

## Exploration of Implicit Culture Belief among English Major Students in China

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### Abstract

*This study aims to explore English major students' implicit culture belief and factors influencing such beliefs within a limited intercultural environment in China. A total of 369 Year 3 and 4 English major students at Hebei International Studies University were surveyed through a mixed-method approach involving a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The study utilized the adapted Implicit Culture Belief Scale and a self-designed demographic questionnaire. The results displayed that English major students' implicit culture beliefs tend to entity beliefs, namely fixed and unchangeable judgement on cultural attributes such as cultural values like individualism-collectivism and personality traits like extraversion-introversion in their implicit culture beliefs within the constrained intercultural settings. Furthermore, the factors influencing English major students' entity beliefs in implicit culture belief include socio-cultural environment, media and psychological inclination toward stability. This investigation underscores students' cognitive process of cultural attributes to delve into their internal cognitive mechanisms regarding cultural values and personality traits within the limited intercultural milieu in China.*

**Keywords:** *Implicit Culture Belief; Entity Belief; Cultural Attributes; Factors.*

Implicit culture beliefs represent a novel vantage point within implicit theory, offering insights into individuals' cognitive perceptions of cultural attributes from a social cognition standpoint. More precisely, implicit culture beliefs encapsulate individuals' perceptions, whether fixed or malleable, concerning cultural attributes such as values and personality traits (Chao et al., 2017). Previous studies have primarily focused on implicit culture beliefs within cross-cultural realms, where individuals from different countries have their own cultural identities (Chiu et al., 2000; Church et al., 2003; Church et al., 2012), and their implicit beliefs vary. Yet, prevailing investigations predominantly center on individuals' implicit culture beliefs within multicultural milieu (Chao et al., 2017). Empirical research on the implicit culture beliefs of college student groups, especially in monocultural settings, is still limited. Consequently, this study aims to scrutinize the implicit culture beliefs of English major students within a restricted intercultural environment. Such inquiry helps to establish English major students' reliable perceptions of the cultural attributes of their own and other countries, thereby laying a cognitive underpinning for their subsequent development of emotions and behaviors in intercultural communication competence. Firstly, a constrained intercultural setting in China is elucidated as follows.

### Introduction

During the 1980s, China embarked on a process of gradual opening to the global economy, leading to an influx of foreign companies initiating business operations in China, while simultaneously witnessing a rise in the number of Chinese enterprises venturing overseas to explore novel opportunities (Pan, 2016). As evidenced by data from the National Bureau of Statistics in 2021, the establishment of 47,643 new enterprises can be attributed to foreign direct investment. Consequently, individuals employed within these enterprises must possess an international perspective, thinking patterns, and an understanding of foreign cultures, enabling them to engage in effective communication and navigate interpersonal encounters adeptly (Dai, 2009). This underscores the significance of individuals developing a clear and accurate understanding of both their own culture and that of foreigners to facilitate effective and appropriate intercultural interactions. In other words, students' implicit culture beliefs play a pivotal role in cultivating their cognitive process of intercultural interactions. Following this, the status of English majors in China is subsequently

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delineated to elucidate the significance of examining the cognitive mechanisms of cultural characteristics among English majors, specifically their implicit culture belief

English major students in China serve as a pivotal conduit facilitating the connection between Chinese and foreign cultures. Moreover, a majority of English major graduates are expected to pursue careers in English-related sectors (Pan, 2016; Wang, et al., 2022). They might find employment in either multinational corporations or local enterprises, engaging in cross-cultural communication and collaboration within the business domain. Alternatively, some individuals may opt for a career in education, serving as language instructors to impart knowledge of foreign languages or Chinese language and promote cultural exchange. Additionally, a portion of students choose to pursue further studies overseas (Pan, 2016). Regardless of their chosen career path, English major students encounter a diverse learning and working environment. Therefore, it is imperative to explore implicit culture beliefs among English major students, as their perceptions of these cultural attributes influences their emotional responses and behaviors during interactions with individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Chen & Starosta, 1998). And the enhancement of proficiency in intercultural communication will support students in becoming skilled in their educational and professional settings (Abbas et al., 2024).

English major students, however, experience a rather restricted intercultural environment throughout their undergraduate studies due to the scarcity of intercultural engagements and exchanges. As indicated by Ning et al. (2021), a substantial number of 845,697 individuals from abroad visit China for purposes such as business, education, and employment. The majority of these individuals choose to settle in major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong, situated in the economically prosperous southeast coastal region. Consequently, numerous less developed cities in China struggle to attract a sufficient number of foreign visitors for fostering intercultural initiatives, resulting in a shortage of foreign instructors in universities within these regions (Yu, 2019). English major students in less developed cities find themselves immersed in predominantly monocultural environments, where a collectivist cultural orientation prevails. English major students in less developed cities mainly acquire foreign language and culture knowledge from secondary resources due to limited opportunities for direct interaction with foreigners. These resources include faculty lectures focusing on cultural teaching (Huang, 2015), reading and writing curriculum (Li & Liu, 2022), translation and interpretation courses (Pan, 2004), as well as listening and speaking courses (Pan, 2016). Additionally, students rely on media and textbooks for acquiring such knowledge (Yang, 2016). The utilization of these secondary sources is crucial for enhancing students' understanding of foreign cultural characteristics. Given these circumstances, there is a critical need to investigate the implicit culture beliefs held by students within such constrained intercultural context.

Implicit culture belief refers to individuals' perceptions of whether cultural attributes, such as collectivism versus individualism, are fixed or malleable (Chao et al., 2017). There are two aspects to implicit culture belief: entity belief and incremental belief concerning cultural attributes. Those who view cultural attributes, such as values like individualism-collectivism and personality traits like extraversion-introversion, as inherent tend to hold implicit culture beliefs that lean towards entity belief. Conversely, individuals who see cultural characteristics as changeable tend to exhibit implicit culture beliefs favoring incremental belief. Entity belief and incremental belief are diametrically opposed concepts, with a stronger entity belief indicating a weaker incremental belief (Levy et al., 1998). Thus, individuals' implicit culture beliefs may align with either entity belief or incremental belief. Research has shown that exchange students tend to hold entity beliefs in intercultural contexts (Chao et al., 2017), prompting the need to investigate whether English major students share similar implicit culture beliefs favoring entity beliefs in the restricted intercultural milieu.

Implicit culture beliefs can be viewed as a cognitive process of learning stemming from research on implicit beliefs regarding intelligence and personality, investigating the potential impact of individuals' cognition on their behavior (Blackwell et al., 2007; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Dweck et al., 1995; Kammrath & Dweck, 2006). The present study represents a novel expansion of implicit beliefs into the cultural domain, moving beyond intelligence and personality. Implicit culture beliefs encompass not only comprehension of cultural attributes but also the internal judgments individuals form regarding these attributes. Previous research has utilized implicit culture beliefs to explore how college students engaging in exchange programs perceive

cultural identity, highlighting the influence of these perceptions on their capacity to effectively adapt and function in intercultural settings (Chao et al., 2017, p. 3). Nonetheless, there is a scarcity of studies investigating the implicit culture beliefs of English major students in a constrained intercultural environment, where opportunities for intercultural interactions are limited. Hence, this study seeks to investigate the perceptions of implicit culture beliefs among English major students and the factors shaping these beliefs within such restricted intercultural contexts. Having said that, the current study aims to respond the subsequent research questions:

- What are implicit culture beliefs among English major students within the limited intercultural environment?
- What are the factors influencing English major students' implicit culture beliefs within the limited intercultural environment?

## Materials and Methods

The present study employs a sequential mixed design in mixed method to explore English major students' implicit culture beliefs and the factors influencing these beliefs within the constrained intercultural settings. As described by Teddlie & Tashakkori (2006: 21), sequential mixed design has two strands, which are "QUAN→QUAL or QUAL→QUAN" and "the conclusions that are made on the basis of the results of the first strand lead to formulation of questions, data collection, and data analysis for the next strand". This study will use the strand of QUAN→QUAL since the collection of quantitative data will precede the collection of qualitative data, with interview questions being developed based on the findings of the quantitative phase.

The respondents in the present study are Year 3 and 4 English major students from Hebei International Studies in Hebei Province, North China. 406 students who have finished the intercultural curriculum involved in this study and the questionnaires were distributed and collected online. However, 37 were excluded since they used very less time to finish and answered the questionnaire very carelessly. Thereby, 369 valid questionnaires were obtained from English major students. Among the respondents, 194 (52.6%) students in Year 3 participated, while 175 (47.4%) participated in the Year 4. And 29 were male students (7.9%), while 340 were female students (92.1%). Furthermore, 172 students had no first-hand intercultural experience (46.6%), while 176 students had a little first-hand intercultural experience (47.7%). Only 21 students had more direct intercultural communication with foreigners (5.7%).

This study adapted the Implicit Culture Belief Scale (Chao et al., 2017) for the evaluation of implicit culture beliefs among English major students in a limited intercultural setting. The original scale comprises 8 items, with 4 being reverse-coded. This research excludes the reverse-coded items, integrating specific cultural values such as individualism-collectivism and personality traits like extraversion-introversion to elucidate the "core ethnocultural" and "ethnocultural characteristics" in the original scale. Consequently, this study consists of six items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example of an item is "The ethnic culture a person is from (e.g., Chinese, American, Japanese) determined the kind of cultural value they have (e.g., individualism or collectivism); not much can be done to change the person." Utilizing a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, the mean score for each item addressing implicit culture beliefs is compared to 3.00. This study calculated the value of 3.00 by dividing the sum of the scale scores (SD+D+N+A+SA=15) by the number of items on the scale (n=5). An item scoring above 3.00 suggests that students perceive cultural attributes like individualism-collectivism as fixed and immutable.

The interview questions continue around the items shown in Implicit Culture Belief Scale to further confirm students' implicit culture beliefs. For instance, the question is "Do you think the individualistic and collectivistic tendencies are fixed or changeable in Chinese and foreign cultures?" Subsequently, the questions will go further to explore the factors influencing students' implicit culture beliefs, such as "why

do you think the individualistic and collectivistic tendencies are fixed or changeable in Chinese and foreign cultures”.

The researcher established the questionnaire on the Fengniao Questionnaire platform and exported the questionnaire link. As the questionnaire is disseminated at a class level, the researcher transmitted the link to the respective class coordinator through WeChat. Subsequently, the coordinators forwarded the questionnaire link to the class collective via WeChat. In order to guarantee the precision of the questionnaire completion, a minimum of 5 minutes was designated as the requisite time for a valid questionnaire completion. Students clicked submit after answering the questionnaire. The questionnaire will be automatically recycled to the Fengniao platform. The researcher then exported the data and put it into SPSS for data analysis. Before the students answered the questionnaire, the researcher first introduced the purpose and process of this study, and the students filled out the questionnaire independently and voluntarily.

Upon examination of the implicit culture belief exhibited by the students, the researcher formulated interview inquiries derived from the findings to explore the factors influencing such implicit culture belief. Fifteen students were then invited to conduct interviews.

This study employs SPSS 27.0 and thematic analysis for data analysis. Firstly, the descriptive analysis was used to describe the mean value to explore students' implicit culture belief. Then, t-test and One-way ANOVA were employed to compare the differences in this study among demographic variables, such as gender, grade and intercultural experience. Following this, English major students' verbatims were categorized and organized through thematic analysis to further examine students' implicit culture beliefs and factors influencing their beliefs.

## Results

Table 1 shows the value of Cronbach  $\alpha$  and KMO to illustrate the reliability and validity of the adapted implicit culture scale. The current investigation reports a Cronbach's alpha of 0.867 and a KMO value of 0.813 for the adapted scale, indicating high reliability and validity.

**Table 1.** Reliability and validity of implicit culture belief scale (6-items)

Items	Cronbach $\alpha$	KMO
Implicit Culture Belief	0.867	0.813

Table 2 illustrates the descriptive statistics pertaining to students' implicit culture beliefs regarding individualism-collectivism, as indicated by the mean value. A mean value exceeding 3 signifies that students' implicit notions constitute entity beliefs concerning cultural characteristics.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of implicit culture belief on individualism-collectivism

Items	N	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly agree 5	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	369	7 (1.9%)	39 (10.6%)	86 (23.3%)	168 (45.5%)	69 (18.7%)	3.69	0.958
2	369	7 (1.9%)	31 (8.4%)	93 (25.2%)	161 (43.6%)	77 (20.9%)	3.73	0.948

Specifically, Table 2 reveals students perceiving individualism-collectivism within China and other nations as fixed and consistent qualities (Chao et al., 2017). The data presented in Table 2 demonstrates that students uphold unchanging perspectives, reflecting their entity beliefs in terms of individualism-

collectivism. This suggests that students maintain the belief that individuals from diverse cultures possess collectivist or individualist attributes that are bestowed upon them by the cultural norms of their respective countries. A total of 168 students expressed agreement with the statement in item 1 "The ethnic culture a person is from (e.g., Chinese, American, Japanese) determined the kind of cultural value they have (e.g., individualism or collectivism); not much can be done to change the person" accounting for 45.5% of the total number. Moreover, a total of 69 students indicated strong agreement with the identical assertion, constituting 18.7% of the participants. This implies that a significant portion of the student body holds the perception that the individualism-collectivism (I-C) traits of individuals are inherent and persistent, tied to the culture of their respective nations. The fixed and immutable nature of this perception is further corroborated by the assertion the item 2 that "People from different cultures cannot change their cultural attributes in terms of individualism or collectivism". In relation to this claim, 161 students (43.6%) expressed agreement, whereas 77 students (20.9%) strongly endorsed it. These findings suggest a prevailing belief among the majority of students that the individualism-collectivism traits observed in various cultures are fixed cultural features.

Table 3 demonstrates the students' implicit culture beliefs concerning extraversion-introversion as inherent and immutable characteristics. This particular perspective is observable in the students' concurrence with elements linked to extraversion-introversion.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics of implicit culture belief on extraversion-introversion

Items	N	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly agree 5	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	369	11 (1.9%)	34 (10.6%)	105 (23.3%)	156 (45.5%)	63 (18.7%)	3.61	0.972
2	369	12 (1.9%)	32 (8.4%)	69 (25.2%)	143 (43.6%)	113 (20.9%)	3.85	1.055
3	369	7 (1.9%)	34 (9.2%)	108 (29.3%)	146 (39.6%)	74 (20.1%)	3.67	0.961
4	369	9 (2.4%)	26 (7.0%)	110 (29.8%)	145 (39.3%)	79 (21.4%)	3.70	0.963

More precisely, 156 students (42.3%) and 63 students (17.1%) expressed their agreement or strong agreement with the statement in item 1 "People from different cultures cannot change their personality traits in terms of being quiet or outgoing". This suggests that a majority of the students hold the entity belief that individuals extroverted or introverted characteristics within various societies remain consistent and immutable. Additionally, a total of 250 students (69.4%) expressed agreement or strong agreement with the statement in item 2. "People from different cultures cannot change their personality traits in terms of being assertive or submissive". This implies that the majority of students' implicit culture beliefs tend favor to entity belief that individuals from varying cultural backgrounds harbor inherent and fixed cultural characteristics pertaining to assertiveness or submissiveness. In addition, 146 students (39.6%) perceive the item 3 of the outspoken or soft-spoken attributes of individuals in diverse cultures as fixed and unchangeable, with 74 students (20.1%) strongly supporting this perspective. Moreover, 145 students (39.3%) and 79 students (21.4%) hold the belief in item 4 that the traits of confidence and humility in individuals across different nations remain fixed and unchangeable. These findings suggest that students uphold an entity belief, concerning extraversion-introversion. Particularly, students view individuals from various cultures as possessing immutable and unchangeable personality traits linked to being extroverted or introverted, assertive or submissive, outspoken or soft-spoken, and confident or humble. This highlights students' implicit culture beliefs incline towards entity belief in cultural attributes associated with personality traits. (Chao et al., 2017).



Independent t-test in Table 4 shows Year 3 and 4 there is no significant differences on English major students' implicit culture beliefs regarding individualism-collectivism ( $t=-0.057$ ,  $p>0.01$ ) and extraversion-introversion ( $t=0.861$ ,  $p>0.01$ ). Furthermore, there is also no differences on female and male students' implicit culture beliefs regarding individualism-collectivism ( $t=-0.011$ ,  $p>0.01$ ) and extraversion-introversion ( $t=-1.483$ ,  $p>0.01$ ). This implies English major students' implicit culture beliefs are consistent and homogeneous. In other words, students implicit culture beliefs tend favor to entity beliefs on cultural attributes, regardless of their grade level and gender.

**Table 4.** Independent t-test differences of implicit culture belief based on the grade and gender

Implicit culture belief	Grade		Gender	
	t-test	sig.	t-test	sig.
<b>Individualism-Collectivism</b>	-0.057	0.955	-0.011	0.991
<b>Extraversion-Introversion</b>	0.861	0.390	-1.483	0.139

Table 5 presents the F value (3, 365) =0.137, with a p-value of 0.938, regarding the distinctions between "Between Groups" and "Within Groups" in the context of individualism-collectivism within implicit cultural beliefs stemming from intercultural encounters. The p value exceeding 0.05 suggests a lack of significance (Qin, 2004) in the I-C aspect of implicit cultural beliefs based on varying levels of engagement in intercultural activities, namely high, medium, and low participation. Furthermore, Table 4 also illustrates the F values (3, 365) =1.377, with a p-value of 0.250. The p value surpassing 0.05 indicates the absence of a noteworthy distinction (Zhang & Dong, 2014) in the extraversion-introversion dimension within implicit cultural beliefs related to intercultural experiences. Essentially, students engaging in intercultural activities at different frequencies exhibit comparable perspectives on the extraversion-introversion aspect of implicit cultural beliefs. Thus, regardless of students' levels of involvement in intercultural activities, they maintain consistent perceptions regarding the fixed and stable judgments concerning individualism-collectivism and extraversion-introversion within their implicit cultural beliefs. This enduring judgment on attributes is recognized as entity belief (Dweck, 2000) within the realm of implicit cultural beliefs.

**Table 5.** One-way ANOVA for difference in I-C and E-I component of implicit culture belief based on intercultural experience

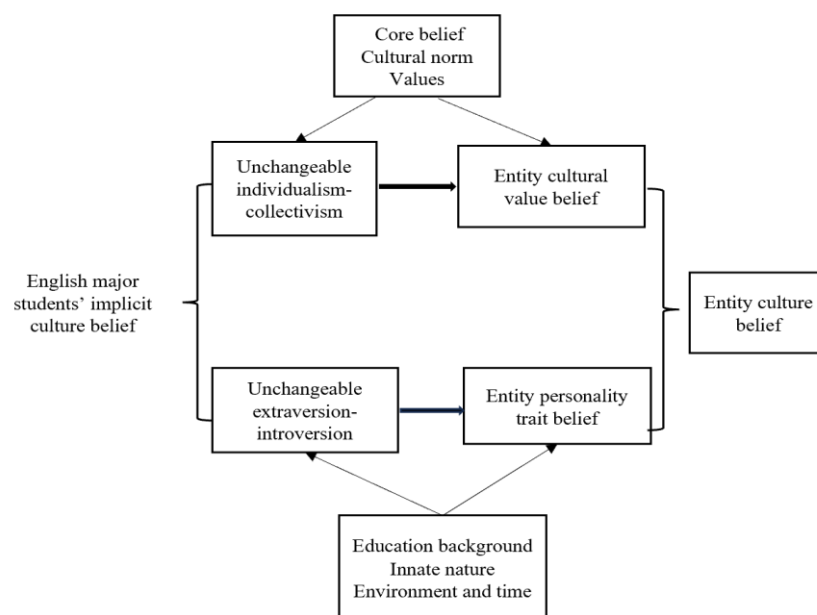
ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>I-C component</b>	Between Groups	.325	3	.108	.137	.938
	Within Groups	289.108	365	.792		
	Total	289.432	368			
<b>E-I component</b>	Between Groups	2.981	3	.994	1.377	.250
	Within Groups	263.409	365	.722		
	Total	266.390	368			

Based on the result shown in quantitative research, it is clear to see English major students' implicit culture beliefs are favor to entity beliefs on cultural attributes in terms of cultural value individualism-collectivism and personality traits extraversion-introversion. Namely, students perceive these cultural attributes as fixed and unchangeable. Following that, interviews were conducted with 12 students regarding the outcomes presented in quantitative research in order to validate their implicit culture beliefs (refer to Table 6).

**Table 6.** Perception of implicit culture belief regarding individualism-collectivism and extraversion-introversion

Implicit culture belief	Fixed traits	Changeable traits
Individualism-Collectivism (I-C)	10 (83.3%)	2 (16.7%)
Extraversion-Introversion (E-I)	10 (83.3%)	2 (16.7%)

Additionally, the present study employs thematic analysis to explore the underlying reasons behind the implicit culture beliefs of English major students, particularly focusing on their inclination towards entity beliefs concerning cultural characteristics. Figure 1 provides a summary of the rationales behind students' entity beliefs regarding individualism-collectivism and extraversion-introversion within a constrained intercultural setting: core belief, cultural norm and values formulating cultural value; education background, innate nature and environment as well as time.



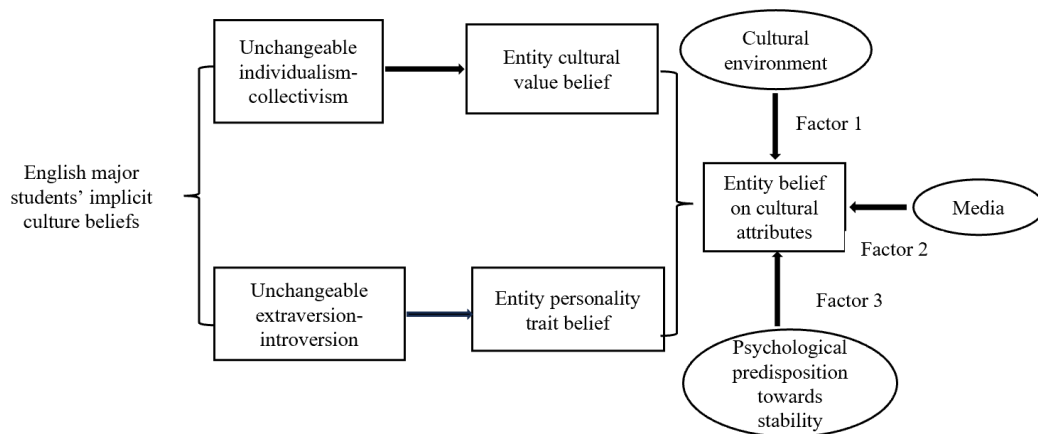
**Figure 1.** Rationales behind students' entity beliefs on individualism-collectivism and extraversion-introversion

The data presented in qualitative research indicates that 10 out of the 12 students acknowledged that their implicit culture beliefs align with entity beliefs related to individualism-collectivism and extraversion-introversion, as they perceive these cultural characteristics to be immutable. This finding is in line with the results depicted in quantitative research.

In order to further explore the determinants impacting the implicit cultural beliefs of students, characterized by a tendency towards entity beliefs regarding cultural attributes, this research utilizes thematic analysis for the purpose of structuring and classifying the students' reactions to the query: "What factors do you believe shape your entity beliefs on cultural attributes?". A majority of ten out of twelve students holding entity beliefs on individualism-collectivism and extraversion-introversion share their perspectives on this investigation. Following the analysis, three prevalent themes are identified as influential in shaping students' entity beliefs on cultural attributes: cultural surroundings, media, and a psychological predisposition towards stability. Figure 2 displays the results of English major students' implicit culture beliefs.

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**Figure 2.** Results of English major students' implicit culture belief and factors influencing such beliefs

## Discussion

This investigation has revealed that students' implicit cultural beliefs lean towards entity belief, indicating that students perceive the cultural attributes of individualism-collectivism as immutable and unalterable. Students have encapsulated individualism-collectivism as fundamental beliefs, societal norms, and values (see Figure 1), which signify cultural values within a particular nation (Hofstede et al., 2010). This implies that students embracing entity beliefs view individualism-collectivism as a cultural value, perceiving it as unchanging and secure due to its early establishment in their cognition. The cultural value of collectivism has been ingrained in their minds persistently. This collectivistic cultural value can be likened to the inner layers of an onion, unseen yet impactful (Hofstede et al., 2010). Consequently, such imperceptible cultural values must possess stability to enable outer layers, like students' intellect, to evolve and progress in alignment with it.

This research is in alignment with the work of Chen and Wong (2015), who have observed that Chinese students within collectivist societies exhibit a notable tendency towards possessing an adaptable outlook on their academic achievements. It is evident that Chinese students maintain the belief that they can enhance their academic grades by persisting in their endeavors. This phenomenon can be attributed to the influence of Confucian principles on the Chinese educational system. Consequently, the academic settings in China are characterized by intense competition and a strong emphasis on examination performance. Within such contexts, individuals in collectivist cultures are anticipated to link their academic successes to communal



objectives, such as meeting familial expectations and upholding family honor. Thus, the inclination of students towards a flexible interpretation of academic success is rooted in the enduring and ingrained collectivistic cultural norms. This underscores that students majoring in English in Hebei province adhere to a belief in the intrinsic value of their culture, which serves as the fundamental basis for overarching constructs like academic accomplishment.

This investigation also uncovers that English major students hold implicit cultural beliefs that lean towards entity beliefs concerning extraversion-introversion, indicating their fixed assessments on cultural characteristics associated with personality traits (Chao et al., 2017). Students explicated that attribute of personality, like sociability or quietness, submissiveness, modesty, and courteousness in communication, are influenced by the communal and individualistic cultures, distinguishing Chinese from foreigners, respectively. This highlights the impact of students' interpretations of cultural principles, influenced by their enduring and consistent social milieu, especially in homogeneous cultural contexts with restricted exposure to foreigners (Yu, 2019), such as Hebei province.

Interviews with English majors, however, demonstrate a perception that an individual's sociability can be transformed throughout the process of communication, impacting not only daily interactions but also cross-cultural exchanges. English majors acknowledge that engaging with an outgoing and communicative foreigner may enhance their own sociability, whereas interactions with an introverted foreigner could result in a more reserved dialogue. This viewpoint challenges the concept of fixed personality traits and highlights the potential influence of cross-cultural interactions on modifying students' characteristics (Kitayama, 2002; Erz & Gati, 2004). Despite this, the scarce exposure of students in Hebei province to cross-cultural environments, as indicated by their limited participation in such experiences, with 94.3% (N=348) lacking significant exposure, implies that their preconceived notions of individuals from other cultures persist unchanged. Students tend to view foreigners, particularly Americans, as confident, assertive, and outspoken, in contrast to the perceived characteristics of Chinese individuals, who are often seen as reserved, humble, and submissive (Hu, 2005). These attributes are considered unique cultural features that are perceived as inherent to individuals in both foreign nations and China. This entrenched perception is rooted in information obtained from secondary sources like textbooks and the internet (Yang, 2016), which contribute to stereotypes and strengthen students' beliefs regarding extraversion and introversion. Thereby, students implicit culture beliefs are favor to entity beliefs on these cultural attributes.

This investigation has revealed that factors such as gender and age do not have a significant impact on the implicit culture beliefs of English major students. It is evident that these factors do not serve as prerequisites for shaping individuals' internal views on cultural characteristics (Aguinis & Vandenberg, 2014). This discovery is congruent with the research carried out by Chao et al. (2017), which observed that implicit culture beliefs of Hong Kong undergraduates tend to lean towards entity belief when they participate in an exchange program. Furthermore, their experiences during their time abroad do not influence their inclination towards entity belief in their implicit cultural convictions. This suggests that students' intercultural encounters also do not influence their internal perceptions and evaluations of cultural attributes in relation to cultural values and personality traits.

Instead, the factors in English major students' explanations revolve around the cultural environment, media, and psychological inclination towards stability. Firstly, the influence of socio-cultural environment on students' beliefs regarding cultural attributes is significant. The nature of students' beliefs, whether fixed or flexible, is determined by the dominant cultural values in various countries (Zhang et al., 2019). Students express that their socio-cultural surroundings instill values such as respect for others, collective pride, and commitment. They also recognize collectivism as a key Chinese cultural value, attributing it to the lasting impact of Confucian and Mencius ideologies that promote tolerance and brotherhood, deeply rooted in Chinese society for centuries (Yang, 2019). This highlights the crucial role of the cultural environment in shaping individuals' perceptions of values. Next, the media serves as the main avenue for Chinese students to understand cultural differences beyond formal academic education (Yang, 2016). This reliance on media is driven by the rapid growth of new online platforms, enabling a variety of channels for information dissemination, including platforms like TikTok. The abundance of online information allows students to validate their cultural perceptions of other nations through different sources. When online information

aligns with their existing views, it reinforces stereotypes about the cultural attributes of other countries (Chen & Starosta, 1998; Tameryan et al., 2019). As a result, students reinforce their beliefs about cultural values, such as individualism-collectivism, and personality traits like extraversion-introversion. Finally, the preference for psychological stability among students emerges as a significant factor influencing their perspective on cultural values. This preference, encapsulated in the Chinese saying "respond to all changes with no change," emphasizes the enduring essence of a nation's culture, where cultural values represent its unalterable core. This fixed and stable mindset is evident not only in individual outlooks but also in national development strategies, notably China's consistent emphasis on stable progress. The enduring commitment to stability in development has shaped societal views, strengthening students' belief that fixed cultural values provide a solid basis for understanding both their own culture and that of other nations.

In summary, factors influencing English major students' implicit culture belief tendency towards entity beliefs are related to socio-cultural environment, development of media and students' preference of psychological stability in order to achieve intercultural goals. English major students have fewer direct intercultural encounters with foreigners, thereby they displayed the homogeneous in their intergroup. In such cases, their implicit culture beliefs cannot be affected by their demographic variables like gender, age and intercultural experiences.

This research offers a novel approach to expanding the scope of implicit theory research into the cultural and intercultural domain. The analysis of implicit culture beliefs aids in investigating students' internal and nuanced evaluations of their understanding of foreign cultures within a limited intercultural framework. Moreover, the scrutiny of students' implicit culture beliefs can prompt educators to concentrate on students' cognitive processes regarding cultural knowledge and to offer immediate guidance for students to develop a precise comprehension of cultural knowledge.

Nevertheless, there are some constraints inherent in this study. Primarily, the focus of this study is on students majoring in English at a foreign language university, rather than a comprehensive university. It is crucial to examine students in different types of universities, including English majors. Additionally, this study delves into the inclination towards entity beliefs in students' implicit culture beliefs, highlighting a fixed judgment regarding cultural attributes known as entity belief. The alternative aspect of implicit culture belief, namely changeable judgments on cultural attributes known as incremental belief, has not been explored. Future research could compare students holding entity beliefs and those with incremental beliefs within such a restricted intercultural setting.

## Conclusions

This research investigates the implicit culture beliefs of English major students in a limited intercultural context in China. It elucidates the manner in which English major students internally evaluate the cultural characteristics of both their own society and other nations. Furthermore, this investigation outlines the various factors that impact the implicit culture beliefs of English major students. These results underscore the significance of the cognitive development process of English major students during intercultural exchanges within a defined intercultural setting. Moreover, this research offers a social cognitive perspective to probe into students' perceptions of cultural attributes, going beyond mere acquisition of cultural knowledge to include an internal evaluation of said cultural knowledge.

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