

# Researching the Relationship Between Emotional Identification in Western and Cross-cultural Competence among College Students from the Perspective of Social Identity Theory

Lingxi Tang

Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan 430000, Hubei, China

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**Abstract:** In an era characterized by globalization and multiculturalism, almost Chinese university students are obligated to expose the cross-cultural situation in academic and professional domains. In fact, it is momentous to improve cross-cultural competence to communicate diversity among people from different countries and establish a harmonious world. So, having cross-cultural competence is extremely important for Chinese students. There is no doubt that the basic of the cross-cultural competence is having a relative high level of learning a foreign language. In China, almost all students should learn English, as English is the most used language. However, the author has found a very interesting phenomenon: some Chinese university students who can get a high score in the English exam actually don't have a strong ability to communicate effectively with foreigners, which is an important indicator for evaluating cross-cultural competence. And these students also have a tendency toward strong rejection in Western culture. The recognition of culture to a certain degree reflects the emotional recognition of the society. Based on this situation, the author supposed that the ability to accept the Western culture, in other words, emotional identification, will affect the cross-cultural ability, and they have a positive correlation. In conclusion, this article aims to study the relationship between emotional identity in the West and cross-cultural competence of Chinese college students from the perspective of social identity theory and explore ways to break the barricades through questionnaires and observations.

**Keywords:** social identity theory, cross cultural competence, emotional identification

## 1. Introduction

With the era characterized by globalization and multiculturalism, individuals with higher levels of cross-cultural competence are better equipped to navigate intercultural interactions and thrive in multicultural environments. So, exploring the factors that influence cross-cultural competence, such as emotional identification with Western culture, is crucial for promoting effective intercultural communication and fostering cultural diversity. However, due to some history or other factors, some Chinese students will have a tendency to refuse to accept something western in a different degree affected by the environment; for instance, some elders resist learning English, and under the college entrance examination system, students and teachers focus more on how to score high marks, neglecting the true purpose of improving cross-cultural competence. For instance, they can't communicate with foreigners in English even though they use some popular terms; they don't know to have a western meal, which is a concrete manifestation of a relative low capacity to accept western culture. In a word, Chinese students always have the phenomenon of "high scores but low ability." In essence, this relative low capacity with these reasons indicates the low emotional identification. Some research findings demonstrate that indirect intercultural contact is the most important mode, in which indirect cultural products contact and indirect interpersonal contact play a dominant role while direct verbal contact and written language contact have a less important role. [1] Therefore, trying to study the relationship between emotional identification in the West and cross-cultural competence of Chinese college students from the perspective of social identity theory can give some fundamental ways to improve Chinese college students' cross-cultural ability, which is of great research value and significance.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In recent years, limited research has specifically examined the relationship between emotional identification with Western culture and cross-cultural competence among Chinese university students. However, research in this field is beneficial for cultivating students' cross-cultural competence through new perspectives. Cross-cultural competence is defined as a person who has abilities in four dimensions. There is knowledge (cognitive level), skills (behavioural level), and attitudes (affective level) according to the ICC theoretical model.[2] Individuals with higher levels of cross-cultural competence are better

equipped to navigate intercultural interactions and thrive in multicultural environments.

Social identity theory is a theory proposed by Henry Tajfel, who put forward this theory through a series of experiments and a certain theoretical foundation. He conducted the famous minimal groups experiment. In the experiment, the participants will categorize themselves to maximize the benefits for their group. In the process of categorizing themselves and others, members gain self-identity, which is also the foundation of the original social identity theory. Tajfel defines "social identity" as part of an individual's self-image, stemming from "the knowledge an individual has of their membership in certain groups and the emotional and value significance attached to that membership." [3]

Subsequent scholars have continuously revised and improved this theory, applying it to various fields, resulting in the current social identity theory. For example, Liu Jiayi uses social identity theory to study the behaviour of online fan communities, pointing out the need to reduce irrational behaviour among highly identified fans through internal persuasion to maintain social order. Chris Tanti, on the other hand, studies the significant impact of media on the social identity of teenagers. Chen Song sheng and others also conduct audit research within the framework of social identity theory, analysing the social dynamics between auditors and clients. It is not difficult to see that this theory is more commonly applied in the field of management, while research related to applying social identity theory to foreign language education is relatively scarce. Improving intercultural competence is one of the important goals of foreign language education. With the development of economic globalization, the demand for talents with an international perspective in today's society is constantly expanding. Students with an international perspective also mean that these students need to have high intercultural competence and must respect and accept other different cultures. This article aims to explore the relationship between social identity competence and students' intercultural competence from the perspective of social identity theory and to propose corresponding solutions on how to improve Chinese students' intercultural competence, thereby filling the research gap.

### 3. Research design

The author designed a questionnaire to investigate the relationship between emotional identification in western culture and cross-cultural competence among Chinese university students. There are 259 students participating in this survey. They come from different universities in China to secure the universality of data.

There are four types of questions: basic background, roughly testing cross-cultural competence, the degree of identification with Western culture, and self-evaluation.

The basic background involves their majors and their English exam scores. Most of the large-scale English exams in China are written exams, with few oral exams, which cannot fully evaluate English comprehensive ability. Therefore, the last type on this questionnaire is specially designed for students to evaluate their comprehensive English ability.

Roughly testing cross-cultural competence includes the ability to write English emails and communicate with others. Common word detection in Western countries, according to the ICC model.

The degree of identification includes the existence of an English name, the desire to communicate with others in English, the frequency of watching western videos, types of Western lifestyle habits, and so on. Having a cup of coffee can be a typical example.

There are four levels to evaluate one's overall English proficiency.

Research Strategies: The author measures students' emotional identification and intercultural communication skills from multiple different dimensions. After obtaining the data, the author use SPSSAU and apply the Pearson correlation coefficient for correlation analysis. Since measuring these two aspects requires multiple questions, the author combines several scale items into a single overall dimension by obtaining the average value, thus creating two new variables: students' emotional identification and intercultural communication skills. The results obtained are as follows:

### 4. Findings

The correlation coefficient between cross-cultural competence and emotional identification is 0.185, and it shows significance at the 0.01 level, indicating a significant positive correlation between cross-cultural competence and emotional identification.

	Cross-cultural competence	Emotional identification
Cross-cultural competence	1	
Emotional identification	0.185**	1

\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$

## 5. Conclusion

This study aims to research the relationship between emotional identification with Western culture and cross-cultural competence among Chinese university students. We can draw the conclusion that higher emotional identification causes higher cross-cultural competence. But the specific relationship needs more data to explore.

The findings of this study will have implications for promoting intercultural understanding, fostering cultural diversity, and enhancing cross-cultural communication skills among university students in China.

Through a better understanding of the role of emotional identification in shaping cross-cultural competence, educators and policymakers can develop more effective strategies for preparing students to thrive in a multicultural world.

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