

A Case Study of Cultural Identity of Students at a Private University

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Abstract

This study examines the cultural identity of college students of Guangzhou Institute, focusing on their identification with Chinese and Western cultures from three dimensions: language, values and cultural behaviors. Results show that students have a stronger Chinese cultural identity than Western cultural identity. Among three dimensions, students' identification with cultural values rank lowest. The study also finds that exposure to Western culture enhances rather than diminishes Chinese cultural identity. Lastly, senior students exhibit significant changes in Western cultural identity, reflecting a need for improved value education in later college years.

Keywords

Cultural identity; College students; Chinese culture; Western culture.

1. Introduction

Globalization has become an important feature of today's world and exchanges and competitions between different economies and cultures are becoming increasingly frequent. Compared with the economy, cultural penetration is more commonly seen in various fields. It impacts local culture through various means such as the Internet, movies, books, and cultural activities. In this context, the issue of cultural identity arises spontaneously. College students, having greater exposure to Western culture, are more easily influenced by it. As the main body of cultural construction and dissemination, and the main force in promoting China's integration with the world, college students' cultural identity has received widespread attention due to its great influence on the future of Chinese culture.

2. Research Background

Cultural identity, as defined by Collier & Thomas (1988), involves all types of identities related to cultural community such as ethnic identity, national identity, etc. It is an individual's "sense of belonging to certain culture and the community of that culture." Lusting & Koester (2003). Zheng Xiaoyun (1992) believes that cultural identity is the consensus of human tendency and recognition towards culture. In 2005, Zheng Xue and Wang Lei defined cultural identity as "the convergence of the cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors of most members of a certain culture with their own attitudes, behaviors, and values."

In the era of globalization, cultural identity is the cornerstone of the existence and development of a country's culture. Since college students are an important force in the construction and development of our country, their cultural identity has received much attention. Many studies on the cultural identity of college students has been carried out, analyzing the current situation, problems and countermeasures of cultural identity of college students from the connotation, structure, function and other aspects of cultural identity. Fan Juan (2009) believes that college students have strong and sincere emotions for their country, but social transformation and globalization have impacted their cultural identity, causing a cultural identity crisis. She also analyzed the specific manifestations of identity crisis from their values and behaviors. Tang

Xiaoyan (2010) believed that college students have cultural identity crisis and proposed that college students' Chinese cultural identity should be improved in three aspects: education, society and management. Li Gang (2016) believed that college students have confusions about cultural beliefs and have an indifferent attitude towards traditional culture. Yunyun (2023) conducted a quantitative analysis of the cultural identity of college students in Guangxi through a questionnaire. The results showed that college students have a positive attitude towards traditional culture, but their knowledge and understanding of it are obviously lacking. However, some scholars are optimistic about this issue. Yang Jianyi (2016) pointed out that from the three dimensions of continuity, unity and wholeness of cultural identity, college students do not have cultural identity crisis, but their deviations from local cultural identity should still need to be noticed.

Many researches have been conducted about the issue but most of them employed qualitative methodology without empirical evidence. This study, employing quantitative methodology, is conducted to analyze the cultural identity of college students from the three dimensions: language, value, and cultural behaviors. It aims to explore the cultural identity of college students under the background of globalization and provide some ideas for cultural identity education of college students.

3. Research Design

The research is conducted in Guangzhou Institute of Science and Technology, a private university in Guangzhou, with 528 participants as research subject. Questionnaires were distributed to students from different majors across four academic years. The study explores the overall status of their cultural identity and examines its variations across different academic years.

3.1. Research questions

1. What is the current situation of college students' cultural identity?
2. Does college students' identification with Western culture affect their identification with Chinese culture?
3. How does cultural identity vary among students across different academic years?

3.2. Participants

The study adopts a random sampling method and collected 528 valid responses. Participants included students from various majors and all academic years, with the distribution as follows: Grade 1: 175 (51 males, 124 females); Grade 2: 72 (25 males, 47 females); Grade 3: 197 (29 males, 168 females); Grade 4: 84 (10 males, 74 females). The basic information of participants is shown in Table 3-1:

Table 3-1. Basic information of the participants

Grade	Total	Male	Female
1	175	51	124
2	72	25	47
3	197	29	168
4	84	10	74

3.3. Dimensions of study

Scholars Gao Yihong and Chen Xinren designed questionnaires from different dimensions, providing a basis for measuring cultural identity. Gao designed a questionnaire around four

dimensions: language, entertainment, behaviors habits, and values. Chen's questionnaire was mainly based on four dimensions: language, values, religion and politics, and cultural behaviors. Drawing from prior studies, the questionnaire in this study examines cultural identity through three dimensions: language, values and cultural behaviors. These dimensions have been modified for this study to better analyze college students' cultural identity.

3.4. Research tool

The questionnaire consists of two parts. Part 1: Basic Information: demographic details such as gender, major, and year of study. Part 2: Cultural Identity Assessment: 24 items designed to measure students' cultural identity. Responses are scored on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=uncertain, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree"). The collected questionnaire data will be statistically analyzed using SPSS 27.0 software. The specific structure of the questionnaire is as follows.

Table 3-2. The structure of questionnaire

Dimensions	Language	Values	Cultural Behaviors
Number of items	1、 2、 3、 4、 5、 6、 7、 8	9、 10、 11、 12、 13、 14、 15、 16	17、 18、 19、 20、 21、 22、 23、 24
Total	8	8	8

Table 3-3. Cronbach's Alpha Analysis Results

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of items
0.731	0.731	24

Generally, a value of alpha above 0.9 indicates very high reliability, a value between 0.7 and 0.8 indicates high reliability, a value between 0.3 and 0.5 indicates moderate reliability, and a value below 0.3 indicates low reliability. The overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the questionnaire is 0.731, which demonstrates that the questionnaire has good reliability.

4. Result and Discussion

This part primarily presents and discusses the results of college students' cultural identity from three perspectives: overall status, the three dimensions (language, values and cultural behaviors), and the academic year variable. All data collected from the questionnaire are analyzed through SPSS 27.0. Methods such as mean comparison, descriptive statistics, independent sample T-tests, and one-way ANOVA were employed.

The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with the options assigned scores as follows: strongly disagree=1 point, disagree=2 points, uncertain=3 points, Agree=4 points, and strongly agree =5 points. The maximum score is 5, with higher scores indicating a greater degree of cultural identity.

According to the classification standards for the five-point Likert scale by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995), a high level is defined by a mean score of 3.5 or higher, a medium level by a mean score between 2.5 and 3.4, and a low level by a mean score of 2.4 or lower.

4.1. The overall cultural identity of college students and their identification across dimensions

(1) The overall cultural identity of college students

As shown in Table 4-1, the overall cultural identity of college students indicates that their Chinese cultural identity (mean = 3.3) is greater than Western cultural identity (mean = 3.05).

Table 4-1. Descriptive statistics of overall Chinese and Western cultural identity

	Chinese cultural identity	Western cultural identity
Valid	528	528
Missing	0	0
Mean	3.30	3.05
Mean Standard Error	0.039	0.038
Standard Deviation	0.89	0.87

The mean score for Chinese cultural identity is 3.3, reflecting a moderately high level of identification. Similarly, the mean score for Western cultural identity is 3.05, also indicating a moderately high level of identification. A comparative analysis of Chinese and Western cultural identity ($3.3 > 3.05$) reveals that the questionnaire sample shows a stronger Chinese cultural identity than Western cultural identity. This suggests that college students generally lean toward identifying with Chinese culture, although their identification to Western culture is also relatively high.

(2) Chinese cultural identity in different dimensions

As shown in Table 4-2, college students demonstrate differences in their identification across dimensions of Chinese cultural identity: Chinese Behaviors (3.47) > Chinese Language (3.35) > Chinese Values (3.08).

Table 4-2. Descriptive Statistics of Chinese Cultural Identity in Different Dimensions

Dimension	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Error
Chinese language	528	7	20	3.35	0.090
Chinese values	528	6	20	3.08	0.085
Chinese cultural behaviors	528	4	20	3.47	0.098

A comparative analysis of these dimensions reveals that students exhibit the highest level of identification with Chinese cultural behaviors (3.47), followed by Chinese language (3.35), and the lowest identification with Chinese values (3.08). This indicates that students in this college have the strongest identification with Chinese cultural behaviors, moderate identification with Chinese language, and the lowest identification with Chinese values among the three dimensions.

(3) Western cultural identity in different dimensions

As shown in Table 4-3, college students exhibit differences in their identification across the dimensions of Western cultural identity: Western cultural behaviors (3.12) > Western language (3.02) = Western values (3.02).

Table 4-3. Descriptive Statistics of Western Cultural Identity in Different Dimensions

Dimension	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Error
Western language	528	4	20	3.02	0.093
Western values	528	4	20	3.02	0.091
Western cultural behaviors	528	6	20	3.12	0.088

It shows that the order from highest to lowest is Western cultural behaviors, followed by Western language and Western values. This suggests that students have the strongest identification with Western cultural behaviors, with slightly lower identification with Western language and Western values.

4.2. Correlation Between college students' identification with Chinese and Western Culture

(1) Correlation Between identification with Chinese and Western Languages

As shown in Table 4-4, the significance value of the correlation between Chinese and Western languages is 0, indicating a significant correlation. The Pearson correlation is 0.366, suggesting a weak positive correlation.

Table 4-4. Descriptive statistics of correlation between identification with Chinese and Western languages

		Chinese Language	Western Language
Chinese Language	Pearson correlation	1	.366**
	Significance (Two-tailed)		0
	Number of Cases	528	528
Western Language	Pearson correlation	.366**	1
	Significance (Two-tailed)	0	
	Number of Cases	528	528

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

The statistics indicate that college students' identification with Chinese and Western languages exhibits a weak positive correlation. To some extent, a higher identification with Western language is associated with an increased identification with Chinese language, and vice versa.

(2) Correlation Between identification with Chinese and Western values

As shown in Table 4-5, the significance value of the correlation between Chinese and Western values is less than 0.05, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.565, indicating a moderate positive correlation between the two.

Table 4-5. Descriptive statistics of correlation between identification with Chinese and Western values

		Chinese Values	Western Values
Chinese Values	Pearson correlation	1	.565**
	Significance (Two-tailed)		0
	Number of Cases	528	528
Western Values	Pearson correlation	.565**	1
	Significance (Two-tailed)	0	
	Number of Cases	528	528

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Analyzing from above, the correlation between college students' identification with Chinese and Western values shows a moderate positive relationship. As students' identification with Chinese values increases, their identification with Western values also tends to rise. Similarly, their identification with Western values promotes their identification with Chinese values.

(3) Correlation Between identification with Chinese and Western cultural behaviors

As shown in Table 4-6, the significance value of the correlation between Chinese and Western cultural behaviors is below 0.05, with a Pearson correlation of 0.194, indicating a very weak positive correlation between the two.

Table 4-6. Descriptive statistics of correlation between identification with Chinese and Western cultural behaviors

		Chinese Cultural Behaviors	Western Cultural Behaviors
Chinese Cultural Behaviors	Pearson correlation	1	.194**
	Significance (Two-tailed)		0
	Number of Cases	528	528
Western Cultural Behaviors	Pearson correlation	.194**	1
	Significance (Two-tailed)	0	
	Number of Cases	528	528
Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).			

This demonstrates that college students' identification with Chinese and Western cultural behaviors reveals a very weak relationship. Students' identification with Chinese cultural behaviors has little association with their identification with Western cultural behaviors. Identification with one cultural behaviors does not significantly influence identification with the other.

4.3. Differences in college students' cultural identity across academic years

(1) Differences in Chinese cultural identity across academic years

As shown in Table 4-7, Chinese cultural identity among students across different academic years varies both overall and across dimensions. Among the dimensions, the identification with Chinese cultural behaviors scores the highest, with an average above 3.4, followed by Chinese language and then Chinese values.

Table 4-7. Descriptive Statistics of Chinese Cultural Identity Across Academic Years

Academic year	Chinese Language	Chinese Values	Chinese Cultural Behaviors	Overall Chinese Cultural Identity
Grade 1	3.21	2.98	3.41	3.20
Grade 2	3.38	3.08	3.54	3.33
Grade 3	3.43	3.12	3.49	3.35
Grade 4	3.41	3.18	3.53	3.37

This reveals that students' identification with Chinese language shows the greatest variation across academic years, rising from the lowest value of 3.21 in the Grade 1 to the highest value of 3.43 in Grade 3, before slightly declining in Grade 4. Students' identification with Chinese values steadily increases with academic progression, growing from a mean value of 2.98 in Grade 1 to 3.18 in Grade 4, indicating a stable upward trend. Students' identification with Chinese cultural behaviors, while consistently high, fluctuates slightly across academic years. The score increases from Grade 1 to Grade 2, declines slightly to 3.49 in Grade 3, and rises again to 3.53 in Grade 4.

The overall Chinese culture identity and its dimensions across academic years shows that students have the highest identification with Chinese cultural behaviors, followed by Chinese language, both of which are higher than identification with Chinese values. Overall, students' Chinese culture identity gradually increases from Grade 1 to Grade 4, eventually leveling off.

In addition, there are differences in identification with Chinese language, Chinese values, and Chinese cultural behaviors among students of different grades, as shown in Table 4-8. Among these, the differences in identification with Chinese language are the most significant (<0.001), while the differences in identification with Chinese cultural behaviors are the least significant ($0.259 > 0.05$).

Table 4-8. Differences in overall Chinese cultural identity and its dimensions among students across academic years

Dimension	Significance
Chinese Language	<0.001
Chinese Values	0.006
Chinese Cultural Behaviors	0.259
Overall Chinese Cultural Identity	<0.001

The differences in overall Chinese cultural identity and its dimensions among college students of different grades indicates that there are significant differences in their identification with Chinese language and Chinese values, while differences in the identification with Chinese cultural behaviors are relatively minor. Therefore, differences in their identification with Chinese language and values are further analyzed, as shown in Table 4-9.

From Table 4-9, regarding students' identification with Chinese language, there are significant differences between students in Grade 1 and students Grade 2, Grade 3 and Grade 4, with significance values less than 0.05 (0.018, 0, and 0.003, respectively). Students in Grade 4 exhibit a higher level of identification with Chinese language compared to students in Grade 1, with a mean difference of 0.791. Students in Grade 2 and Grade 3 also show higher levels of identification compared to students in Grade 1, with mean differences of 0.9 and 0.676, respectively.

For identification with Chinese values, the differences among grades are less pronounced compared to that of language. There are significant differences between students in Grade 1 and Grade 3 (significance value $0.006 < 0.05$) and between students in Grade 1 and Grade 4 (significance value $0.002 < 0.05$). However, there is no significant difference between students in Grade 1 and Grade 2 (significance value $0.124 > 0.05$).

Table 4-9. Differences in students' identification with Chinese language and values across academic years

Dependent Variable	(I) Academic year	(J) Academic year	Mean Difference (I-J)	Standard error	Significance
Chinese Language	1	2	-.676*	0.285	0.018
		3	-.900*	0.211	0
		4	-.791*	0.27	0.003
	2	1	.676*	0.285	0.018
		3	-0.223	0.28	0.425
		4	-0.115	0.326	0.725
	3	1	.900*	0.211	0
		2	0.223	0.28	0.425
		4	0.108	0.265	0.682
	4	1	.791*	0.27	0.003
		2	0.115	0.326	0.725
		3	-0.108	0.265	0.682
Chinese Values	1	2	-0.417	0.271	0.124
		3	-.559*	0.201	0.006
		4	-.811*	0.257	0.002
	2	1	0.417	0.271	0.124
		3	-0.142	0.266	0.593
		4	-0.395	0.311	0.204
	3	1	.559*	0.201	0.006
		2	0.142	0.266	0.593
		4	-0.252	0.252	0.317
	4	1	.811*	0.257	0.002
		2	0.395	0.311	0.204
		3	0.252	0.252	0.317
Overall Chinese Cultural Identity	1	2	-1.611*	0.616	0.009
		3	-1.769*	0.457	0
		4	-2.064*	0.584	0
	2	1	1.611*	0.616	0.009
		3	-0.157	0.606	0.795
		4	-0.452	0.707	0.522
	3	1	1.769*	0.457	0
		2	0.157	0.606	0.795
		4	-0.295	0.573	0.607
	4	1	2.064*	0.584	0
		2	0.452	0.707	0.522
		3	0.295	0.573	0.607

In the overall Chinese cultural identity comparison, significant differences are observed among students of different grades. Specifically, students in Grade 1 show significantly lower levels of cultural identity compared to students in Grade 2, Grade 3 and Grades 4, with significance values of 0.009, 0, and 0, all less than 0.05. This indicates a significant difference in cultural identity levels across grades. However, when comparing students in Grade 2 with students in Grade 3 and Grade 4, and students in Grade 3 with students in Grade 4, the data does not show statistically significant differences.

Through the comparative analysis of differences in Chinese cultural identity, language, and values among students of different grades, the following conclusions can be drawn. Identification with Chinese language: students in Grade 1 exhibit significant differences in this dimension compared to other grades. However, the differences between students in Grade 2, Grade 3 and Grade 4 are not significant, suggesting that after the first year, students' identification with Chinese language becomes stable. Identification with Chinese values: Significant differences exist between students in Grade 1 and students in Grade 3 and Grade 4, but no significant differences are observed between students in Grade 1 and Grade 2, or between students in Grade 2 and other grades. This indicates that students' identification with Chinese value stabilizes after the second year.

(2) Differences in Western cultural identity across academic years

From Table 4-10, Western culture identity among students across different academic years varies both overall and across dimensions. Western cultural behaviors received the highest scores, averaging above 3.13, followed by Western language and Western values.

Table 4-10. Descriptive statistics of Western cultural identity across academic years

Academic year	Western Language	Western Values	Western Cultural Behaviors	Overall Western Cultural Identity
Grade 1	2.98	2.91	3.07	2.98
Grade 2	3.18	2.94	3.14	3.07
Grade 3	3.04	3.06	3.11	3.08
Grade 4	2.96	3.12	3.23	3.11

The identification with Western language among students of different grades exhibits the most significant variation, starting at the lowest value of 2.98 in Grade 1, increasing to the highest value of 3.18 in Grade 2, but then declining in Grade 3 and dropping further to the lowest value of 2.96 in Grade 4.

The identification with Western values among students steadily increases with grade level, rising from a mean score of 2.91 in Grade 1 to 3.12 in Grade 4, showing a gradual and consistent upward trend.

Although students' identification with Western cultural behaviors remains generally high, it fluctuates with grade levels. The mean score rises from Grade 1 to Grade 2, slightly declines in Grade 3, but rebounds in Grade 4 to reach 3.23. Overall, from the first to the fourth year, students' identification with Western cultural behaviors shows a steady increase.

Through the analysis of students' overall Western cultural identity and its dimensions across different grades, the following conclusions can be drawn: college students have higher identification with Western cultural behaviors than Western language and values. As grades progress, students' overall Western cultural identity gradually strengthens from the first year to the fourth year.

In addition, there are differences in identification with Western language, Western values, and Western cultural behaviors among students of different grades, as shown in Table 4-11. Among these, the differences in identification with Western values are the most significant (0.001), indicating that there are differences in their identification with this aspect.

Table 4-11. Differences in overall Western cultural identity and its dimensions among students across academic years

Dimension	Significance
Western Language	0.249
Western Values	0.001
Western Cultural Behaviors	0.118
Overall Western Cultural Identity	0.031

Through the analysis of the differences in overall Western cultural identity and its various dimensions among students of different grades, it is evident that there are significant differences in students' identification with Western values, while the differences in their identification with Western cultural behaviors and Western language are relatively smaller.

Table 4-12. Differences in students' identification with Western values across academic years

Dependent Variable	(I) Academic year	(J) Academic year	Mean Difference (I-J)	Standard error	Significance
Western Values	1	2	-0.127	0.29	0.661
		3	-.783*	0.215	0
		4	-.865*	0.275	0.002
	2	1	0.127	0.29	0.661
		3	-.656*	0.285	0.022
		4	-.738*	0.332	0.027
	3	1	.783*	0.215	0
		2	.656*	0.285	0.022
		4	-0.082	0.269	0.761
	4	1	.865*	0.275	0.002
		2	.738*	0.332	0.027
		3	0.082	0.269	0.761
	1	2	-0.966	0.638	0.13
		3	-1.163*	0.473	0.014
		4	-1.534*	0.605	0.011
	2	1	0.966	0.638	0.13
		3	-0.197	0.627	0.754
Overall Western Cultural Identity	3	4	-0.567	0.732	0.438
		1	1.163*	0.473	0.014
		2	0.197	0.627	0.754
	4	1	-0.371	0.594	0.533
		2	1.534*	0.605	0.011
		3	0.567	0.732	0.438
		3	0.371	0.594	0.533

From Table 4-12, regarding Western values, there are significant differences between students in Grade 1 and students in Grade 3 and 4; as well as between students in Grade 2 and students in Grade 3 and 4, with significance values less than 0.05. Students in Grade 3 and 4 exhibit higher identification with Western values compared to students in Grade 1, with mean differences of 0.783 and 0.865, respectively. Similarly, Students in Grade 3 and 4 have higher identification levels than Students in Grade 2, with mean differences of 0.656 and 0.738, respectively. However, there are no significant differences when comparing students in Grade 1 and Grade 2 (significance value = 0.661 > 0.05) or Students in Grade 3 and Grade 4 (significance value = 0.761 > 0.05).

Through the comparative analysis of differences in identification with Western values among students of different grades, it can be observed that the differences within lower grades (Grade 1 and Grade 2) and within higher grades (Grade 3 and Grade 4) are not significant. However, the differences between lower-grade levels and higher-grade levels are significant. This suggests that students experience notable changes in their identification with Western values as they progress to higher grades.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the current situation of cultural identity of college students and presents three main findings. Firstly, on the whole, college students demonstrate a higher level of identification with Chinese culture compared to Western culture, though the difference is not very significant. Among the three dimensions—language, values and cultural behaviors—

students show the highest identification with cultural behavior and the lowest for values. This indicates that college students' cultural identity mainly exists at the levels of language and behaviors, with relatively superficial engagement with values, resulting in minimal changes to their values. However, identification with value is the core of cultural identity. Values represent the essence of a nation's cultural tradition, embodying its ideals and aspirations while exerting a lasting and stable influence on its systems and behaviors. Consequently, there is no indication of a cultural identity crisis among college students. This aligns with Li Gang's (2016) observation that cultural identity of college students primarily manifests in their daily behaviors. Secondly, the study finds that students' identification with Western culture and Chinese culture are mutually reinforcing. Understanding and learning about Western culture does not lead to a crisis in their Chinese cultural identity. On the contrary, exposure to and engagement with other cultures can enhance their learning and understanding of Chinese culture. Similar viewpoint has been put forward in Gao Yihong's (2003) findings in additive bilingualism. This finding challenges the assumption held by some scholars that the "invasion" of Western culture may cause cultural identity crises among students. Whether cultural identity crisis happens or not in a country largely depends on the level of identification with one's own culture rather than the identification with other cultures. However, the study also shows students' limited ability to discern differences in values and their insufficiency in value rationality, indicating a lack of in-depth understanding of the differences between Chinese and Western values. Thirdly, senior students exhibit higher levels of cultural identity. Students' identification with Chinese values grows steadily across academic years, while their identification with Western values undergoes more significant changes in senior years. This reflects a gap in value education during the later years of college, which may be related to the fact that courses on political thought and ideological education are more concentrated in the earlier years of university.

In addition to these three findings, the study also reveals that students with a higher identification with Chinese language tend to exhibit higher identification with Chinese values. However, in their Western cultural identity, higher identification with Western cultural behaviors corresponds to higher identification with Western values.

This study is expected to provide some implications for higher education. It suggests that cultural identity does not mean rejecting Western culture but rather leveraging its positive influence on Chinese culture. Efforts should focus on strengthening value education and developing students' value-based reasoning abilities. Meanwhile, value and cultural education should not be limited to the early years of college education but should extend throughout the entire academic years.

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