

A Study on the National Identity of Special Administrative Region Students in Mainland Universities—— A Qualitative Study Based on the Grounded Theory

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Abstract: **Objective** To understand the current situation and influencing factors of national identity of Special Administrative Region students in Mainland universities, and to enhance the national identity of Special Administrative Region students in Mainland universities. **Methods** Qualitative analysis was conducted through in-depth interviews with 22 Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities using NVivo11 software. **Results** Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities have strong cultural, economic, and identity identities of the country, different ethnic identities, and weak political identities. In-depth analysis reveals that geography is a natural influencing factor, family education is an important influencing factor, Special Administrative Region school education is a fundamental influencing factor, and the education in mainland universities is a direct influencing factor. **Conclusion** The national identity of Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities has been improved in general, and the national identity of Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities can be enhanced through various means such as government, society, school, and family etc.

Keywords: Mainland universities; Special Administrative Region students; National identity; Influencing factors; Qualitative study

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1. Literature Review

This study focuses on three aspects of national identity of Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities: the current situation, the influencing factors, and the pathways for improvement. First of all, although there are more studies on the current situation of national identity of Special Administrative Region students, the “current situation” itself is a variable, and different periods of time will present different “current situations”, which means that the study of “current situation” is a dynamic and continuous content. The

findings of scholars such as Xing Li Jun (2014), Liu Zhengxian (2014), and Chen Lijun (2014) indicate that Special Administrative Region students still have a weak political identity, identity, and national consciousness^[1-3]. The results of studies of Song Enrong (2017) and others indicate that Special Administrative Region youth national identity is weak and has been little changed^[4]. The findings of Huang Chudan's (2019) master's thesis suggest that contemporary Special Administrative Region youth face cultural identity problems, with a lack of awareness of Chinese history and culture and a "nihilization" of its values, and that some Special Administrative Region youth are troubled by a loss of values in political participation^[5]. Moreover, the influencing factors of national identity of Special Administrative Region students are also one of the hotspots of scholars' research. In general, the findings in this area are relatively consistent, and basically suggest influential factors such as political system, national education, cultural barriers, and historical legacy^[5-8]. Finally, in terms of pathways for improvement, different scholars have proposed different pathways for improvement based on the research results, for example, Xu Haibo (2014) proposed to lead the "Special Administrative Region Dream" with the "Chinese Dream" and enhance the overall consciousness of Special Administrative Region^[9], Wu Li-bin (2018) suggested that the national authorities and the Special Administrative Region government should focus on patriotic education for Special Administrative Region youth^[10], and Xie Baojian et al. (2019) proposed pathways for Special Administrative Region youth to integrate into the Guangdong-Special Administrative Region Greater Bay Area^[11].

Overall, the previous studies have important implications for this study. Compared to previous studies, this study aims to address the following three questions by means of qualitative research. Firstly, what is the current status of national identity of Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities? Has it been enhanced and improved compared to the previous ones. Secondly, in terms of influencing factors, do different influencing factors have different roles? For example, which are the important influencing factors? Which are the direct influencing factors. Thirdly, based on the research results, can we provide some effective pathways for improvement?

2. Research Design

(1) Methodology and instruments

This study used qualitative research methods to conduct in-depth interviews with Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities to collect students' real experiences and feedback on issues related to national identity. The qualitative analysis software NVivo11 was used to read the interview data in depth, and open coding, axial coding and core coding were conducted according to the

method of the grounded theory.

(2) Subjects and samples

The subjects of this study are Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities, mainly from Shenzhen universities. The interviewed students were selected in strict compliance with the following two criteria. The interviewed students must be students of Special Administrative Region nationality and reside mainly in Special Administrative Region before attending colleges and universities in Shenzhen. Before the interview, the interviewed students were informed of the purpose of this interview study, and were promised to keep their identity information secret, and the interview was started with the consent of the interviewed students to ensure that the interview was voluntary. The interview data will be used for academic research only, and the handling of the interview data will respect the wishes of the interviewed students. The study expected to interview 30 eligible students, but in the actual interview process, starting from the 22nd student, the following students did not put forward new ideas and concepts, reaching the “theoretical saturation” of the qualitative research. The final sample size of the study was determined to be 22, and the basic information of the sample is shown in Table 1. The sample selection ratio is reasonable and representative.

Table 1 Basic information of the interviewees

Basic information	Category	Number of people	Basic information	Category	Number of people
Gender	Male	8	Major	Science	8
	Female	14		Engi- neering	5
Grade	Freshman	7		Medicine	7
	Sophomore	12		Liberal arts	1
	Junior	3		Art	1

(3) Research process

This study first collected authentic, valid, and accurate raw interview data through in-depth interviews with 22 students. Then, based on the method of rooting theory, the original interview data were coded at three levels. On that basis, the national identity of Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities was analyzed.

1) Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured, and due to the impact of the epidemic, the interviews were conducted in different formats such as face-to-face communication, WeChat video calls or calls. Firstly, the interview outline was determined (with reference mainly to Zhang Yangming’s master’s paper *An*

Empirical Study on National Identity of Special Administrative Region Students in Mainland Universities -- Taking Huaqiao University and Jinan University as Examples ^[7]. The interview outline focused on seven questions covering cultural identity, economic identity, identity, national identity, and political identity. (1) How long have you been studying in Shenzhen universities? And how do you adapt to the universities in Shenzhen? (e.g. living habits, language communication, and interpersonal communication, etc.); (2) Do you know about Chinese traditional festivals and the Four Great Classics? How do you know them? And how well do you know? (3) Do you have confidence in China's economic development? And do you have any concerns or suggestions? (4) Which kind of people do you prefer to see yourself as (Chinese, Special Administrative Region people, Chinese Special Administrative Region people, or foreigners)? And why? (5) What is your attitude (support or oppose) towards a few Special Administrative Region people who describe their compatriots in the Mainland as "locusts"? And why? (6) Do you know anything about China's political system (socialist system, one country, two systems, rule of law, and people's congress, etc.)? And how well do you understand it? (7) What are the real thoughts on national identity? And what are your opinions or suggestions on national identity education in mainland universities. Secondly, before the interview, the interviewed students were informed of the definition of national identity and the purpose of the interview to guarantee the validity and accuracy of the interview data. Finally, once the interview formally began, 1-3 introductory questions were set to bring the interviewed students into the interview scenario, and additional questions or follow-up questions were asked based on the interviewed students' emotions and responses to the outline. All interview information was recorded in its original form to ensure the correctness and integrity of the study results.

2) Coding

After organizing the interview data, the interview data were sequentially imported into the NVivo11 internal data, and the bottom-up approach was used for open coding, axial coding, and core coding.

3) Test of coding reliability

The "coding comparison function" of NVivo11 was used to test the coding reliability. Two researchers coded the texts separately and then compared them, and the results showed that the coding agreement percentage ranged from 82.155% to 91.55%, indicating a good coding reliability. During the coding process, if there are significant differences, the two people will negotiate and make a decision together. After the coding, 5 interviewed students were randomly selected to judge the coding, and all of them indicated that the coding reflected their attitudes and perceptions on the issue of national identity.

3. Research Results

(1) Current status of national identity of Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities

In this study, the interview data were summarized according to the principle of “localized concepts”, and the national identity status of Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities was coded and integrated into 19 free nodes (see column 1 of Table 2). In the axial coding, the association properties between nodes and nodes were analyzed, and five meaning genera were formed separately (see column 4 of Table 2). In the core coding, all the meaning genera were reviewed and the core genera with explanatory and generalizing properties were summarized (see column 5 of Table 2).

Table 2 Coding of national identity status of Special Administrative Region students in Mainland universities

universities

Open coding			Axial coding	Core coding
Node name	Number of student sources	Number of reference nodes		
In Special Administrative Region, we also have traditional festivals, and we understand them well.	20	20	In terms of cultural identity, students have a high degree of unity and a strong sense of identity. They not only understand traditional festivals but also participate in them, and they not only know the Four Great Classical Novels but also have read them.	Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities have a high degree of unity in culture, economy, and identity, and a strong sense of identity, different ethnic identity, and weak political identity
Every year, we will be together at home for New Year's Eve, and make zongzi together.	18	18		
Know something about the Four Great Classical Novels.	22	22		
In elementary school and junior high school, teachers asked everyone to study and watch TV dramas.	18	18		
Confident in China's economic development	22	22	In terms of economic identity, students have a high degree of unity and a strong sense of identity, and are generally confident in and optimistic about the Chinese economy	
The government has been promoting the opening of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in various areas / overall well-off/ poverty eradication/common prosperity) are to promote further economic stability.	6	6		
Affected by the epidemic or foreign economic pressure, China's economy will be negatively affected to a certain extent, and there will be pressure and fluctuations at different stages in the short term, but I am optimistic about China's economic development.	10	10		

I see myself as a Chinese.	16	19	In terms of identity, students' perceptions are relatively unified, with a strong sense of "Chinese" identity, and are based on the perception that Special Administrative Region is a part of China.
Be more of a Special Administrative Regioner (has become a habit).	2	2	
I am a Chinese Special Administrative Regioner.	6	6	
Special Administrative Region is a part of China. I have Chinese blood.	14	14	
The motherland is so strong, and Special Administrative Region and the mainland should unite together with love for the motherland	6	8	In terms of ethnic identity, students' perceptions are different, resulting in different identities, but all are based on a rational view of their compatriots in the Mainland.
Absolutely opposition. We are family, and it is inevitable that there will be some frictions.	12	12	
Take a neutral attitude. Have no aversion to all the mainlanders, but only for some of them (the mainlanders who are rich and rude)	6	6	
Have no idea, do not quite understand	4	4	
Believe in the leadership of the party	6	6	In terms of political identity, students' perceptions are inadequate, resulting in a weak identity
Just want to join the party as soon as possible	2	2	
Know something, but not comprehensively. I understand some, and I have been exposed to them in the group day activities, the Youth Study and the ideological and political education.	16	16	
Understood very well. The fundamental political system is the people's congress system, and China is a socialist country. One country, two systems is a very humane system, and the rule of law is necessary.	8	8	

(2) Influential factors of national identity of Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities

The coding of influencing factors of the national identity of Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities was integrated into 15 free nodes (see column 1 of Table 2). In the axial coding, the correlation attributes between nodes and nodes were analyzed. Four meaning genera were formed separately (see column 4 of Table 2). In the core coding, all the meaning genera were reviewed, and the core genera with explanatory and generalizing nature were

summarized (see column 5 of Table 2).

Table 2 Coding of factors influencing the national identity of Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities

Open coding			Axial coding	Core coding
Node name	Number of student sources	Number of reference nodes		
Since childhood, they have traveled back and forth to Shenzhen, so they are familiar with Shenzhen. There is no great differences between the lives of the two regions.	14	14	Geography is a natural influencing factor. The shorter the distance, the better Special Administrative Region students can adapt and integrate, which is conducive to enhancing students' national identity.	Geography, Special Administrative Region school education, family education, and the education of mainland universities are the influencing factors of national identity of Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities
Language is not difficult either.	8	8		
In terms of interpersonal relationship, I got along very well with my classmates and roommates. We chatted with each other and met friends from other majors.	6	6		
The teachers and students are also very friendly. They are willing to help me if I need anything.	4	4		
I've been studying in Shenzhen for two semesters, and I'm getting used to it.	14	14		
In Special Administrative Region, Mandarin is included in the curriculum	2	2	School education in Special Administrative Region is a fundamental influencing factor.	
Identity has been built in Special Administrative Region education for many years.	2	2		
Chinese culture education	18	18	Special Administrative Region students who have received education	
Since Special Administrative Region is an all-information education, they may hesitate. But they will make final judgments based on reality.	2	2	courses on Chinese culture, identity and language have a strong sense of cultural identity and identity	

Education from parents	2	2	Family education is an important influencing factor. The family atmosphere and parents' teaching by personal example enhance the cultural identity and identity of Special Administrative Region students Education in mainland universities is a direct influencing factor to enhance Special Administrative Region students' political identity, cultural identity and national identity through courses, campus activities and ideological and political education etc.
Family atmosphere, celebrate festivals	20	20	
Campus culture, rich national identity education	4	4	
Ideological and political theory education in schools, movies of red spirit	4	4	
Patriotism education	2	2	
Courses on culture and life	4	4	

4. Discussion

(1) The current situation of national identity among Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities

1) Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities have a highly unified understanding and strong sense of identity in terms of culture, economy, and identity

In terms of cultural identity, Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities have a highly unified understanding and a strong sense of identity, which is consistent with the results of previous studies ^[7] and shows that Special Administrative Region students have always maintained a high sense of identity in terms of culture. In terms of economic identity, Special Administrative Region students in Mainland universities are generally confident in China's economy, which is consistent with the view that Special Administrative Region students are optimistic about the economic development of the Mainland in Ding Xue's master's paper *Research on the Current Situation of National Identity of Special Administrative Region students in Mainland Universities and Countermeasures for Cultivation* ^[6]. In terms of identity, most Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities "see themselves as Chinese" and can recognize that Special Administrative Region is part of China and I have Chinese blood, which is different from the results of previous studies

that “Special Administrative Region students consider themselves as people from Special Administrative Region or Special Administrative Region, China ^[1,12]. On the one hand, the subjects of this study are Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities, who have received patriotic education and cultural education in mainland universities and are more likely to identify as “Chinese” than local university students in Special Administrative Region. And on the other hand, as national identity education and identity education in Special Administrative Region continue to deepen, the identity of Special Administrative Region students continues to grow.

2) National identity is characterized by differences

In terms of ethnic identity, Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities are different, and some studies have shown that there is a “polarization” of national identity among Special Administrative Region youth ^[4]. Such differences have three characteristics. Firstly, “differences” are based on the premise that “the motherland is so strong, and Special Administrative Region and the Mainland should be united together with love for the motherland. Secondly, “differences” are based on a certain degree of rational thinking, not blind support or opposition. Thirdly, the “difference” comes from reality and is in line with the facts. Some students said that they didn’t have any idea, and didn’t know much about it”. It is probably because students have never encountered similar situations in real life, and those who took a neutral attitude said that they didn’t have aversion to all mainlanders, but only to some of them”. In the light of those three characteristics, although they have led to differences in national identity, the perception of national identity among Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities is progressive. In the long run, such “cognitive progress” is conducive to strengthening and consolidating the national identity of Special Administrative Region students in the Mainland.

3) Weak political identity

In terms of political identity, Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities do not know enough about the national political system and so on, which leads to weak political identity. That is consistent with the results of previous studies ^[6-7], which also shows that Special Administrative Region students’ political identity has been weak. However, from the interviews, we can also see that some students expressed their views and willingness to “believe in the leadership of the Party” and “join the Party”, which is relatively rare in previous studies. It indicates that although the political identity of Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities is still weak, it is becoming “stronger”. On the one hand, in recent years, the CPC has led and united the people of Special

Administrative Region to solve Special Administrative Region's practical problems, stabilize Special Administrative Region society, and promote Special Administrative Region's stability and prosperity. The Special Administrative Region students continue to enhance their understanding and political identification with the Party. On the other hand, Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities are exposed to student Party members during their study in the Mainland, and the positive influence of student Party members on Special Administrative Region students, coupled with the development of national identity education, patriotic education, red culture and other courses, lead Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities to actively approach the Party organization.

(2) Influencing factors of national identity of Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities

1) Geography is a natural influencing factor

Geography serves as a naturally existing influencing factor, but few studies would single it out as one of the influencing factors. Adjacent to Shenzhen, Special Administrative Region shares basically the same food, language, living habits and regional culture, which is conducive to Special Administrative Region students being able to quickly integrate into Shenzhen universities, establish good interpersonal relationships in the universities, enhance Special Administrative Region students' goodwill and trust in the country, and promote Special Administrative Region students' active awareness of various aspects of China's politics, system, economy and culture, thus enhancing their sense of national identity.

2) Family education is an important influencing factor

Family education has an important influence on the national identity of Special Administrative Region students. The influence of family education has two characteristics. Firstly, it is implicit in nature. Parents' words and deeds in daily life have a subtle influence on students' growth and understanding, and generally students imitate their parents' behaviors and perceptions from the beginning. In the interviews, many students also talked about how "traditional holidays are celebrated at home and parents teach them to read the Four Great Classic Novels", which has a profound impact on students. Secondly, it is long-term. Generally speaking, Chinese parents and families stay with Chinese people throughout their lives, and students spend most of their time at home, so the influence of family education on students is long-term.

3) The school education in Special Administrative Region is the fundamental influencing factor

There is no doubt that the school education in Special Administrative Region

has a fundamental influence on the national identity of Special Administrative Region students. The influence of schools in Special Administrative Region has two characteristics. In the interviews, many students mentioned “Mandarin courses, Chinese culture courses, and identity courses in Special Administrative Region schools”, which shows that those courses have a profound impact on them with significant effects. Secondly, it is fundamental in that national identity is a cognitive process from thought to behavior, and students need guidance in their ideological understanding and behavioral cognition, especially for young elementary and middle school students. The influence of ideological understanding on national identity is fundamental. Proper ideological guidance can enable Special Administrative Region students to have a correct understanding of the political, economic, cultural and ethnic aspects of the country, to form the ideology of patriotism and love for Special Administrative Region, and to fundamentally establish students’ sense of national identity.

4) Mainland tertiary education is a direct influencing factor

When Special Administrative Region students study in mainland universities, Special Administrative Region students begin to be exposed to mainland university education, which has a direct impact on their national identity. The influence of mainland university education has two characteristics. Firstly, it is challenging, because Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities have experienced more than ten years of school education in Special Administrative Region and have formed more stable ideological perceptions, and there are some differences between the education in the two regions. For example, the students mentioned in the interview that the education in Special Administrative Region is all-information education, while the education in mainland universities is not all-information education. Therefore, it is challenging for mainland universities to change some misconceptions of Special Administrative Region students, establish a new concept of national identity, and enhance national identity. Secondly, it is direct in nature. The education provided to Special Administrative Region students by mainland universities, whether in the form of patriotic education and cultural courses, or red cultural practices and campus cultural activities, is direct and concrete in face-to-face form, and the impact of each course or activity is also direct.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

(1) Conclusion

The study shows that Special Administrative Region students in mainland colleges and universities have strong cultural, economic, and identity identities

of the country, with differences in ethnic identity and weak political identity. Compared with the results of previous studies, Special Administrative Region students in mainland universities maintain a high level of cultural and economic identity. Ethnic identity is progressive in terms of cognition despite its variability, identity has improved greatly, and political identity has not been significantly improved. In-depth analysis reveals that the factors influencing Special Administrative Region students' national identity in mainland universities are geography, family education, Special Administrative Region school education, and mainland university education. Among them, geography is a natural influencing factor, family education is an important influencing factor, education in Special Administrative Region schools is a fundamental influencing factor, and education in mainland universities is a direct influencing factor.

(2) Recommendations

1) Government should make good use of the geographical advantages, promote the deep integration of students from both regions and enhance the national identity of Special Administrative Region students

Universities in Shenzhen should make good use of the natural advantage of the proximity of Shenzhen and Special Administrative Region, and take advantage of the good opportunity of the construction of Guangdong-Special Administrative Region Greater Bay Area to carry out study and exchange activities for students from Shenzhen and Special Administrative Region. On the one hand, we can cooperate with Special Administrative Region universities to carry out activities of visiting and learning. Special Administrative Region students from universities in the Mainland can introduce students from universities in the Mainland to universities in Special Administrative Region for study and exchange, and carry out academic discussions on culture, science and technology to enhance the emotion of students from both regions. On the other hand, students from Special Administrative Region schools, especially junior and senior high school students from Special Administrative Region, can be invited to visit and study in universities in Shenzhen, so as to understand the specific situation of Shenzhen universities in advance and provide reference and experience for them to choose to come to study in Shenzhen in the future.

2) Schools should consolidate and strengthen school education in both regions, and reinforce the idea of national identity among Special Administrative Region students

School education in Special Administrative Region, especially in early childhood and primary schools, should continue to be consolidated and strengthened. On the one hand, the teaching materials should be strictly controlled and a mechanism of three reviews and three proofreading should be formed so

that Chinese culture, national identity education and patriotism education can be transmitted to Special Administrative Region students through the teaching materials and a correct view of national identity can be established at an early age. On the other hand, teachers should be strictly monitored, and teacher ethics should be incorporated into the teacher assessment system, so that teachers who love their motherland and love Special Administrative Region are employed to set a good example for Special Administrative Region students by their words and deeds. Universities in the mainland should take advantage of the opportunity for Special Administrative Region students to attend school in the mainland to provide diverse programs and activities for Special Administrative Region students to enhance their sense of national identity and train them to become patriotic communicators so that they can continue to spread patriotic ideas when they return to Special Administrative Region.

On the one hand, through various means such as Chinese culture courses, ideological and political education and professional courses, the awareness of Special Administrative Region students about the country's politics, economy, culture and system is enhanced, thus strengthening their sense of national identity. On the other hand, through practical activities such as social practice, campus cultural activities, and red culture activities, Special Administrative Region students will enhance their experience of national politics, economy, culture, and institutions, etc. Students will be guided to appreciate the meaning and value of national identity through practical experience, and enhance their sense of national identity in a comprehensive manner.

3) Families should be encouraged to enhance the cultural identity of Special Administrative Region students through family education

Family education should be encouraged and promoted. On the one hand, parents, as the core members of the family, should take up the daily education and guidance of students. Families should spread Chinese culture and enhance students' cultural identity through traditional holidays and classical works in China. On the other hand, family education and school education should be combined to form a synergy, spread the idea of patriotism and love for Special Administrative Region to students, clarify the identity of Chinese people and establish a correct outlook on life and values.

4) Society should adopt the core socialist values as the guide to strengthen the management of social environment and shape a good social climate

With the rapid development of the Internet, many unhealthy ideas and concepts have penetrated into the society through the network, which has negatively affected the growth of Special Administrative Region students. On the one hand, relevant

government departments and the Special Administrative Region government should strengthen the management of the social environment through legal means, especially the management of the online society, and give legal punishment to some acts that maliciously defame the image of the country, damage the national interests and subvert the national values. On the other hand, social organizations, enterprises and public welfare organizations should shoulder the national mission and social responsibility, consciously practice the core socialist values, spread positive energy, and jointly shape a good social climate for enhancing the national identity of Special Administrative Region students.

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