

The Impact of Traditional Cultural Identity on the Mental Health of Vocational Undergraduate Students under the Healthy China Strategy

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Abstract: Against the dual backdrop of the "Healthy China 2030" plan, which emphasizes both "promoting mental health" and "advancing the inheritance and development of outstanding Chinese traditional culture," this article focuses on vocational undergraduate students, a critical group in the cultivation of application-oriented talents. This study aims to systematically elucidate, from a theoretical perspective, the multi-dimensional impact and intrinsic mechanisms of traditional cultural identity as a positive cultural and psychological resource on their mental health. By analyzing how the philosophy of life, moral codes, aesthetic values, and social etiquette in traditional culture are internalized into an individual's cognitive schema, emotional patterns, and behavioral norms, this article argues for the positive value of traditional cultural identity in alleviating psychological stress, enhancing psychological resilience, increasing the sense of meaning in life, and regulating social behavior. It also provides a theoretical basis and pathway inspiration for integrating outstanding Chinese traditional culture into vocational undergraduate education to improve the quality and effectiveness of mental health education.

1. Introduction

The in-depth advancement of the "Healthy China 2030" Plan Outline signifies that the national health governance system is entering a new stage with the strategic theme of "co-construction and sharing, and health for all." This strategy transcends the limitations of the traditional biomedical model, emphasizes integrating health into all policies, pays particular attention to mental health promotion and prevention of mental disorders, and clearly proposes the guiding requirement of "strengthening the construction and standardized management of the mental health service system." [1,2] At the same time, the "Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on the Implementation of the Project for the Inheritance and Development of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture" also points out that culture is the lifeblood of a nation and the spiritual home of the people, and it is necessary to focus on building a system for the inheritance and development of excellent traditional Chinese culture. Under this dual strategic background, exploring the intrinsic connection between the profound spiritual resource of excellent traditional Chinese culture and

individual mental health is not only an academic response to national strategy but also an interdisciplinary issue of humanistic care and health promotion in the new era[3].

This study focuses on the specific group of vocational undergraduate students in higher education. Vocational undergraduate education, as a key link in building a modern vocational education system, aims to cultivate high-level application-oriented talents with profound theoretical literacy and superb technical skills. However, this group also faces unique psychological challenges: they are in the gap between academic education and vocational training, and often encounter multiple stressors such as ambiguous social identity, complex academic pressure, and uncertainty in future career development[4]. These factors make them a potentially vulnerable group to mental health problems, and place higher demands on their psychological resilience and adaptability. Therefore, exploring effective ways to promote mental health is of urgent practical significance for ensuring the comprehensive and healthy development of vocational undergraduate talents.

In this study, "traditional cultural identity" does not refer to a superficial understanding or shallow appreciation of cultural symbols, but rather a multi-layered and internalized psychological construction process. It signifies an individual's cognitive understanding and acceptance, emotional resonance and attachment, and attitudinal valuing and recognition of the philosophical ideas (such as the unity of nature and humanity, the doctrine of the mean and dialectics), ethical norms (such as benevolence, love of family, honesty, trustworthiness, and reciprocity), humanistic spirit, and aesthetic concepts inherent in outstanding Chinese traditional culture, ultimately leading to conscious practice in behavior, which is a dynamic psychological tendency. Its essence is the internalization of cultural values, forming a stable sense of spiritual belonging and meaning framework. Correspondingly, the definition of "vocational undergraduate students' mental health," while encompassing general standards such as emotional stability, personality integrity, and interpersonal harmony, needs to emphasize its specificity within the vocational context. This includes possessing a positive vocational self-concept, a good sense of self-efficacy in technical learning, psychological resilience to cope with job requirements, and sustainable confidence in career development, which is a positive psychological state closely related to vocational growth.

In view of this, this study aims to systematically elucidate at the theoretical level how traditional cultural identity can empower the mental health of vocational undergraduate students as a positive form of cultural psychological capital. The study will deeply analyze its internal influencing dimensions and mechanisms of action, striving to fill the research gap that combines macro-level cultural strategies, micro-level psychological mechanisms, and meso-level educational practices. It will provide a solid academic basis and forward-looking path inspiration for effectively integrating outstanding Chinese traditional culture into vocational undergraduate education and innovating a mental health promotion model that "cultivates people with culture and nurtures the mind with culture."

2. Intrinsic Acculturation: Cognitive and Emotional Empowerment of Traditional Cultural Identity on Mental Health

The most profound impact of traditional cultural identity on mental health lies in the individual's internal world, specifically in the processes of mental construction and emotional shaping. This "intrinsic acculturation" mechanism refers to the process by which individuals actively accept and internalize the core values and concepts of traditional culture, transforming them into relatively stable cognitive schemas, emotional patterns, and personality traits. This, in turn, provides internal psychological resources for coping with stress and achieving personal growth[5]. For vocational undergraduate students, this process can effectively buffer the unique developmental pressures they face, laying a solid cognitive and emotional foundation for their mental health.

On a cognitive level, traditional culture provides individuals with a grand and profound framework of meaning, assisting them in cognitive restructuring and effectively alleviating existential anxiety and the stress of uncertainty. Vocational undergraduate students, living in an era of rapid technological change and diverse career paths, are prone to feelings of confusion and anxiety due to the uncertainty of future development. The traditional cultural concept of "unity of man and nature" views individual life as a harmonious part of nature and the universe, guiding students to examine their own difficulties from a broader perspective and place their personal experiences within the continuous cycle of life. This diminishes attachment to temporary gains and losses, and reduces self-denial resulting from unmet goals. The philosophy of "exhausting one's nature and knowing one's destiny" advocates striving to the best of one's ability while acknowledging one's inherent endowments ("nature") and external environmental limitations ("destiny"), and accepting the results that are beyond human control with equanimity. This thinking helps students establish realistic career expectations and maintain a balanced mindset in the face of intense academic and employment competition, avoiding cognitive dissonance or mental exhaustion caused by the gap between ideals and reality. Furthermore, the dialectical thinking and moderation principle inherent in the "Doctrine of the Mean" can guide students to avoid extreme cognitive patterns of either/or, black or white. When facing the contradiction between theoretical learning and practical skills training, or the conflict between personal interests and social needs, it encourages them to seek balanced and appropriate solutions, cultivating their systemic thinking and strategic focus. This is a higher-order cognitive flexibility and a core component of psychological resilience.

On an emotional level, the nurturing of traditional culture holds significant value in cultivating positive emotions and enhancing emotional regulation skills. Confucianism's "benevolence and love" thought, along with Mencius' advocacy for the "heart of compassion," lays the foundation for the moral and emotional bedrock of Chinese culture. The understanding and practice of "benevolence" can stimulate an individual's capacity for empathy and altruistic behavior. When students regard caring for others and serving society as an intrinsic value, the sense of accomplishment and meaning they gain will far surpass the satisfaction of personal interests. This positive emotional experience, stemming from moral practice, is lasting and profound, effectively counteracting the loneliness and alienation brought about by utilitarian competition, and laying an emotional foundation for building a positive interpersonal support network, while social support is a known key protective factor for mental health. Simultaneously, traditional culture particularly emphasizes inner spiritual joy rather than material satisfaction, as vividly illustrated by the paradigms of "Confucius and Yan Hui's Joy" and "finding joy in poverty." This inward-seeking orientation to happiness guides vocational undergraduate students to pay attention to cultivating a rich spiritual world while mastering practical skills and pursuing career development, deriving lasting spiritual satisfaction from knowledge exploration, skill refinement, interpersonal harmony, and even artistic appreciation. This emotional pattern endows them with a kind of "emotional immunity," enabling them to maintain relative emotional stability and inner peace when facing material temptations, social comparisons, or temporary difficulties, reducing susceptibility to depression and anxiety, and significantly enhancing subjective well-being[6].

In terms of character development, the identification with traditional culture provides vocational undergraduate students with rich spiritual nourishment for forging resilient, self-confident, and composed psychological qualities. The maxim in the "I Ching", "As heaven maintains vigor, the superior man should constantly strive for self-improvement; as earth's condition is receptive devotion, the superior man should hold the outer world with broad mind," precisely outlines the binary yet unified structure of the ideal personality: it should possess both a spirit of striving for progress and ceaseless self-improvement, and a magnanimous character that embraces all things and bears responsibility. The core spirit of "unceasing self-improvement" can be directly

transformed into the intrinsic motivation for students to learn knowledge and skills, encouraging them to continuously pursue excellence on the technical path, overcome fear of difficulty, and form positive achievement motivations. The broad-mindedness of "holding the outer world with broad mind" helps them to correctly view criticism and setbacks, and cultivate a spirit of cooperation and teamwork, which is essential for their future integration into the workplace and undertaking social responsibility. What is particularly important is that the essence of "unity of knowledge and action" in Neo-Confucianism highly coincides with the essence of vocational undergraduate education that emphasizes practical application. Wang Yangming emphasized that "knowledge is the idea of action, and action is the effort of knowledge." True knowledge must lie in action, and action must have knowledge as its guide. This concept can profoundly influence students' self-cognition model: they no longer regard theoretical knowledge and practical skills as separate, but rather "learn by doing" and "do by learning," repeatedly verifying and strengthening their own ability beliefs through successful practice, thereby steadily improving their professional self-efficacy in the professional field. This conviction in one's own ability is the most direct and effective psychological capital to cope with challenges, relieve stress, and maintain a positive and optimistic attitude.

3. External Cultivation: The Regulation of Behavior and Relationships in Psychological Well-being through Traditional Cultural Identity

The promotion of psychological well-being through traditional cultural identity extends beyond internal spiritual construction, profoundly regulating an individual's interactions with the external world through explicit behavioral norms and social patterns. This "external cultivation" mechanism emphasizes transforming internalized values into stable behavioral habits and harmonious social interactions, thereby constructing a supportive, orderly, and meaningful external environment for students. For vocational undergraduate students, their psychological well-being is deeply influenced by practical training, internships, and future workplace interpersonal relationships[7]. Therefore, the guidance and norms provided by traditional culture at the behavioral and relational levels have irreplaceable practical value.

Traditional culture provides students with clear social behavior guidelines through a precise system of "li" (rites or etiquette), greatly promoting interpersonal harmony and social adaptation. The essence of "li" is not merely simple etiquette or rituals but a cultural design for an individual's appropriate position and behavioral boundaries within a social relationship network. It requires individuals to maintain an attitude of "jing" (respect) in their interactions with others, that is, genuine respect and sincerity from the heart. For vocational undergraduate students, mastering the essence of "li" means adhering to the dignity of teachers in teacher-student interactions, understanding cooperation and humility in team training, and learning to establish positive interactions with colleagues and clients in the future workplace. These behavioral norms can effectively reduce interpersonal conflicts caused by egocentricity or inappropriate behavior, thereby avoiding interpersonal relationship stress, a significant source of psychological distress. The Confucian pursuit of the value of "he" (harmony) does not seek unprincipled conformity but advocates a dynamic balance and organic harmony achieved under the premise of acknowledging differences and respecting rules. This wisdom of "harmony without uniformity" guides students on how to maintain their uniqueness and professionalism while efficiently collaborating with members from different backgrounds in a diversified and collaborative modern work environment, building a strong and stable social support network. Numerous psychological studies have confirmed that social support is a buffer for psychological well-being, which can significantly enhance an individual's ability to cope with stress and reduce the risk of anxiety, depression, and other psychological problems.

"At the level of professional ethics and identity, the ethical principles and craftsmanship from traditional culture provide vocational undergraduate students with professional values that transcend utilitarian calculations. Core ethical concepts such as "filial piety, brotherly respect, loyalty, and trustworthiness," through creative transformation, can be mapped onto modern professional scenarios: "Filial piety" can be extended to reverence for industry traditions and the experience of predecessors; "brotherly respect" can be transformed into camaraderie and mutual assistance within a team; "loyalty" is reflected in reverence for the profession, responsibility to the enterprise, and adherence to the spirit of contract; and "trustworthiness" is the foundation of professional conduct, namely, honesty, integrity, and consistency between words and actions. These internalized professional ethics enable students to regard work as a career with intrinsic value rather than merely a means of making a living, thereby gaining a profound sense of professional meaning and dignity. This sense of meaning is a deep-seated motivation to resist professional burnout and maintain long-term work enthusiasm and mental health. Furthermore, the professional view of "diligence and trustworthiness" and the exploratory spirit of "investigating things to acquire knowledge" together forge a unique "craftsmanship." Craftsmanship emphasizes the ultimate pursuit of skills, the pursuit of excellence in works, and the focused immersion in processes. Practicing craftsmanship in technical learning and practice can guide students to immerse themselves in the current operation, focus on every detail of the technology, and thus more easily enter the "flow" experience—a psychological state of wholehearted engagement, forgetting time, and full of pleasure and a sense of control. The flow experience itself is a positive emotional reward, and it is also the fundamental way to improve skills and gain a sense of accomplishment. This confidence and satisfaction gained from superb skills constitute the core of professional identity, enabling students to face technical challenges and professional competition with a positive and stable attitude."

In addition, the artistic and aesthetic nourishment provided by traditional culture offers students a non-verbal channel for emotional expression and stress relief, fulfilling a unique "aesthetic healing" function. Traditional Chinese arts, such as calligraphy, traditional Chinese painting, Guqin (a traditional Chinese musical instrument), and Weiqi (also known as Go), are not merely skills but also philosophical practices for self-cultivation and character development. Calligraphy and painting emphasize "intention before the brush" and "vividness of spirit," requiring creators to concentrate and contemplate, entering a state of high focus and physical and mental relaxation. This creative process itself is a form of deep mindfulness practice, effectively clearing away distractions caused by academic worries and future anxieties, reducing anxiety levels, and achieving emotional regulation. Reciting poetry, through the rhythm, phonetics, and artistic conception of language, finds elegant expression and sustenance for emotions, achieving emotional catharsis and sublimation. These refined artistic activities provide students with a spiritual haven away from utilitarian clamor, allowing their emotions to be purified and their minds to be nourished. The Taoist philosophy of "Tao follows nature" advocates a lifestyle that is close to nature and in accordance with natural laws. Guiding students to temporarily withdraw from closed training rooms and classrooms and immerse themselves in the natural environment, experiencing the uplifting state of "mountains and rivers as metaphors for virtue," has been proven by modern environmental psychology to be an effective way to restore attention, relieve mental fatigue, and improve psychological state.

4. Mechanism Construction and Educational Implications: Achieving a Virtuous Cycle of Cultural Identity and Mental Well-being

Based on the in-depth analysis of the dual pathways of internal assimilation and external cultivation in the preceding text, an integrated theoretical model can be systematically constructed

to explain the influence of traditional cultural identity on the mental well-being of vocational undergraduate students. The core of this model lies in clarifying that cultural identity does not function in a simple linear manner, but rather through a dynamic "cognition emotion behavior environment" four-dimensional interactive mechanism, ultimately converging into a joint force to enhance the level of mental well-being. In the cognitive dimension, the moderate dialectical thinking and grand meaning framework provided by traditional culture, as core cognitive schemas, are responsible for the initial assessment and reconstruction of stressors, laying the rational foundation for psychological adaptation. The emotional dimension then takes over the guidance of cognition, fostering moral emotions such as benevolence and compassion, as well as pursuing the inner pleasure of Confucian and Yan Hui's joy, responsible for the generation, regulation, and sublimation of emotions, constituting the perceptual foundation of mental health. The behavioral and personality dimensions externalize cognition and emotion, manifesting as stable behavioral patterns and professional character such as continuous self-improvement and dedication to work and harmonious collaboration, directly responding to challenges in the environment. The environmental dimension serves as the external projection and feedback field of all the above internal processes. Good behavioral norms promote harmonious interpersonal relationships and a supportive campus and practical training environment, and this positive environment in turn reinforces the individual's positive cognition and emotional experience, forming a reinforcing loop. These four dimensions are not isolated but rather permeate and reinforce each other, together constituting a stable psychological protection system.

The construction of this theoretical model provides a clear direction and profound insights for optimizing vocational undergraduate education practices under the dual guidance of the Healthy China and Cultural Powerhouse strategies. The fundamental aspect of educational innovation lies in shifting from the single dimension of "knowledge and skills transfer" to a holistic education model that promotes the coordinated development of "technical competence and cultural literacy." At the curriculum level, it is necessary to break down the barriers between traditional cultural general education courses and professional skills courses, and promote their deep integration. For example, embed classic discussions of "craftsman spirit" and "investigation of things to acquire knowledge" in engineering ethics courses; explore the modern value of "distinction between righteousness and benefit" and "integrity" concepts in business management and marketing courses, realizing the creative transformation of cultural essence into professional fields.

In terms of creating campus culture, efforts should be made to create an immersive humanistic environment full of traditional cultural atmosphere. This goes far beyond establishing cultural corridors and holding traditional festival celebrations and other material activities. More importantly, it advocates a campus spiritual atmosphere that respects skills, values morality, and is harmonious and inclusive. For instance, the students can establish cultural clubs with professional characteristics, such as the "Lu Ban Workshop" of the School of Intelligent Manufacturing and the "Confucian Merchant Research Association" of the School of Business and Trade, so that cultural identity can grow endogenously in close combination with professional practice.

5. Conclusion

For mental health education itself, there is an urgent need to innovate working paradigms and develop psychological intervention programs based on traditional culture. Mindfulness meditation can be combined with Zen Buddhist philosophy to offer meditation workshops for cultivating the mind; expressive art therapy can be utilized through calligraphy and painting to help students express emotions and calm their minds; a "book club" format can be introduced into group counseling to jointly study the wisdom of dealing with the world in classic texts, serving as a

beneficial supplement to cognitive behavioral therapy. Ultimately, the realization of all this depends on the comprehensive improvement of the cultural literacy of the teaching staff. Professional teachers and counselors should take the lead in becoming practitioners and leaders of cultural identity, being adept at organically integrating traditional cultural values into the process of imparting skills and managing classes, to achieve a subtle and silent cultural nurturing effect. Through the above systematic educational reconstruction, deep cultural resources can be truly transformed into a powerful driving force for promoting students' mental health, cultivating high-quality technical and skilled personnel who are both technically proficient and possess a complete personality, and are able to calmly cope with future challenges.

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