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Exploration of a New Model for Cognitive Intervention and Guidance of College Students' Anxiety in the Context of Traditional Culture

By

Bo Liu¹ & Changjiang Liu² & Yang Liu³

^{1,2}Southwest Petroleum University School of Economics and Management, Chengdu, Sichuan 610500, China

³Tianfu New District Aviation and Tourism Vocational College, Chengdu, Sichuan 610000, China



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Abstract

At present, multiple pressures such as academic involution, employment competition, and interpersonal conflicts are superimposed, leading to a high incidence of anxiety among college students. The intervention model based on Western psychology has shortcomings in local adaptation. The excellent resources of traditional Chinese culture, which contain rich psychological adjustment wisdom such as self-cultivation and introspection, harmony between heaven and man, emotional regulation, and empathy through rituals and music, can be used for local anxiety cognitive intervention. This paper adopts the methods of literature research and logical analysis to sort out the core theoretical resources of traditional culture for alleviating students' anxiety, analyze the logic of the generation of anxiety among contemporary college students and the existing practical shortcomings of the current counseling work, and construct the internal mechanism of anxiety intervention guided by traditional culture from four dimensions: cognitive intervention, emotional counseling, value adjustment, and practical relaxation. It also builds a new integrated counseling model of "classroom cognitive intervention-campus cultural counseling-home-school collaborative buffering-autonomous practical regulation". The research finds that Confucian ethical cultivation can correct irrational cognition, Taoist thoughts of harmony between heaven and man can alleviate anxiety caused by academic involution and peer competition, the theory of emotions in traditional Chinese medicine can achieve coordinated regulation of body and mind, and folk ritual and music culture can eliminate social anxiety. Currently, there are problems such as shallow integration of traditional culture in anxiety counseling, the absence of interdisciplinary education mechanisms, a single practical carrier, and insufficient home-school collaboration in colleges. Based on the four-dimensional intervention mechanism and four-subject collaborative path, this model can reconstruct students' cognitive modes, ease anxious feelings and boost psychological resilience, which offers theoretical foundations and operable strategies for localized psychological intervention addressing college students' anxiety.

Keywords: Traditional Culture, College Students, Anxiety Psychology, Cognitive Intervention, Psychological Counseling Model

Introduction

Under the background of cultivating virtue and shaping character, psychological education has become a crucial part of talent cultivation in universities. Multiple pressures such as college entrance examinations, postgraduate entrance examinations, job hunting, interpersonal relationships, and life adaptation continue to impact young students. Generalized anxiety, exam anxiety, and social anxiety have become the most common psychological problems in universities,

seriously affecting students' physical and mental health and their growth and development. For a long time, anxiety counseling in universities has mostly relied on Western psychological systems such as cognitive behavioral therapy and psychoanalysis. The intervention methods have mainly been psychological lectures, individual counseling, and group counseling, lacking localized intervention approaches compatible with Chinese people's modes of thinking and cultural traditions, and the counseling effect has limitations.

*Corresponding Author: Bo Liu



The excellent traditional Chinese culture contains a complete system for balancing the body and mind. The Confucian and Taoist wisdom of self-cultivation, the theory of the mutual restraint of the five emotions in traditional Chinese medicine, traditional rituals and folk customs, and health preservation exercises all incorporate mature ideas for regulating emotions and correcting cognition, which can fundamentally alleviate students' irrational anxiety and cognitive biases. Existing domestic research has confirmed that traditional culture has a positive effect on enhancing students' psychological resilience and alleviating negative emotions. However, there is relatively scarce research on cognitive intervention systems and systematic guidance models specifically targeting the anxiety of college students. Overseas empirical studies also demonstrate that culturally rooted psychological intervention programs produce more significant relief effects on anxiety symptoms among East Asian youth compared with mainstream Western psychological therapies. This article is based on the core of traditional Chinese culture for inner spiritual cultivation, focuses on the root causes of students' cognitive deviations in anxiety, clarifies the internal logic of traditional culture's intervention in anxiety, and constructs a new guidance model that can be implemented based on the shortcomings of existing guidance work, promoting the transformation of traditional cultural resources into standardized university anxiety intervention methods, and improving the local psychological education system.

1. The core theoretical resources of traditional culture in addressing the anxiety of college students

The traditional Chinese culture has formed four types of thought systems for addressing students' anxiety, corresponding to four major needs for psychological relief: cognitive correction, stress alleviation, physical and mental adjustment, and social soothing. These constitute the theoretical foundation for anxiety intervention.

1.1 Confucian self-cultivation ethics: Correcting irrational anxiety cognition, resolving self-denial anxiety

The majority of college students' anxiety stems from cognitive biases: excessive self-criticism, comparing themselves with others, having an overly strong sense of gain and loss, and fearing failure, resulting in "all-or-nothing" thinking. The Confucian concepts of self-reflection and self-discipline, moderation and harmony, benevolence towards others, and acting within one's capabilities while accepting the outcome, can help reshape students' cognitive framework.

"Reflecting on oneself three times a day" prompts students to objectively examine their own strengths and weaknesses, and abandon the notion of perfectionism; "The Doctrine of the Mean" corrects students' one-sided evaluation criteria, breaking the obsession with grades and employment; "The Benevolent Person Loves Others" advocates for perspective-taking, alleviating the social anxiety caused by interpersonal sensitivity; The value orientation of "Self-cultivation and Life Establishment" guides students to establish a long-term

growth perspective, weakening the exam and job-hunting anxiety triggered by short-term gains and losses, and reducing the generation of anxiety at the source of cognition. Peng & Zhang (2023) proposed that the essence of Confucian "vigilance in solitude" is local mindfulness training. This practice corrects irrational cognitions such as catastrophizing and absolutism through consistent self-reflection, which effectively reduces young people's social anxiety levels[1].

1.2 Taoist wisdom on harmony between humanity and nature: Reducing internal competition and comparison, alleviating anxiety about sustained development

At present, students are generally caught in peer competition and blind rivalry, and have been suffering from chronic internal anxiety. The dialectical thought of Taoism, such as "following the natural way, knowing contentment and avoiding humiliation, and acting in accordance with the trend", provides students with ideas for stress regulation. "All things obtain their harmony to thrive" acknowledges individual differences in development and eliminates the mentality of blind comparison; "knowing contentment leads to happiness" guides students to accept their current situation, reducing the psychological burden caused by excessive desires; the outlook on life that conforms to nature helps students correctly view setbacks and failures, reduces excessive worry about the unknown future, and alleviates persistent development anxiety. Overseas cross-cultural research has confirmed that the "non-action" dialectical thinking of Taoism can serve as a cognitive remedy for internal competition anxiety, helping youth break free from the single competitive evaluation system and achieve significant declines in chronic stress anxiety scale scores.

1.3 Traditional Chinese Medicine's Emotional Health Care: Achieving Synergistic Regulation of Body and Mind, and Reducing Somatic Anxiety Symptoms

Most anxious students exhibit physical symptoms such as insomnia, palpitations, chest tightness, and distraction. Modern psychological interventions focus on verbal counseling but are unable to simultaneously address both the mind and body. Traditional Chinese Medicine's five-emotion restraint theory—"the unity of body and spirit, and mutual restraint among five emotions"—holds that emotions and physical states interact bidirectionally, with logic such as joy overcoming sorrow, thinking overcoming fear, and anger overcoming thinking. It combines practical methods like five-tone therapy, eight-section exercise, Tai Chi, and meditation, and through physical relaxation, it reversely alleviates anxiety, making up for the shortcomings of single psychological counseling. Wang et al. (2025) conducted a systematic review and verified that TCM interventions including five-tone therapy and Tai Chi training can simultaneously alleviate psychological anxiety symptoms and physical complaints such as palpitations and insomnia, and the long-term effect is better than simple verbal psychological counseling[2]; Liu et al. (2022)'s controlled experiment proved that traditional folk music five-tone therapy can

significantly reduce the scores of the college students' anxiety scale, and has the value of convenient and low-cost campus promotion[3].

1.4 Folk Ritual and Music Culture: Constructing Shared Emotional Scenarios to Alleviate Loneliness-Induced Social Anxiety

Some students experience anxiety due to social phobia and loneliness. Traditional festivals, calligraphy and painting, folk music, handicrafts, and intangible cultural heritage activities have the value of immersive group therapy. Collective folk practices reduce the estrangement between people and provide an outlet for emotional expression. Aesthetic activities such as calligraphy and traditional music offer a way to vent emotions. In collaborative experiences, students' empathy and sense of collective belonging are enhanced, and the anxiety caused by solitude and social avoidance is alleviated. Cross-cultural psychological research indicates that folk collaborative activities in collectivist cultures can buffer the social anxiety caused by "collective value conflicts" among young people and build a stable emotional support system.

2. The generation logic of college students' anxiety and the current practical difficulties in the counseling work

2.1 The multi-level generation logic of college students' anxiety psychology

- (1) Cognitive level: Irrational thinking gives rise to anxiety

Perfectionism, absolutist demands, and catastrophizing thinking are the core causes. Students equate a single exam failure or job application rejection with the total failure of their lives, forming extremely negative predictions and continuously triggering anxiety.

- (2) Environmental aspect: Multiple external pressures intensify anxiety

Increased competition in social employment, excessive expectations from families, internal competition among peers in schools, and the impact of diverse online information, all these multiple external pressures continue to stimulate, intensifying psychological burdens and leading to persistent anxiety. Clashes between Eastern and Western cultural values lead to value fragmentation, further exacerbating the inner conflicts and anxiety feelings of young people.

- (3) Facilitation Level: The lack of local intervention resources exacerbates the solidification of anxiety

The psychological counseling methods in universities are overly uniform, lacking appropriate adjustment channels that align with students' cultural cognition. As a result, students find it difficult to find suitable ways to release their emotions, and their anxiety cannot be effectively alleviated for a long time, gradually turning into chronic anxiety. The Western-style cognitive intervention model lacks local cultural support and has limited adaptability for Chinese students, with a high dropout rate during the intervention process.

2.2 The prominent challenges in the current anxiety counseling efforts

2.2.1 Cognitive intervention is disconnected from traditional cultural resources

The mental health courses and anxiety group counseling rarely incorporate traditional cultural elements such as Confucianism and Taoism for self-cultivation, as well as traditional Chinese medicine concepts of emotions. The psychological teachers lack reserves of national culture, while the history and literature teachers do not possess professional capabilities for psychological intervention. The cross-disciplinary collaborative intervention mechanism is absent, and the corrective value of traditional culture for cognition cannot be implemented.

2.2.2 The practical forms of counseling have become overly simplistic, lacking targeted anxiety regulation tools

The traditional cultural activities on campus mainly consist of artistic performances and essay competitions. There is a lack of practical programs specifically designed for easing anxiety, such as meditation workshops, traditional martial arts stress reduction classes, and sound therapy experiences. Psychological counseling activities are independent of traditional cultural practices, and there are few integrated projects of this kind. The active participation rate of students is less than 45%, and the counseling effect is superficial.

2.2.3 The home-school collaborative psychological support chain is fragmented

Family education overly focuses on academic performance. Parents lack knowledge related to traditional culture for cultivating the mind and emotional counseling. When dealing with students' anxiety, they merely give simple lectures, unable to utilize family traditions and traditional festivals to provide cognitive buffering at the family level. As a result, the family becomes a source of anxiety rather than a space for stress relief and buffering.

2.2.4 Students lack subjective awareness of internalizing cultural resources

Under the influence of utilitarian thinking, Students dismiss traditional culture as useless extracurricular knowledge. They only consume fragmented short-video clips about traditional culture rather than actively applying classical self-regulation approaches including meditation, calligraphy and self-examination to ease their anxiety. As a result, cultural resources are difficult to be transformed into their own autonomous psychological regulation abilities.

2.3 In-depth Analysis of the Causes of Real Problems

Based on comprehensive interviews and literature analysis, the causes of the predicament can be classified into three levels: First, there is a lack of top-level planning. The university's education planning fails to integrate the two major sections of culture and psychology, and the division of responsibilities among departments is unclear. Second, the

content transformation is insufficient. Traditional cultural resources have not undergone secondary processing for psychological adaptation and have been disconnected from the contemporary life scenarios of college students. Third, the training system for teachers is lacking. Universities lack cross-disciplinary training and joint lesson preparation systems, and there is insufficient environment for the growth of interdisciplinary talents.

3. The Four-Dimensional Cognitive Guidance Internal Mechanism of Traditional Culture in Intervening College Students' Anxiety Psychology

Starting with the reconstruction of cultural cognition, this four-dimensional mechanism realizes emotional relief, value reshaping and practical internalization, forming a closed logical loop spanning cognitive intervention, value reconstruction and daily practical self-regulation.

3.1 Cognitive intervention dimension: Rebuild rational thinking, cut off the source of anxiety generation

Systematically conduct teaching on Confucian and Taoist self-cultivation theories as well as traditional Chinese theories on emotions and mental health, helping students establish a localized framework for understanding their physical and mental states. By leveraging traditional concepts such as the mean, self-reflection, and acting in accordance with circumstances, correct three types of irrational cognition (perfectionism, catastrophizing, and absolutism), change students' ways of thinking about setbacks, competition, and themselves, and reduce the generation of anxiety from the root of cognition. Comparative experiments have shown that group counseling incorporating Confucian and Taoist cognitive regulation has a significantly better effect on correcting students' irrational beliefs than ordinary psychological courses.

3.2 Emotional Counseling Dimension: Release negative emotions, reduce anxiety-related physical reactions

Based on cultural elements such as folk music, calligraphy, traditional health preservation exercises, and festival customs, channels for emotional release are established. The five-tone therapy and the eight-section exercise help relieve physical tension, collective folk activities help eliminate feelings of loneliness, and through continuous positive emotional experiences, emotional tolerance is enhanced, and physical symptoms such as insomnia and palpitations caused by anxiety are alleviated. Meta-analysis shows that traditional mind-body exercises like Tai Chi and the Eight-Section Exercise can stably reduce the anxiety levels of college students, and they have dual effects of cognitive regulation and physical relaxation.

3.3 Value adjustment dimension: Diversified value orientation, reducing the anxiety of internal competition and comparison

By applying traditional cultural concepts such as "self-improvement", "each doing their own part", and "cultivating virtue and self-improvement", we break away from the single-value evaluation system that focuses solely on grades and employment, and guide students to establish diversified growth goals. When facing failure in competition, we rely on traditional inspirational ideas to stabilize our mindset, reduce the tendency to compare with others, and alleviate the persistent anxiety caused by long-term internal competition. The traditional cultural values of self-transcendence can significantly buffer the positive correlation between competitive pressure and anxiety, and play a regulatory role.

3.4 Practical internalization dimension: Transform cultural approaches, develop autonomous regulatory capabilities

Transform traditional cultural approaches including meditation, musical relaxation, classic recitation and handcraft therapy into standardized self-regulation tools for regulating anxiety. Students can proficiently master self-regulation skills through regular practice, achieving the transformation from classroom intervention to daily autonomous regulation, and establishing a long-term anxiety prevention mechanism.

4. A Four-Component New Model for Anxiety Counseling of College Students from the Perspective of Traditional Culture

Based on the four-dimensional intervention mechanism, a new type of counseling model led by the university, supported by the society, buffered by the family, and coordinated by the individual is constructed. This model connects the entire process of cognitive intervention and emotional counseling in a closed loop.

4.1 Colleges and universities: Establish the main platform, promote curriculum-based cognitive intervention and scenario-based counseling

- (1) Course co-construction, embedding content for anxiety-related cognitive intervention based on traditional culture. Universities add a special module "Traditional Culture and Anxiety Regulation" to compulsory mental health courses. Selective courses such as "Confucianism for Self-Cultivation and Emotional Management" and "Five-Tone Musical Therapy and Mental Regulation" have also been offered. Regular Qigong meditation courses have been included in the physical education curriculum. The classics of Confucianism and Taoism for mental adjustment have been integrated into the ideological and political, and literary classes to systematically correct students' irrational anxiety cognition. A cross-disciplinary teaching group consisting of psychological teachers and history and literature teachers has been established to jointly

develop school-based textbooks for anxiety counseling.

- (2) Build a dedicated cultural counseling practice platform

On campus, meditation workshops, calligraphy stress relief studios and traditional folk music experience spaces are established. Special psychological salons featuring "classic recitation for mental calming", "intangible cultural heritage handcraft decompression" and "Taoist meditation regulation" are held before examinations and job-hunting seasons. Psychological associations focusing on guqin, calligraphy and traditional health preservation are supported to carry out regular small-group counseling activities targeting students with anxiety symptoms.

- (3) Improve the mechanism for cultivating multi-skilled teachers

Regularly organize psychological teachers to conduct special training on cultivating the mind through traditional culture, and organize history and literature teachers to pursue basic psychology and anxiety intervention techniques. Hire traditional Chinese medicine emotional physicians, Confucian classics experts, and intangible cultural heritage inheritors to serve as external counseling mentors, supplementing the local intervention professional strength.

4.2 Society: Integrate external resources and expand the practice platform for addressing students' anxiety outside the school

The local cultural center, the cultural heritage protection center, and the traditional Chinese medicine hospital have jointly established a student emotional relaxation study base. They regularly organize students to participate in experiences related to traditional Chinese medicine emotions and traditional folk customs meditation practices. They also collaborate with local new media to create a "Traditional Culture Relieves Anxiety" science popularization column, using short videos and text to popularize simple traditional adjustment methods. They standardize the commercial development of traditional culture, retaining the psychological counseling core of rituals and health preservation, and avoiding excessive commercialization and superficial entertainment that undermine mental soothing values.

4.3 Family: Relying on family culture, create a buffer space for anxiety relief and home-based counseling

Colleges and universities conduct online parent education sessions and parent meetings to popularize knowledge on traditional culture-based emotional counseling among parents, guiding them to abandon the sole focus on academic performance in their education methods; they advocate that families utilize traditional festivals such as the Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival to engage in activities like reading classic works together and engaging in folk handicrafts, in order to use family warmth to alleviate students' anxiety about their studies and employment; they promote simple at-home adjustment methods such as self-reflection on family traditions and family meditation, forming a collaborative family-school counseling chain.

4.4 Individual: Enhance the subject's self-awareness and establish a regularized autonomous counseling model

Guide students to abandon fragmented and superficial reading and systematically study traditional classics related to self-cultivation and mental adjustment; actively use calligraphy, meditation, and traditional exercises to regulate anxiety before exams and interpersonal relationships on a daily basis; dialectically integrate psychological adjustment methods from both China and abroad, transform traditional means of nourishing the mind into exclusive self-regulation tools, and achieve long-term self-intervention for anxiety.

5. Conclusions and Prospects

5.1 Research conclusion

First, the four types of traditional cultural resources - Confucian self-cultivation, Taoist wisdom of harmony between man and nature, traditional Chinese medicine on emotions, and folk customs and rituals - can respectively implement stratified intervention for college students' anxiety at the cognitive, emotional, value, and practical levels, effectively correcting irrational thinking, alleviating somatic anxiety, eliminating internal competition and comparison, and enhancing the ability of autonomous emotional regulation. Multiple domestic and international empirical studies have jointly confirmed that the localized cultural intervention programs have unique advantages in improving the anxiety of Chinese college students.

Secondly, at present, there are several practical problems in the anxiety counseling for college students, including the separation of cultural and psychological education, shallow implementation of the educational approach, the absence of collaboration between home and school, and insufficient internalization by students. The root causes lie in the lack of top-level planning, insufficient psychological transformation of traditional cultural resources, and the shortage of interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary teaching staff.

Thirdly, by relying on the four-dimensional collaborative intervention mechanism of cognition, emotion, value, and practice, a new model integrating universities, society, families, and individuals for traditional culture counseling is constructed. This can form a complete closed loop from cognitive intervention to daily self-regulation, creating a localized and regularized counseling system for college students' anxiety, effectively compensating for the shortcomings of Western-style psychological intervention that is not well-suited for local conditions.

5.2 Research Prospects

Subsequently, large-scale empirical research can be conducted to quantitatively analyze the intervention effects of different traditional cultural practice projects on pre-exam anxiety, social anxiety, and developmental anxiety. Detailed differentiated guidance plans for different groups and scenarios can be developed. Combined with VR digital technology, an online virtual meditation and healing space can be created to expand the online carrier for traditional culture cognitive intervention. Further improvement of the

interdisciplinary teacher training system can be made to promote the standardization and normalization of traditional culture anxiety counseling models and continuously optimize the local psychological education work path. At the same time, the international cross-cultural psychological intervention research paradigm can be drawn upon to continuously improve the standardized evaluation system for traditional culture psychological counseling.

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