A Case Study of African International Students' Cultural Identity in China

Xi Mizhe[1,2]

[1]Faculty of Literature and Communication, Xianyang Normal University, Xianyang 12000, China

[2]Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400, Malaysia

ximizhe@gmail.com

Abstract: He study on the cultural identity of international students in China can guide international students to adapt to the learning environment in China effectively. This study selected an African student from Xianyang Normal University in China as a respondent and conducted an exploratory case study on his Chinese cultural identity through a semi-structured interview from language, ulture, ethnic group and values dimensions. The study found that degree of cultural identity of African students in China is diversified in general, specifically, Chinese language identity and Chinese cultural identity are unified, identification of the ethnic and values is not very high, which need positive guidance for the teachers of Teaching Chinese as a Second Language. Furthermore, student management should be considered in their daily lives to help international students adapt and understand China's deep culture, and policymakers should take into account the curriculum, teaching environment on the layout of combined with Chinese cultural content, to promote students' understanding of Chinese culture and cognition.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The word "identity" was first put forward by Freud(cited in Zhou Yali, Liu Min, 2018), who defined it as a process of emotional and psychological convergence between an individual and others, groups, or imitated characters. The Chinese Cultural Dictionary interprets cultural identity as an affirmative judgment of cultural value. In other words, cultural groups or cultural members acknowledge that the value utility of new culture or different cultural factors within a group conforms to the traditional cultural value standard

Cultural identity refers to "human's tendentious consensus and recognition of culture". (Zheng, X.Y.1992. P4). Although they are different due to the differences of national cultures, they are all

manifested as belonging to their own national cultures and recognition of other national cultures.

The identification of international students with Chinese culture is a process of identifying, selecting, and accepting external things with existing knowledge. It is the degree to which the individual's cognition, attitude, and behavior are the same or consistent with those of most members of a certain culture. It is a kind of cross-cultural identity. Intercultural identity emphasizes the understanding and identification of different cultures based on the understanding and identification of mother tongue culture. This kind of understanding and identification does not distinguish between subject and object, but mutual understanding and identification between subjects. Mother tongue culture and different cultures are equal.

Accept the foreign student's in China also means behavior patterns of Chinese culture conveying , and the transformation of the self-image, the identification of the Chinese culture. It is not to abandon their native language culture system, but based on our cultural acceptance and approval of alien culture from a multicultural perspective of cultural identity, which belongs to the dual cultural identity.

This dual identity is the development of traditional culture foundation in their mother tongue in an open and expanded way. That is to say, the learner himself's culture is absorbed and integrated across the cultural identity of Chinese cultural elements. In the process, the learner's motherland culture and Chinese culture constantly discuss, compromise each other, then to achieve consensus, agree with each other, and finally construct harmonious cross-cultural relations, in which way to realize the dual culture of cross-cultural identity.

Now, the pedagogical pattern of African international students in Chinese literacy adopts the traditional teaching model with lower learning interest, inactive learning behavior, lack of participation among learners, which has affected the students' intercultural adaptation, academic adaptation, psychological adaptation. Furthermore, it could cause serious consequences such as mental illness and drop out of school or drop out of school.

1.2 Background of the study

With the improvement of China's comprehensive national strength and the development of the "Belt and Road" cooperation initiative, more and more foreign students are coming to study in China, and China has become the largest overseas study destination in Asia. In 2018, a total of 492,200 foreign African students from 196 countries and regions studied, studied, and trained in 1,004 higher education institutions, scientific research institutes and other educational institutions across the country. After African students came to China, their living, "earning and social environment have undergone great changes, and there will be many kinds of unsuitability, and even "cultural shock". But adapting to life in China largely depends on their degree of identification with Chinese society and culture.

In the process of living and studying in China, African students will inevitably encounter cultural identity problems due to differences in culture and national conditions. Although domestic scholars have begun to attach importance to cultural identity and have made a certain amount of literature contributions, the number of relevant literature on the study of African students' Chinese cultural identity is relatively small, and there are even fewer empirical investigations. This investigation and research can make cultural identity theoretical research more substantial, on the one hand, it can verify the conclusions of cultural identity related literature, on the other hand, it can also enrich the research objects of cultural identity.

In terms of practical value, this research has strong practical guiding value. On the one hand, the

basic situation and influencing factors of the Chinese cultural identity of African students presented in this study can be used as a starting point for teaching Chinese as a foreign language teachers and the management of African student managers. On the other hand, this research also presents the concerns and blind spots of African students on Chinese culture and provides a direction for teachers teaching Chinese as a foreign language. For example, the Chinese culture with higher concerns for African students can be explained more deeply. The weak understanding of Chinese culture for African students can be supplemented. Also, it is hoped that through this research, African students can improve their sense of Chinese cultural identity as soon as possible to adapt to the life and study of African students and enhance their sense of belonging.

1.3 Research problem

Due to the large differences in culture and language between African and Asian countries, a large number of African students feel hard to adapt to the Chinese culture initially, which affects their Chinese learning effect. On the one hand, at present, the majority of research on cultural identity in the field of language teaching targets learners with English as a second language, while the research on the cultural identity of learners with Chinese as a second language is still rare, not to mention that on the cultural identity of African students studying in China. On the other hand, in the field of Teaching Chinese as a Second Language, quantitative research methods are much more prevailing than qualitative ones during the research on cultural identity(). Hence, this study intends to explore the following question: How do African students perceive Chinese culture identity during the process of learning Chinese in China context?

2. Literature Review

In terms of cultural identity, at the early of 90s, cholars abroad have carried out investigation and research on different groups from varying perspectives and theories (e.g. Giles & Johnson, 1987; Norton, 1997 ; Bhugra D, Bhui K, Mallett R, et al, 1999). Nevertheless, most of the domestic studies focus on the Chinese identity of English learners, as well as the relationship between identity and learning motivation, learning level, change of self-identity, confusion of identity research, and so on (e.g. Gaoyihong, 2003, 2004; Liu Shuang, 2000; Ren Yuxin, 2008; Yan Guojiang, 2013 ; Han Haiyan, 2014; Li Zijuan, 2015).

The current era of globalization has come; especially economic globalization is affecting all aspects of our lives. The cultural identity of various nationalities between countries has become an unavoidable issue (He Yanfeng 2007),   and it is also an issue for contemporary Chinese, especially young people. There was a crisis. Qin Xuan (2010) and Zheng Haixia (2015) believe that Chinese cultural identity is very valuable in enhancing national security, cultural security, and national identity. Feng Dabiao (2017) believes that Chinese cultural identity plays an important role in the construction of Chinese ideology.

Recently, more studies focused on the cultural identity among international students in China. For example, Wang Aiping (2006) took Indonesian Chinese teenagers as the research object to explore their identity and national identity.   Another study conducted by Song Yan (2015), paid attention to the group of Chinese language learners studying in Southeast Asia and investigated their cultural identity. Studies have shown that cultural identity, in turn, to a large extent affects the motivation, learning style and learning outcomes of overseas students in Chinese learning. Liu Xiaojiao, Liu Jiejie and Du Bing (2018) conducted questionnaires and interviews with 85

international students and found that international students would improve their sense of identity with Chinese culture with the continuous advancement of Chinese learning.

However, limited research was conducted on the cultural identity of international students from Africa. Therefore, this study takes the African international students as the research object to study their Chinese cultural identity. Moreover, previous study mainly utilized the quantitative research methodology, and little studies were conducted by qualitative. Hence, this study will fill the population gap and methodology gap in teaching Chinese as a second language field.

3. Methodology

In this study, a semi-structured interview research method is adopted. First of all, semi-structured interview is considered to be more flexible than the structured one and facilitate the researcher to more easily capture the rhythm of the interview compared with the completely open interview. Secondly, the one-to-one individual interview is selected to dig deeper into specific problems. It allows the researcher to conduct an in-depth discussion of specific problems with participants at any time. Compared with group interviews, this format promotes control over the interview schedule and situation. At last, the audio recordings of interviews were fully transcribed verbatim using the authentic language of the participant student. The transcriptions were read and re-read to identify the themes as issues emerged which answered the research questions. Personal feeling, biases, preconceptions were put aside and data was viewed and analysed as objectively as possible.

Before the interview, the permission of interviewees for recording the interview was obtained, followed by the transcription and analysis of the content after the interview. To be more specific, we first transcribed the recordings to get a detailed understanding of the interviewees' views and make a summary. Afterward, an in-depth theoretical analysis of the summarized content was conducted to find out the underlying reasons.

The interviewee of this survey is a Chinese learner from Guinea in Africa, who is also studying computer software and Chinese at the interviewer's university and has been in China for three years. The observation and communication with him in his spare time exposed his views and puzzles about the Chinese language and culture and similar problems faced by his peers. This inspired a survey of their understandings of Chinese culture. After consultation with the interviewee, he agreed take part in the survey as an interviewee at a specific place and time decided by him. The interview outline was sent to him for good preparation.

4.   Results

Ye Lang (2008) proposed that in the context of cultural globalization, the universal value contained in Chinese culture must be fully demonstrated. Liu, Xun. (2002) classifies culture as material culture, institutional culture, behavior culture and value culture, which is an extension of surface culture and deep culture. Therefore, the identification of foreign students to Chinese culture is also a shallow to deep process. Therefore, this study divides the cultural identity of African overseas students into four levels, that is, language identity, cultural identity, ethnic identity and value identity.

4.1 Language Identity

Language identity is the foreign students' attitude towards Chinese and the surface cognition of

the process of learning Chinese. When chatting with Chinese people, the interviewee always speaks Chinese, because he think that his Chinese has improved. But at the early stage when he came to China, he seldom used Chinese. This shows that learners' language identity develops dynamically and changes with the improvement of their language level.

Besides speaking Chinese in class, the interviewee speaks Chinese everywhere. For example, when the interviewee talks to Chinese friends, there are many words that he doesn't quite understand, and then they explain to him and tell him the meaning of the words. Then he thinks his listening and oral Chinese have made great progress.

In methods or ways of learning Chinese, the interviewee talks to his friends more, and he write more in the dormitory. Because he thinks it is too difficult to learn Chinese characters, he should write more, mostly, he writes a lot of words every day.

This indicates that learners have a very positive attitude towards Chinese and are willing to learn it, which further confirms that learners have a good Chinese language identity

The interviewee didn't choose to watch some TV programs to improve his Chinese because he think his Chinese level has not been improved by watching Chinese programs. It can be seen that learners are not confident enough about their Chinese level, resulting in a relatively single method of learning Chinese.

The interviewee thinks there are many activities about Chinese in our school. He has taken part in many competitions, such as the Chinese ancient poetry recitation competition "Quietly I left, just as quietly I came". Then he got the second prize in Shaanxi province. The interviewee thinks participating in such activities has helped him learn Chinese. He thinks it is very good for him, because he can make a lot of friends, and improve his Chinese. He likes this kind of competition. It can be seen that campus cultural activities are helpful to enhance learners' sense of identity in Chinese language

When the interviewee is learning Chinese, sometimes he thinks it is too difficult, but he has never stopped studying. Because he think learning a language should be difficult, but he should study it every day. It's not easy, but take it slow. Strong learning motivation is conducive to strengthening language identity

The level of language recognition of African students is not high, but only "average", mainly because the Chinese language is quite different from their mother tongue, which hinders their Chinese learning. And in China, even if they don't speak Chinese, it will not cause obvious obstacles to their lives. But they all recognize China's great strength and believe that Chinese is one of the most important languages in the world. Most of the international students come to China to learn Chinese with a strong instrumental motivation, so they attach great importance to oral English to satisfy the communication with Chinese and Chinese in their country.

4.2 Culture Identity

The interviewee likes Chinese culture. Students' identification with Chinese culture is also a process of dynamic development. For example, before he came to China, he heard that the Chinese people welcome Muslims, but after he came to China, he found that's not the case at all, no one interferes with your faith, China is a very democratic country, so he likes Chinese culture very much.

There are a lot of things he understands about Chinese traditional culture, for example, when he was a kid, his favorite star is Jackie Chan, in their country there are a lot of people like Jackie Chan. Also, he likes listening to music, he has heard a lot of Chinese music in China, he feels particularly

good. He also likes the history of China, because he think the history of China is the longest in our world's history. So he think it's important to understand that historical story, because he can learn a lot there, he can all tell people, he know the oldest history in the world.

The interviewee likes traveling and he has been to many places in China, He has gained some new understanding of Chinese culture through traveling. He remembers in China tourism especially good experience. Because China is a big country, each place has its own specialty, such as Xi 'An 'food is different from that of Nanjing. Language is different too, he thought Chinese people are speak mandarin, then he find the dialects vary from place to place in China, and the pronunciation of Mandarin varies from place to place.

As an old Chinese saying goes, read 10,000 books and travel 10,000 miles. It can be seen that traveling is one of his ways to experience and recognize Chinese culture.

He prefer to eat dumplings on the winter Solstice. He remember Chinese people all go home and then have dinner together, and then red everywhere, he felt very good at that time.But in an interview, when the interviewer mentioned yesterday is the winter solstice, asked if he to eat dumplings, he was surprised that he didn't remember the specific day of the winter solstice, interviewer asked him further also know what kind of Chinese traditional festivals and customs, the custom of many important only know the name, do not know the specific time and significance, and what are the customs, visible respondents understanding of Chinese tradition culture is less.

4.3 Ethnic Group Identity

Phinney (1992) studied ethnic identity, which refers to the learner's identity to the community to which he belongs, mainly reflected in the learner's sense of attachment and belonging to the community to which he belongs. The interviewee thinks Chinese is not very used to talk to strangers. He had a good impression of Chinese people because they are often friendly. For example, his friends often greet him, about his study and life, like "how are you doing recently" "How are you?" He thinks their relationship is very good, but he also have met the place where he doesn't like, then he think Chinese people much more special, not everyone is good. Then if he thinks they can be friends, it's ok for them to be friends, if he knows they can't be friends, so they won't be friends.

When he first came to China, he didn't think Chinese people like to talk to foreigners very much. Later, he realized that they are afraid of unable to communicate with foreigners in English. And if he speaks Chinese, they would like to communicate with him. Because when they start to learn English, they generally understand what he says, they also say him generally understand, they are a little afraid of using English.

The interviewee thinks the relationship between his teacher and him is very good, but he thinks they gave, a good effect, such as you give me a call and ask me, "how can you study well,". The teacher in his own country is generally not to call the students, they can be friends, but they seldom greet the students, maybe because they are all adults, so he began to feel the students must be good. But he thinks what he said had a good effect on me.

Teacher-student relationship in China is not the same as it is in the interviewee's country, because they look more like friends with teachers, they can talk about anything, do anything together, but he think it's a little different in China, teachers are the same as parents.

4.4 Values Identity

The interviewee thinks that in China, people are very obedient and respect the decision of the

country, and they are very united. For example, when the COVID-19 started to spread in China this year, the government told everyone to stay at home and not to go out, so everyone did as they were told. Many people, regardless of their own safety, should go from all directions to support Wuhan. Such a move is very touching, but he thinks people want freedom more in our country.

The interviewee can understand the Chinese saying "win honor for your family" very well. Because in his own country, their nation is the most important, and then they feel that their family is the most important. For example, they think that if one person in a family is rich, it means that the family is happy. That means the family is rich.

Also, the interviewee thought Chinese filial piety is almost the same from his own culture. They generally treat the elderly are very filial. However, regarding the Chinese modesty, it's really a great behavior, because in his own country, if someone says you are very nice, you just say thank you. In China, the answer like "Not yet," "not so good." At first, he thought Chinese people were strange, but now he is used to it. He thinks Chinese people are like that.

5. Discussion

First and foremost, language identity shows the highest level for African student in China. This proves that if a second language learner wants to learn a language well, the identification of the target language is a key element; on the other hand, the mother tongue of African students is mainly phonetic writing figures such as English and French, which is very different from Chinese. And they choose to come to China to learn Chinese, and they have a certain linguistic identity with Chinese as a second language. They affirmed that it is useful and important for them to learn Chinese .However, as the length of Chinese study in China increases, the degree will gradually slow after the language identity reaches a certain level.

Secondly, degree of cultural identity appears moderate for the learner. Because some of African students choose to study Chinese in China for the reason that they yearn for Chinese culture. According to the author's observation and survey, some of them know little about Chinese culture, even confined to the Shaanxi area where they currently live. However, those who like travel have a relatively high cultural identity level. There is a significant difference between Chinese duration in China and its cultural identity. Similar to language identity, when cultural identity rises to a certain level, the speed will slow down. Although Chinese characters carry a lot of Chinese culture, African students in non-Chinese cultural circles use linear characters that are completely different from Chinese characters. They may not be able to learn Chinese characters through cultural identity. In addition, although the vocabulary taught in the textbooks of intensive reading and oral courses is cultural, the oral communication that people use daily is also related to Chinese culture, but because they do not know it deeply.

Thirdly, ethnic identity ranks second only to culture identity. Because African students' language identity with Chinese is actually based on their ethnic identity with China and recognizes China's powerful strength. According to the results of the interviews, African students are also willing to make friends with Chinese people. They also said that the Chinese people they met were very friendly. The overseas students themselves have no psychological resistance or rejection to the Chinese. However, because there are more students living in small African areas, in addition to school or school curriculum needs, foreign students lack the opportunity to take the initiative to contact Chinese people.

Lastly, values identification presents the lowest degree for the learner. For this study, the

interviewee did not understand the important values of China, hence, he needed further explanation and explanation from the interviewers, such as the collectivist values of China. Through the explanation, the interviewee seemed to understand and recognize some behaviors of Chinese people, but these are totally different from the values of their country. Because the identity of values is a deep cultural identity. A more appropriate form of guidance is needed to help students understand Chinese values over a longer period of time.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the overall level of African students' Chinese cultural identity is moderate, and it presents a dynamic development process and individual differentiation characteristics. This result just validates Wei Yanjun's view that learners' identity construction is not single, but in a specific social, cultural and historical context, and it is also diverse, dynamic and changeable(Wei Yanjun, 2015).The case in this study shows that African students have the highest degree of language identity, followed by cultural identity and ethnic identity, and the lowest degree of value identity.

The enlightenment in teaching is to guide students to understand the values and culture at the rehabilitated level, and the content of cultural teaching can be diversified. To be specific, cultural teaching in Chinese teaching should be gradual, from shallow language level to deeply value construction should be deepened with the improvement of learning level. In addition, learners should also have a positive attitude to understand Chinese culture from multiple perspectives, so as to achieve a comprehensive and objective view of cultural identity and improve their Chinese learning ability.

Acknowledgements

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