

# Mechanism and Practice Path of Adolescents' Identification with Traditional Chinese Values: Based on Social Identification Theory

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**Abstract:** Traditional Chinese values are the core and soul of traditional Chinese culture, the ideological ideas and moral norms formed by the Chinese nation in the long-term historical development, and they are also the ideological source of socialist core values. Adolescents shoulder the historical mission of realizing the great national rejuvenation, and it is urgent to strengthen the identification of traditional Chinese values among adolescents. This paper clarifies the scientific connotation of traditional Chinese values identification, identifies its value from macro and micro perspectives, and constructs the mechanism of adolescents' traditional Chinese values identification based on social identity theory, in which social categorization is the prerequisite, social comparison is the central, and positive distinctiveness is the guarantee. Three dimensions – rational perceptions, emotional resonance, externalized practice – could be explored as the practice path to strengthen the traditional Chinese values identification among adolescents.

**Keywords:** Adolescents; Identification of traditional Chinese values; Social identity theory; Practical path

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## 1. Introduction

Traditional Chinese values were formed in the long-term historical development of the Chinese nation and are the important ideological source of socialist core values. From the perspective of the national character of culture and the continuity of cultural development, the development of socialist core values is inseparable from the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese values. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> CPC National Congress, the important role of traditional Chinese values in the construction of the current socialist core value system has been repeatedly elaborated. In 2017, *The Opinions on Implementing the Project of Inheriting and Developing Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture* stated that “to pass on and develop excellent traditional Chinese culture, we must vigorously promote the traditional Chinese virtues of unremitting self-improvement, respect for the work and the community, and filial piety for the elderly and love one's family.” Adolescents are “between adults who are fully adapted to life and adults who are not,”<sup>[3]</sup> which is a critical period for the formation of values. Strengthening adolescents' identification with traditional Chinese values is conducive to the practice of socialist core values, the positive development of adolescents' mental health and the establishment of cultural confidence.

## **2. Connotation, value and theoretical basis of identification of traditional Chinese values**

### **2.1. Connotation of identification of traditional Chinese values**

Traditional Chinese values generally refer to an ideology with Confucian classics as the core and many ideological systems such as Mohism, Dharma, Buddhism, Taoism philosophy. From the point of view of philosophy of value theory, and the traditional Chinese values refers to the value subject by cognitive value, value evaluation, value selection activities such as changing their ideas and value structure, the traditional Chinese values of ideology, moral norms internalized as their value orientation, and the process of the externalization of the value of the behavior. The generation process of adolescents' identification with traditional Chinese values is the process of their acceptance, sharing and tendency to identify with traditional Chinese values, which ultimately points to the world of adolescents.

### **2.2. The value of identification of traditional Chinese values**

It has been pointed out that "The Chinese civilization has been going on for thousands of years and has its own unique value system ..... In advocating and promoting socialist core values, we must draw rich nourishment from it; otherwise, we will lose vitality and influence." Traditional Chinese values are the ideological source of socialist core values, so from a macro perspective, the identification of traditional Chinese values can promote the practice of socialist core values, and plays a role in ideological guidance and cultural support. From the micro point of view, the identification of traditional Chinese values plays an important role in the physical and mental health development of adolescents. Adolescents are in a critical period of physical and mental development, with a strong curiosity but low discrimination ability. The contradiction of the traditional Chinese values contains moral concept and standard which effectively guide adolescents, promote mental health growth of the adolescents, provide a guide to adolescents' life, so that the adolescents are equipped with the capabilities to shoulder the historic mission of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

### **2.3. The theoretical basis of identification of traditional Chinese values**

Social identity theory came into being in the 1970s, represented by Tajfel and Turner. According to social identity theory, social categorization, social comparison and positive distinctiveness are established. In the stage of social categorization, according to Turner, people will automatically classify things, distinguish between in-group and out-group, and include the self in the classification process, and assign to the self-characteristics consistent with in-group, which is a process of self-stereotyping. Therefore, the basic assumption of social identity theory is that everyone wants to belong to an identity group with unique meaning and positive value <sup>[8]</sup>. This is what differentiates social identity from individual identity. In the stage of social comparison, groups will compare and identify with the group from cognition, emotion and behavior, so that individuals can get positive self-evaluation. The principle of positive differentiation encourages individuals to find the advantages of their group in the relevant dimensions of group comparison, so that they can get positive social recognition and improve their self-esteem in distinguishing from other groups.

## **3. Mechanism construction of adolescents' identification of traditional Chinese values**

### **3.1. Social categorization is a prerequisite for adolescents to identify with traditional Chinese values**

The need to simplify social phenomena has led people to categorize and place complex things into different categories. The "category" does not have to be a face-to-face interaction; it can refer to groups that exist on a psychological level, or even concepts that exist historically and culturally. Here, social-categorization is regarded as a cognitive tool, which distinguishes and classifies people and makes the social environment orderly so that individuals can carry out various forms of social activities. It creates and defines the position

of individuals in society. According to Turner's self-categorization theory, people distinguish between in-group and out-group and assign to themselves characteristics that fit in-group. That is, at the moment of choosing values, or even earlier, adolescents begin to engage in social categorization of groups with different values. In order to make adolescents identify with traditional Chinese values, it is necessary to make adolescents classify groups that practice traditional Chinese values into in-groups at the stage of social-categorization, assign their group characteristics to themselves, and finalize themselves as a member of practicing traditional Chinese values.

### **3.2. Social comparison is central to consolidating teenagers' identification with traditional Chinese values**

Under the preconditions of different categories, individuals can only evaluate their group cognition and get the emotional resonance of the group they belong to by comparing groups. Social comparison is the first behavior triggered by social categorization, and it is an instrumental means for us to establish correct perception. On the one hand, people always evaluate anything on the basis of comparing it with similar things. In most cases, membership in a social category does not increase or decrease social identity; membership is only valuable when compared between groups. On the other hand, at present, adolescents are in the information-explosive era that utilizes big data. The main educational channel is not the only source of their knowledge and information. Digital media is playing a greater role than ever before. In addition, adolescents are in the stage of rapid physical and mental development and maturity, and their emotions and attitudes, as an important part of individual non-intellectual factors, are also in a period of drastic development and change; these attributes show that they have strong initiative in value judgment. This also urges adolescents to compare groups that practice traditional Chinese values with other groups of values, and discern group differences through social comparison, making the significance of social categorization process more obvious.

### **3.3. Positive distinctiveness is the guarantee to strengthen teenagers' identification with traditional Chinese values**

According to social identity theory, positive distinctiveness is to obtain higher social identity, while positive social identity is to meet the needs of self-esteem. Everyone wants to be positively evaluated by the outside world, and the way to achieve this is to place oneself in a group with a high reputation. This is because the sociality of human needs determines the sociality of values. Tajfel and Turner believed that if the advantages of their own group could not be recognized or the disadvantages could not be denied, members would tend to seek to join a group of higher status through social mobility to obtain higher social identity and self-esteem, while positive distinctiveness met the needs of individuals to obtain positive self-esteem. In other words, adolescents need to gain advantages from groups practicing traditional Chinese values, so as to obtain a higher level of social identity and self-esteem and maintain positive distinctiveness. Otherwise, they will lose confidence in practicing traditional Chinese values and lose their identification with traditional Chinese values.

## **4. The practice path of adolescents' identification of traditional Chinese values**

### **4.1. Strengthen rational cognition and guide social categorization**

Social categorization is not only the result of information processing, but also the result of realizing deep value understanding through various educational approaches. Therefore, on the one hand, we should give full play to the guiding role of school education in adolescents' identification of traditional Chinese values, reasonably infiltrate the content of traditional Chinese values into existing curricula, speed up the introduction of excellent traditional Chinese values into textbooks, emphasize the advantages of subject

curricula, and impress students with rational knowledge. For example, in order to achieve the value goal of “unremitting self-improvement” in traditional Chinese values, relevant curricula can be combined with teaching, such as *Zhan Tianyou* and *Get Rid of the Backwardness of the Petroleum Industry*. In addition, we should fully excavate the hidden curriculum resources in the school environment with the help of the school building, blackboard newspaper, school emblem, school motto and other content integrated with the traditional Chinese values to exert an imperceptible influence on identity guidance. On the other hand, the traditional cultural literacy of primary and secondary school teachers should be enhanced. Teacher is the guide of adolescents’ life and person who seeks knowledge to educate people, so teachers are supposed to have the excellent traditional culture of learning enthusiasm and research ability, understand the connotation of the traditional Chinese values, absorb the essence, discard the dregs, inherit and develop traditional Chinese values, and facilitate modern transformation of these values. To deepen adolescents’ rational cognition of traditional Chinese values in a more accessible way, we should guide them to classify themselves as internal groups that practice traditional Chinese values, so as to identify with traditional Chinese values.

#### **4.2. Stimulate emotional resonance and stabilize social comparison**

Adolescents have a strong curiosity for knowledge and are willing to analyze and compare all kinds of things, but due to the lack of dialectical thinking development, lack of social experience, weak discrimination ability, there will be deviations in social comparison, and their emotions will fluctuate violently. Therefore, it is necessary to stimulate the emotional resonance of adolescents, so that they can obtain a higher level of social identity and self-esteem in the social comparison between groups, and can consciously resist the corrupted values, so that traditional Chinese values are internalized into the spiritual pursuit of adolescents. On the one hand, it is necessary to improve public sentiment management, give play to the propaganda role of mainstream media on traditional Chinese values, and stimulate the emotional resonance of adolescents in a way closer to students’ real life by capitalizing typical cases, role models and traditional Chinese festivals. For instance, they can learn Qu Yuan’s patriotic spirit during Dragon Boat Festival and learn Zhang Guimei’s “burning the lamp” spirit on Teacher’s Day. On the other hand, traditional media and emerging media should be organically combined, and new Internet media should be used to expand the channels and space for the dissemination of traditional Chinese values. In connection with the achievements of the development of China’s socialist construction, relevant articles and videos should be timely released on social software or websites to form a positive environment for public sentiment, so that adolescents can obtain a higher social comparison effect in the process of social comparison, take pride in practicing traditional Chinese values, and strengthen their belief identity.

#### **4.3. Externalize practice and guarantee positive distinctiveness**

With the completion of social categorization and social comparison, adolescents have a better understanding of the advantages of traditional Chinese values and will actively make up the gap between them according to the requirements, so as to guarantee that they achieve a higher level of self-esteem in the positive distinctiveness. Therefore, we should strengthen the experience of adolescents, encourage them to understand and interpret traditional Chinese values based on their own experience and social reality, internalize their theoretical identity and externalize their practice. Using the demands of the adolescents as the breakthrough point, we can use various forms of on-campus and off-campus activities to impart positive values and spirit to adolescents, as in carrying out the real-life learning campaign, “cleaning your plate,” which is in line with the Chinese traditional values, encouraging students to accompany senior citizens outside the campus so as to practicing the Chinese traditional values of respecting for elders, etc. In this way, adolescents can gain a higher level of social identity and self-esteem in positive distinctiveness, and

strengthen the identification of traditional Chinese values. It is also necessary to strengthen multi-sectoral coordination and cooperation to form a good social practice platform for adolescents, broaden the channels of social practice, and innovate the forms of social practice, so as to deepen adolescents' understanding and perception of traditional Chinese values, and promote the transformation of traditional Chinese values from passive acceptance to conscious practice.

### Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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