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Constructing Identity Abroad: How Chinese Students in Canada Reconcile their Cultural Identity with Western Influences

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we investigate the phenomenon of cultural identity construction, focusing on Chinese students studying in Canada and how they deal with conflict between their Chinese and Western cultures. It investigates different factors of Western culture and examines how Chinese students construct and reconcile their identity with Western influences. The study also focuses on the psychological effects of identity reconstruction among these students. This study employed a qualitative research approach, and data were gathered through structured interviews with six Chinese students at Canadian universities. Three primary themes were revealed through thematic analysis: educational institution's role in cultural adaptation, cultural practices and identity influence, and psychological well-being and cultural identity. Consequently, the study results show that the role of educational institutions, cultural practices, and identity conflicts significantly impact cultural adaptation and students' psychological well-being. The study stresses the fluidity of the identity construction process and the challenges Chinese students face in defining their cultural self-identification with the dominating Western culture.

Keywords: Social adjustment, cross-cultural emotional health, identity, Chinese international students, Western influences

INTRODUCTION

Drawing from the OECD and UIS conventions adopted in 2006, an “International student” refers to a term used for people who travel to other countries to study. International students’ identity construction, particularly among international students (ISs), has attracted significant attention in recent decades. Researchers aim to understand how ISs develop their cultural identities within academic and social contexts. Various factors influence this process, especially those related to the learning environment. Identity encompasses an individual's conception, characteristics, beliefs, and expressions, as illustrated in the studies of Roy and Al Harthy (2022). It is one's understanding of one's relationship with the world, constructed over time and space, and one has envisioned possibilities for the future. Identity may be seen as the distinctive character unique to an individual or shared among members of a specific social category or group, emphasizing the notion of sameness or oneness. It defies a singular definition, with various theoretical perspectives yielding diverse interpretations, including notions of uniqueness and differentiation. Campbell (2000) defined identity as fluid, multifaceted, and contextual, challenging static and homogeneous interpretation.

According to Peng (2020), international students often pursue English-speaking countries to increase their English proficiency, viewing English proficiency as crucial for achieving their goals. Proficiency in English facilitates a reflective and critical attitude toward one's own culture, fostering cross-cultural understanding in multicultural societies (Merish & Auburn, 2021). In academic communities, students engage in diverse communities of practice, which is essential for scaffolding the construction of cultural identities. Cultural identities are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power, encompassing language, religion, values, and norms. International students often experience a conflict between their preexisting cultural identity and constructing a new identity in a foreign context. Learning an additional language and adapting to a new society entail a complex process of identity negotiation and construction, challenging students to reconcile their original cultural values with those of the host culture.

Although previous research has shown that identity negotiation is a challenging process for international students, such as Liu's (2021) examination of cross-cultural identity construction and Kaktiņš' (2021) study on identity challenges faced by students in Australia, there remains a gap in understanding how Chinese students reconcile their cultural identities with Western influences, especially in Canada. Oduwaye et al. (2023) conducted a trend analysis of international students' challenges over 21 years, highlighting the need for more focused research. While global education cooperation has expanded and more Chinese students pursue education abroad, the impact of identity reconciliation on their psychological health has received limited attention. Most studies, such as those by Chen (2020), Sam and Eide (1991), Lu (1990), Forbes-Mewett (2018), Ryan and Twibell (2000), and Russell et al. (2010), focus on mental health issues such as homesickness, loneliness, and anxiety without exploring the role of identity construction. This research aims to fill these gaps by empirically studying

the cultural identity construction process of Chinese students in Canada and its psychological effects.

This research investigates how Chinese students studying in Canadian universities reconcile their cultural identity with Western influences. It examines the factors, challenges, and strategies involved in their identity negotiation, providing insight into their adaptation processes. The study explores the impact of various Western influences—cultural, social, and educational—on their behavior and perceptions. Additionally, it delves into the psychological effects of identity reconstruction, highlighting the challenges and mental well-being issues these students face. Overall, this study aims to explain how Chinese students navigate and balance their cultural identity with Western influences in Canada, addressing the associated challenges and stressors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural identity

Identity theory is often associated with cultural studies and proposes how individuals construct, reconstruct, negotiate, and reconcile their identities. Various factors, such as gender, race, culture, and social and political contexts, play important roles in shaping and constructing an individual's identity. One of the famous theorists who proposed identity theory is Stuart Hall; he argues that identity is not fixed but rather a process (Yang et al., 2021). Other theorists who have proposed identity theory include Homi K. Bhaba and Gloria Anzaldúa, who argued that identity is hybrid, particularly in colonial and postcolonial discourse (Bhandari, 2022). The fundamental principles of identity theory are fluidity of identity, intersectionality, hybridity, and cultural negotiation, which suggest that identity is not static but rather dynamic and is liable to transformation and evolution. The individual adapts and negotiates to different identities and navigates their cultural identities, which are often seen in immigrants. They are subject to blending and merging their identity with other cultural identities.

Kim (2007) researched different academic concepts of cultural identity and concluded that cultural identity is an unambiguous term or concept in intercultural communication and social sciences. A review of the vast literature on various concepts of cultural identity revealed how cultural identity has been defined and conceptualized in recent decades. Employing the analytical framework of the ideological circle, Kim proposed various directions of cultural identity, which indicates that cultural identity is an adaptive and evolving entity, a flexible and negotiable entity, an individual's choice and discrete social entity, a communicative system, and a social category.

In his study on the cultural identity of international students, Tarry (2011) argued that studying abroad transforms individuals' cultures. Researchers such as Forbes-Mewett (2008) argued that studying in the host country aims to gain experience, not to change cultural values, for a relatively short period. Individuals sometimes face challenges related to new cultural values, lifestyles, social behavior, and norms. According to Cooper (2016), adaptation to the cultural identities of other communities sometimes results in cultural shocks where

individuals find that they face challenges with beliefs, norms, and values and that their identity and self-being are potential threats. These investigations indicate that cultural identity is subject to change and is dynamic. In the case of immigration or as an international student, individuals have to reconcile their cultural identity with the cultural values of the community where an individual lives.

Cross-cultural adaptation and its influence on Chinese students in Canada

International education offers students a rare opportunity to interact with diverse cross-sections of society and learn how to cope with different cultures. However, this cultural adaptation is limited for international students (Sadewo et al., 2020). Using cross-sectional longitudinal data collected in three waves, Sadewo and colleagues studied the changes in social adjustment processes and psychological networks among international students. By employing the stochastic actor-oriented model (SAOM), they reported that psychological adjustment and sociocultural adjustment were the two factors that most influenced the dynamics of the participants' networks, i.e., declining friendship with those who differed in terms of their psychological adjustment while approaching others with different levels of sociocultural adjustment. They also reported that, indeed, social networks play a significant role in social adaptation and adjustment.

Campos et al. (2022) focused on cross-cultural adjustment and applied a cross-sectional survey of 189 participants. By looking at other conceptualizations of cross-cultural adjustment and adapting a scale from expatriates, the authors show that this scale is appropriate for measuring adjustment in the context of higher education. The confirmation factor analyses show a valid 8-factor model in the cross-sectional inpatient sample with satisfactory test reusability. These descriptive findings suggest that most international students are adaptable to many domains. Furthermore, the research correlates criterion-related validity by showing how host social interaction corresponds to aspects such as students' adjustment. In summary, this study opens up avenues for future research and implications for practice by presenting a theoretically informed measure of international students' adjustment across various domains. It serves as a valuable resource for higher education counselor administration and students' support services to assess their adjustment and mitigate possible challenges.

The different methods of assessing the adjustment of international students are presented along with the different indices and theoretical models. The early studies of Church (1982) and Searle and Ward (1990) highlighted the areas of academic achievement, social contact, satisfaction, and personal development as indicators that are used interchangeably with acculturation and adaptation. Theories exist from clinical to social learning and social cognitive theories. Subsequent research has also utilized various measures, such as stress, coping models, and behavioral outlooks. However, some instruments, such as the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS), are among the most popular. However, the field still needs to be better integrated, and there are no systematic efforts to build up bodies of knowledge. One exception is the meta-analysis by Wilson et

al. (2013), which aimed to identify the predictors of cultural adaptation using a range of participants, including international students.

Moreover, the studies of Zheng and Ishii (2023) highlighted the influence of distant support and acculturation orientation. In their research, they analyzed the impact of different types of social support on the psychological adaptation of Chinese students studying abroad. The findings of their study show that distant support negatively impacts psychological adaptations, whereas close feelings positively impact sociocultural adaptation and alleviate feelings of loneliness among Chinese international students. Likewise, international students with higher levels of home-culture orientation had a greater propensity to look for support more distally. Those with a stronger host culture orientation perceived a need for and sought more close support. A Chinese cultural orientation led to an increase in distance emotional support seeking and a reduction in psychological adaptation, which caused loneliness.

Factors influencing cultural identity reconciliation

Cultural identity reconciliation is a summary interaction characterized by several factors that cut across the individual, social, and contextual domains. Studies related to this subject stress that identity is a process that can be easily observed when international learners are adapting to a new cultural environment. Yuan (2023) explored the intercultural sensitivity and sociocultural antecedents of Chinese students studying at Canadian universities. These findings depict how the acceptance and integration of sociocultural factors and cultural hybridity are essential for reconciliation. Similarly, Wang (2016) engaged Canadian-born and foreign-born Chinese students studying in Malaysian schools who faced trials and transitions in social and cultural assimilation. This underlines the value of two comparative techniques in predicting the specific and unique individual characteristics of identity negotiation for distinct and shared social demographic profiles in different living contexts. Li and Krugly Smolska (2008) focused on Chinese postgraduate students' identity reconstruction in Canada and noted the impacts of academic, social, and cultural contexts. These works suggest that nothing in identity might prove that it is not a change, being fully completed and formed, and that constant construction and reconstruction are exerted and influenced by several external and internal factors.

According to Tarry (2011) and Forbes-Mewett (2008), international education alters individual cultures despite the unchanging objective of doing so. The experiences described by Cooper (2016) indicate that the conditions and culture shock undermine identity's malleability and how the students have to adapt their cultural identification to authorities and the hosting community. Such studies show that cultural identity is not a fixed concept and may be in the process of transformation, thus forcing people to adjust their identities in new cultural zones constantly.

Psychological well-being in identity reconstruction

Interruption of identity reconstruction is another factor that considerably affects international students' psychological states. In this context, Beck (2008) explored the mental health consequences of identity change among international students at a Canadian university and revealed the sources of emotional pressure. This research provides insight into the effects of identity reconciliation on Chinese students' psychological well-being, thus making these aspects critical. Studying Chinese doctoral students' withdrawal in Canada, Gao (2018) focused on the psychological aspects of withdrawal and stressors with respect to students' socioidentity. The results of this research affirm the stated problem that little attention is given to the effects of identity reconciliation on psychological well-being. Based on the analysis presented by Gao, one can gain a basic understanding of the mental health challenges that result from identification processes.

Zhu and Zhang (2014) explore international students' contemporary psychological health and identity formation, focusing on culture and occupation. Their study describes the psychological impact and stressors of makeovers and how they try to manage the identity transformation process, making their study an essential resource for understanding the psychological aspects of Chinese students' identity reconstruction. Zheng and Ishii (2023) discuss how institutional and close support affects psychological adaptation. The findings indicate that while distant support has adverse effects on psychological adaptations, close support has positive effects on sociocultural adaptations and reduces loneliness. These results indicate that the type of social support can influence Chinese international students' adaptation and maintenance of their psychological well-being during identity reconstruction.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research method

This research uses a qualitative case study method to acquire a more profound knowledge of the analysis of cultural identity construction and reconciliation, especially the cultural identity reconciliation of Chinese students in Canada. The interviews were conducted to collect data from Chinese students studying in Canada to understand better their challenges in reconciling their cultural identity with their Canadian identity and how they cope with such challenges. The psychological effect on Chinese students during identity reconciliation is also determined through interviews.

Data collection

Data were collected through interviews with Chinese students studying at Canadian universities. The interviews provide comprehensive information about the experiences of Chinese students related to cultural adaptability, the construction of their identity abroad, and Western influences on identity. The

interviews covered the challenges faced by Chinese students abroad in terms of the adaptability of reconciliation with their cultural identity and the impact of such processes on the mental well-being of Chinese students in Canada. The open-ended interview questions allowed all interviewees to express their experiences fully. Including participants from various regions within China and different Canadian universities provides a more comprehensive understanding of the identity construction process, contributing to the study's robustness and depth.

Research sample

The current study's research sample included six Chinese students studying at Canadian universities. To that end, purposive sampling, which is a nonrandom sampling approach, was adopted to identify participants who could offer in-depth and varied information about the cultural identity reconciliation process of Chinese students in the context of Canada. According to Creswell (2013), a sample size of five to ten participants is adequate for qualitative research when aiming to understand detailed personal experiences. This range allows for deep, meaningful insights while maintaining data collection and analysis manageability. Based on these considerations, purposive sampling is most suitable because it identifies individuals most likely to provide experiences and insights pertinent to the study's objectives (S. Campbell et al., 2020).

The participants were selected based on the following criteria: Chinese citizenship, studying at Canadian educational institutions as international students, originating from diverse regions, ranging from the time of their stay in Canada to their major field of study, level of assimilation, and readiness to talk at length during an interview about cultural identity restoration. Including diverse groups representing various regions within China and different Canadian universities enhances the generalizability and credibility of the findings, offering a broader perspective on the identity reconciliation process among Chinese students.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the themes extracted from the interviews, aligning with the study objectives. This coding process involves scrutinizing the interview transcripts to discern recurring patterns and themes. Thematic analysis holds significant value in qualitative research by facilitating the organization and interpretation of diverse data, thereby uncovering commonalities and disparities (Naeem et al., 2023). Additionally, it enables the exploration of nuanced issues underlying the data.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board before the commencement of the study. The participants were provided with an information sheet detailing the study's purpose, role, and rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without any consequence. Informed consent was

obtained from all participants before the interviews. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used, and any identifying information was removed from the transcripts. The data were securely stored, and only the researcher could access them.

RESULTS

The codes are generated based on interview guides and are used for data analysis. The coding process began with an initial read-through of the transcripts to familiarize them with the data, followed by systematic coding of significant statements and phrases. These codes were then grouped into broader themes based on patterns and recurring topics. The themes were finalized through iterative comparison and refinement to ensure they accurately reflected the participants' experiences and aligned with the study's objectives. The codes and their descriptions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes for the results and their description

Theme# 01: Educational institutions' role in cultural adaptation

No	Themes	Description
1	Educational Institution's Role in Cultural Adaptation	Explores the role of Educational Institutions in cultural Adaptation among Chinese students in Canada. It investigates how educational institutions shape students' perceptions, identities, and beliefs through education and extracurricular activities.
2	Cultural Practices and Identity Influence	What are the practices and behaviors Chinese Students adapt or adopt from Canadian students, and how do they influence their cultural values and identity and form a hybrid identity?
3	Psychological Well-being and Cultural Identity	This theme focuses on the complexities Chinese Students face in navigating between preserving their cultural identity and assimilation with Canadian identity. It also explores the psychological implications and the tensions and challenges Chinese Students face in balancing their identity while adopting the dominant identity.

Language and communication are essential in cultural adaptation, especially within higher education institutions. Almost one-third of the population of China is studying at Canadian universities. Canada has a diverse culture because Canadian universities primarily enroll students from diverse cultures, resulting in diversity and inclusivity (Séguin, 2022). The educational landscape in Canada is shaped by its multicultural society. This multiculturalism has led to many challenges faced by international students and Canada and has focused on the challenges faced by students of different cultures simultaneously.

English is the second language of Chinese, and the central issue they face is communicating, so the communication gap has led to difficulty in cultural adaptation. This theme focused mainly on the role of educational institutions in cultural adaptation. The research question was as follows: As Chinese students studying in Canada, do you think your institution helps students from different cultures reconcile their identities with Western influences? The responses of the students from different institutions were collected and are given below.

Student 1: “As an international student studying in Canada, I am experiencing acculturative stress, and I face challenges in the adaptation process. My institution lacks culturally responsive pedagogy, and there is inadequacy in language-related services that has hindered my ability to reconcile my cultural identity with Western influences, and this has affected my academic performance as well.”

Student 2: “The dominance of Western culture in universities in Canada and the lack of diversity in the curriculum has resulted in cultural differences and created a sense of inferiority in me because of communication barriers. This has led to the marginalization of international students like me.”

Student 3: “I faced many challenges in cultural adaptation and still I am facing. However, my institution recently implemented the policy or strategy of a culturally responsive teaching framework and programs related to language support, which are designed for international students. Our university promises to bridge the cultural gap.”

Student 4: “Although the institutions are committed to diversity and inclusion, the lack of training programs for the university professors has created an environment unsuitable for learning because of lack of inclusivity, and this does not fulfill the student's cultural needs and affects their academics.”

Student 5: “The lack of institutions to address the intersectionality of language and culture has resulted in failure of support to the students and increased the challenge to the students related to mental well-being and challenges to their studies, and as Chinese students studying in Canada, I face the same challenges.”

Student 6: “I have faced challenges related to cultural adaptation during my first year as international students, but my institute has established a Center for Cultural Competence and Inclusive Excellence, and it encourages open conversation and involves practices to support international students in adapting to a new culture.”

The responses show that most Chinese students are complaining about the challenges of cultural adaptability in Canada's diverse environment. Students 1, 2, 4, and 5 gave negative responses related to the role of educational institutions

in cultural adaptability and helping students adapt to a new culture. They face challenges related to communication that have resulted in their poor academic performance and feelings of stress and loneliness. On the other hand, respondents 3 and 6 gave positive responses, saying that their institutions are striving to help international students bridge the barrier related to cultural adaptation. However, these are new policies, and it is evident that these centers will help adapt to diverse cultures.

Theme #02: Cultural practices and identity influence

Chinese students have a strong moral identity, and the cultural context of Canadian students influences it. There are substantial cultural differences in the moral identities of the students of both nations. For example, the collectivist approach of the Chinese and the individualistic approach of Canadian students. Individualism dominates collectivism in Canada and dramatically influences the moral identity of Chinese students studying in Canada. Other social norms, such as the value of filial piety in Chinese culture, are also affected by Canadian culture. Likewise, the dominance of Canadian cultural practices affects many other Chinese social practices. This theme focuses mainly on the practices and behaviors that Chinese students adopt or adopt from Canadian students and how they influence their cultural values and identities and form a hybrid identity. The research question is as follows: Can you provide examples of specific cultural practices or norms that you have adapted or adopted from Western culture during your time in Canada, and how have they influenced your sense of identity? The responses of the students are given below:

Student 1: “I felt pressured to abide by the individualistic approach and values of Canadian students, which has affected my academic, personal life and mental health as well. Our Chinese culture values collectivism, especially in workplaces and educational institutions, which help us perform effectively. The individualistic approach here makes me feel like I am in competition with others, and it affects my academic performance and mental well-being.”

Student 2: “I feel like I am feeling like I am losing my cultural identity and values by adopting Western communication styles in academic or impersonal communication. I feel like I am living in two different worlds and continuously switching between two cultures, and it makes me feel exhausted to reconcile the two cultures.”

Student 3: “The Western norms such as physical touch and personal space have made me feel uncomfortable sometimes but at the same time it makes me confident in certain conditions.”

Student 4: “The Western heritage and holidays have made me feel disconnected from my Chinese heritage and traditions. It felt like I have to

hide my cultural values to fit into Canadian culture, which has led to the feeling of erasure of my culture or cultural displacement.”

Student 5: “Adopting Canadian practices such as individualism made me feel more confident and independent and made me explore my weaknesses so that I can work on them and improve my self-being.”

Student 6: “The Western education system emphasized critical thinking and analysis in their education system. This has developed the qualities of questioning and reasoning in me, and it encouraged me to question my own cultural beliefs and resulted in a deeper understanding of my culture and religion.”

These responses by Chinese students highlight Canadian culture’s negative and positive impacts on Chinese students. Students 1, 2, and 4 highlight the negative impacts of Canadian culture, whereas students 3, 5, and 6 highlight the positive impact of Canadian culture on Chinese students' identity.

Theme #03: Psychological well-being and cultural identity

The complexities faced by Chinese students in navigating between the preservation of their cultural identities and assimilation with Canadian identities lead to an impact on their mental well-being. The significant challenges faced by them are cultural identity conflicts, acculturation stress, and identity fragmentation, which lead to uncertainty, confusion, anxiety, depression, and cultural disorientation. This theme focuses mainly on the psychological implications of cultural navigation and the complexities Chinese students face. The interview question is as follows: How do you navigate the tension between preserving your Chinese cultural heritage and assimilating into Canadian society? Can you discuss any strategies you employ to balance these competing influences on your identity? The responses of students from different educational institutes are given below.

Student 1: “I attempt to take part in Chinese culture by celebrating Chinese national holidays and cooking Chinese foods, but it becomes challenging to combine the two with my friends from Canada; it is as if I am living a double life.”

Student 2: “I go to a Chinese cultural club in my school to socialize with people from my culture; it makes me feel more grounded in my identity when stressed by excess assimilation.”

Student 3: “I have integrated the Chinese traditions as part of my lifestyle in Canada by using both the Dong and Wang featured in the story. For example, in the morning, I do Tai Chi moves, and in the evening, I prepare Chinese dishes for my Canadian counterparts.”

Student 4: “The conflict between staying loyal to the Chinese traditions of my parents and following the culture that is dominant in Canada makes me feel very stressing and confused about who I truly am.”

Student 5: “With time, I have adopted a growth mindset and endeavour to see diversity as a potential for change, growth and development. Last, have visited the counsellors’ office where I have a chance to address my disorientation culturally.”

Student 6: “I have embraced the comfort that comes with interacting with fellow international students who go through worst experience just like me in the world today; we encourage each other in matters concerning personal identity and integration in a new system of life.”

These responses highlight the strategies used by Chinese students to cope with their mental health issues, including cultural identity conflicts, acculturation stress, and identity fragmentation. Different students use different strategies to navigate between the two cultures. As the responses show, all the students went hand in hand with their cultural practices to cope with challenges and mental health issues such as homesickness, loneliness, anxiety, depression, and acculturation stress.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that language and communication play essential roles in cultural adaptation among Chinese students studying at Canadian universities. Owing to language gaps, Chinese students need help communicating, especially in educational institutions. The policies undertaken by universities to end the language gap help students adapt to the culture. As the findings show, Students 3 and 5 say that their university introduced the programs and developed centers related to cultural support, which will help them open up freely and make them more confident. Various studies highlight the role of intercultural communication; Backman and Baldwin (2009) analyze the effect of language barriers on intercultural communication, with a focus on Engineering and Italian studies. They used the case study approach and thematic analysis and reported that simplicity in the environment, group cohesion, and instructor or interpreter help bridge the language gap and enhance intercultural communication. San and Guo (2022) researched the correlation between institutional support, social support, and academic performance. The findings show that institutional and social support positively affects academic performance. This evidence shows that educational institutions and instructors play a significant role in the cultural adaptation of international students. Thus, academic institutions should prioritize social support to enhance the experiences of international students in cross-cultural adaptation.

Moreover, this findings suggest that Canada’s cultural practices strongly influence the identity of Chinese students studying in Canada, as is evident from students’ responses. Every student adapts to different Canadian practices, and

their cultural identity is influenced positively and negatively. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1984) categorizes Chinese culture as highly collectivist, emphasizing group harmony and familial ties, whereas Canadian culture leans toward individualism, prioritizing personal autonomy. This contrast supports Student 1's experience of pressure and academic challenges due to individualistic values. Bhabha (1994) describes hybrid identity formation, where individuals integrate aspects of both native and host cultures. It aligns with Student 3's experience of discomfort with Western norms but gains confidence, illustrating the blending of cultural identities. The studies of Ward et al. (2001) discuss "cultural distance," where significant differences between host and home cultures lead to tremendous adaptation stress. This is reflected in Student 4's feelings of cultural displacement and identity confusion, which affect their psychological well-being. It is evident from the above literature that cultural practices influence an individual's identity greatly.

Furthermore, the findings of this research highlight that the challenges Chinese students face in navigating between preserving their cultural identity and reconciling their identity with the Canadian identity have affected their psychological well-being. The findings of this study show from the responses of students that the strategies used by Chinese students to cope with their mental health issues include cultural identity conflicts, acculturation stress, and identity fragmentation. Different students use different strategies to navigate between the two cultures. This is evident from the study by Bethel et al. (2020), titled "Cross-Cultural Transition and Psychological Adaptation of International Students: The Moderating Effects of Host National Connectedness on Culture Shock among International Students, a Cross-sectional Study." This study focuses on culture shock and its effects, particularly when studying in different countries as an international student. The research findings help develop a theoretical model for the psychological adjustment of international students. Presenting personal resources and the chosen environment interactively affects adaptive outcomes through the mediator of host national connectedness. The results of the path analysis indicated that all of the host national connectedness was a partial mediator while fully mediating the relationship between English learning proficiency and the two mental health outcomes of interest: psych symptoms. Likewise, Zhu and Zhang (2014) explore international students' contemporary psychological health and identity formation, focusing on culture and occupation. Their study describes the psychological impact and stressors of makeovers and how Mai and Hong try to manage the process of identity transformation, making their study an essential resource for understanding the psychological aspects of Chinese students' identity reconstruction. Hence, cultural identity changes substantially impact international students' psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study delved into the intricate process of identity construction among Chinese students in Canada, examining how they reconcile their cultural identity with Western influences. The research highlighted several key findings that underscore the complexity and dynamism of cultural identity negotiation. Identity

construction is a multifaceted and ongoing process influenced by numerous educational, social, and cultural factors. It established the foundation for analyzing Chinese students' experience in balancing their cultural selves within a global context dominated by the West.

This study established that educational institutions play a central role in cultural assimilation. While some institutions of higher learning have put in place supportive structures to facilitate the adjustment of international students, others lack and/or provide little or no support, which leads to acculturative stress and communication issues. This approach aligns with other foreign acculturation studies that highlight the role played by social institutions in supporting cross-cultural adjustment.

The study also revealed that culture plays an important role in forming identity. Many Chinese students become involved in practicing Western activities, thus making them engage in this hybrid practice. However, cultural integration could be smoother than the process above suggests. A significant challenge students encounter in their education is culture shock, whereby they are torn between the old and the new culture. They are necessary for individual maturation and impetus toward cultural confusion.

The last theme of the study was psychological well-being, which was closely associated with the process of identity reconciliation. Owing to the cultural conflict between the traditional culture of Canada and the new culture of Canada, most immigrants experience stress in their families, leading to anxiety, depressive disorders, and identity conflicts. Some of the ways through which the students try to overcome these challenges include engaging in cultural clubs, trying to obtain social support, and trying to stay culturally rooted.

In conclusion, the current study highlights the complex and multifaceted understanding of identity development among Chinese students in Canada. This raises awareness of the necessity for proper support in educational facilities to enhance cultural adaptation and mental health care services for international students.

Future studies should replicate this study with more extensive and more heterogeneous participant groups to substantiate these results. Furthermore, longitudinal research may also offer greater illumination of the potential repercussions of culture and the process of cultural adaptation on identity and mental health in the long term. Awareness of how the identity negotiation process occurs and the involvement of institutional support may help design more effective policies to integrate international students.

Author Contributions

The first author, Wendai Yang, is a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Macau. Wendai Yang was responsible for the research design, semistructured interviews, data analysis, and writing. The second author, Shuya Du, a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor, is responsible for contacting the interviewees, conducting semistructured interviews, and offering suggestions for revisions.

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