit with humanistic care

This dimension reconciles the value neutrality of Western approaches with the explicit value guidance of the Chinese tradition, aiming to cultivate scientific spirit, humanistic care, and social responsibility in tandem. A scientific spirit is fostered by adopting an empirical orientation, using detailed enterprise cases to model data-driven analysis [5]. Humanistic care is emphasized through a people-centered approach, illustrated with cases that frame employee well-being within a collectivist context [9]. Simultaneously, social responsibility is integrated by linking organizational behavior to broader

ethical and societal issues, using relevant dilemmas to develop moral judgment and civic duty.

3.3 Practical dimension: Aligning skill development with value guidance

Serving as the bridge between theory and internalization, this dimension creates a closed-loop system of "theoretical application, skill enhancement, and value internalization". Professional competencies are developed through diversified modules such as comparative Sino-Western case analyses (e.g., Apple vs. Huawei), simulation exercises (e.g., cross-cultural negotiations), and enterprise research projects. Within these activities, ideological-political elements are embedded thematically—through initiatives like team projects on "Rural Revitalization", simulations of "SOE Reform", or debates on "Efficiency vs. Fairness". Cross-cultural competence is cultivated through modules on the operations of multinational corporations in China and Chinese firms abroad [6].

3.4 Technical dimension: Empowering through digital integration

Functioning as an enabler, this dimension leverages digital tools within a blended learning model to synergize and amplify the previous three dimensions. Online platforms are used for pre-class resource sharing and asynchronous discussion to prime engagement. In-person sessions focus on interactive, deep-dive activities such as seminars and workshops. Post-class, online platforms facilitate practical tasks, reflective submissions, and personalized feedback. This integrated cycle creates a dynamic teaching loop that reinforces the connections between knowledge, practice, and values.

4 Designing an ideological-political integration mechanism

This paper proposes two approaches, implicit integration and explicit integration, to operationalize this mechanism effectively. Explicit integration involves infusing Marxist dialectical and historical materialism directly into theoretical teaching, connecting foundational concepts to students' daily experiences and future professional planning, for instance, by applying the principle of "human essence as the sum of social relations" to analyze campus group dynamics. Concurrently, implicit integration employs a "local cases-to-campus extension" model. This strategy utilizes a curated library of Chinese management practices, extracting their underlying ideological-political essence and creating parallel scenarios relevant to student life, thereby facilitating organic value discernment through comparative analysis of professional and personal dilemmas [7].

Table 1. Localized case library design framework

Case	Corresponding Chapter	Ideological-Political Points	Campus Scenario Extension
SOE Mixed-Ownership Reform (e.g., China Unicom)	Organizational Change	National identity, social responsibility, collectivism.	Simulate "Classroom Learning Atmosphere Reform," balancing academic performance, peer support, and cohesion.
Collaboration in Huawei's 5G R&D Teams	Team Management	Innovation, patriotism, teamwork, accountability.	Form groups for a "Campus Innovation Project," emulating collaborative models.

5 Future directions

Future research should advance along three interconnected trajectories. First, comparative analysis must be expanded beyond the current textbook exemplars to include a wider array of domestic and Western texts, enabling a more nuanced understanding of variations in localization and ideological explicitness. Subsequently, the proposed integration mechanisms require empirical validation through teaching experiments across diverse institutional and disciplinary contexts. Data collected via multi-method approaches—such as classroom observations, interviews, and pre/post-test comparisons—should inform iterative refinements to the pedagogical design [8]. Concurrently, it is crucial to develop a

robust, tripartite assessment framework to quantitatively evaluate student outcomes in knowledge, ability, and value internalization.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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