

Developing and Validating the Cultural Security Awareness Scale for College Students: A Preliminary Study

Jingru Qu, Mengjie Yin

School of Humanities and Social Science, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, China

Email: qujingru@cuhk.edu.cn

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Abstract

This preliminary study developed and validated the Cultural Security Awareness Scale (CSAS) for Chinese college students. Combining materialist epistemology and policy requirements, the scale assesses emotional attitudes, rational cognition, and situational thinking dimensions. An initial 60-item pool was refined through expert evaluation and pilot testing. In the first round, the scale was administered to 377 college students. Exploratory factor analysis supported a three-factor structure. In the second round, 259 college students completed the refined 15-item scale. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported a three-factor structure with good model fit, reliability, and validity. The scale can evaluate college students' cultural security awareness and guide educational interventions. Future research should validate the scale with larger samples and diverse populations. Adapting the scale for college students in other countries could provide insights into cultural security awareness across different contexts.

Keywords

Cultural Security Awareness, Scale Development, Chinese College Students

1. Introduction

National security serves as a critical foundation for safeguarding the nation and ensuring its stability. Especially in today's world of increasing tensions, most countries have heightened their sensitivity towards national security issues. For example, the UK government has demonstrated its strong commitment to national security by introducing the *National Security Act 2023*, which provides new measures to counter espionage, foreign interference, and other threats, while also reforming existing laws to address evolving security challenges (UK Parliament,

2023). The United States has released the *National Security Strategy 2022*, which outlines the country's approach to addressing global challenges, promoting American interests, and defending democratic values in an increasingly complex and competitive world.

Developing countries are also placing increasing emphasis on safeguarding their national security. In 2014, at the China National Security Commission meeting, President Xi Jinping pioneered the significant concept of the comprehensive national security framework, explicitly emphasizing the necessity to pay attention to both traditional and non-traditional security (Xi, 2014). The *National Security Law of the People's Republic of China* enacted in 2015, proposed the integration of national security education into the national education system. Consequently, national security education has received increasing attention and prominence in China. In 2020, the Ministry of Education of China issued the "National Security Education Guidelines for Universities, Middle Schools, and Primary Schools". The document emphasizes the importance of helping students develop a strong sense of national security awareness and encouraging them to translate this awareness into conscious actions that contribute to safeguarding the nation's security interests (Ministry of Education, 2020).

The Copenhagen School's security framework distinguishes between traditional and non-traditional security issues, with the latter encompassing societal, economic, and environmental aspects (Buzan et al., 1998). Cultural security, a non-traditional security issue, is more challenging to identify and tackle compared to conventional threats (Stritzel, 2014). Given the complexity of these issues, educating college students about non-traditional security has become crucial. By raising awareness and understanding of these evolving threats, educators aim to empower students with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively navigate and respond to them (Grygiel, 2013).

This preliminary study concentrates on cultural security, one of the non-traditional securities, and aims to develop an evaluation tool for measuring university students' cultural security awareness. The research involves the compilation of a scale for measuring university students' cultural security awareness and conducting empirical tests.

2. Cultural Security

Cultural security is a crucial aspect of non-traditional security (Jovanović et al., 2016). The discussion of cultural security began in the 1990s when the Copenhagen School proposed a new framework for analyzing security problems with cultural security being an important component (see Buzan et al., 1998). As Buzan (1991) states, "societal security concerns the sustainability, within acceptable conditions for evolution, of traditional patterns of language, culture and religious and national identity and custom." (pp. 19-20) The Copenhagen School argues that security threats can be existential for the survival of particular referent objects, which include not only the state, populace, and territory but also identity and culture (Stritzel, 2014). This perspective highlights the significance of cultural security

within the broader framework of security studies.

In practice, many national security conceptual frameworks have incorporated culture or culture-related content, recognizing the importance of safeguarding cultural identity and values. For instance, according to the *Federal Office for Information Security and Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance in Germany (2013)*, critical infrastructures include media and culture, emphasizing the need to protect these domains as part of a comprehensive security strategy.

A multi-national project “The Evolving Concept of Security” (EvoCS) provides an analytical framework for key security concerns, further underscoring the multidimensional nature of security. In this framework, the core values refer to the different aspects of life that actors seek to secure, including physical, territorial, environmental and ecological, social, cultural, political, economic, and information and cyber dimensions (Jovanović et al., 2016). The inclusion of cultural aspects in this framework reinforces the idea that cultural security is an integral part of the broader security landscape.

Previous demonstrations of the concept of “cultural security” mainly include objective and subjective perspectives. From an objective perspective, “cultural security” emphasizes the state of a country’s cultural sovereignty being objectively unharmed in reality. In contrast, the subjective perspective focuses on the people of a nation, emphasizing the subjective experience and perception of the people within the nation-state regarding the safety of national cultural values (Cheng, 2019; Liu, 2023; Pan, 2011). It is worth noting that threats to cultural security can come not only from “external troubles” but also from “internal concerns”. Attention to “external troubles” focuses on resisting and preventing the infiltration and invasion of foreign cultures and values, emphasizing anti-infiltration and anti-invasion. On the other hand, attention to “internal concerns” regards the dregs of a country’s own culture as a threat to cultural security, emphasizing the protection and inheritance of national cultural resources and advocating the enhancement of the innovative ability of national culture, with the focus on improving the endogenous driving force of national culture.

Universities serve as hubs of cultural productivity and potential targets for cultural infiltration by hostile forces (Grubbs, 2019; Samier, 2015). College students, who are at the forefront of contemporary culture, actively participate in various cultural activities, both offline and online. While their enthusiasm is commendable, they may lose their way in the cultural wave (Li et al., 2020; Nemeth, 2016). However, college students are also the fresh force of cultural inheritance and innovation. Their sensitivity to cutting-edge cultural trends, ability to accept and transform emerging cultures, and enthusiasm for creating new things position them as an important force in promoting the innovative development of local culture, maintaining its vitality, and safeguarding national cultural security (Zhao, 2023). Consequently, this study emphasizes the importance of cultural security and the critical role of fostering cultural security awareness among college students to safeguard national cultural interests and promote the innovative development of local culture.

3. Awareness of Cultural Security

In this study, cultural security awareness refers to the emotional attitudes, rational cognition, and behavioral orientations exhibited by college students when facing cultural security issues (Li et al., 2020; Pan, 2011; Samier, 2015). Previous research has primarily focused on cultivating national security awareness among university students, with limited dedicated discussions on fostering cultural security awareness (Dong, 2019; Grygiel, 2013; Skolnikoff, 2003). However, in the realm of higher education, it is necessary to have separate discussions and assessments of cultural security awareness. This is because universities are the most concentrated battleground for national cultural productivity and the main target of infiltration by hostile forces both domestically and abroad.

The cultural security challenges faced by universities in the new era are becoming increasingly complex, and the cultivation of cultural security awareness among university students deserves greater attention (Grubbs, 2019; Zhao, 2023). Referring to the conceptual analysis of national security awareness in previous literature (such as Bai & Zhang, 2024; Li et al., 2020; Samier, 2015), the concept of cultural security awareness can be broken down into at least three dimensions: emotional attitude, rational cognition, and action orientation, which aligns with the materialist epistemological logic from sensibility to rationality to practice.

As mentioned earlier, previous studies have primarily focused on university students' national security awareness and have attempted to evaluate it. Some studies have conducted evaluations through questionnaire surveys, but these studies did not employ a psychological scale design and were ultimately limited to presenting descriptive data (Bai & Zhang, 2024; Li et al., 2020; Samier, 2015). Other studies have attempted to develop evaluation scales, but since national security itself is a broad concept, the resulting scales have struggled to truly encompass its ten basic elements, and their effectiveness in assessing students' national security awareness is debatable (Dong, 2019; Zhao, 2023). Therefore, this study recognizes the necessity of focusing the research perspective on a single aspect of cultural security awareness and attempting to design a targeted cultural security awareness scale, making it an effective tool for evaluating university students' cultural security awareness (Dong, 2019; Grubbs, 2019).

4. Scale Development Process and Methods

4.1. Definition of Cultural Security Awareness

Combined with relevant concepts and meanings of cultural security, this study defines the cultural security awareness of college students as: the emotional attitudes, rational cognition, and behavioral orientations exhibited by college students when facing cultural security issues. Among them, emotional attitudes refer to the subjective feelings and emotional reactions of college students on cultural security-related issues; rational cognition refers to the objective cognition of college students on cultural security-related issues, including the rational understanding of the importance, urgency, current situation, and phenomena of cultural security;

behavioral orientations refer to the tendency of college students to take practical actions to safeguard national cultural security (Li et al., 2020; Pan, 2011; Samier, 2015).

4.2. Development of the Item Pool

The development of the item pool in this study has three main reference sources:

1) Important speeches by Xi Jinping, such as his speech at the first meeting of the Central National Security Commission on April 15, 2014, his speech at the Forum on Literature and Art Work on October 15, 2014, his speech at the opening ceremony of the 10th National Congress of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and the 9th National Congress of the Chinese Writers Association on November 30, 2016, and his speech at the National Conference on Publicity and Ideological Work on August 22, 2018; as well as various guidance documents issued by the Ministry of Education and the State Council, such as the “Guidelines for National Security Education in Primary, Secondary and Higher Education” issued by the Ministry of Education of China in 2020, and the “14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Development” issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council in 2022. These sources serve as a guiding role in the compilation of the item pool.

2) Literature related to cultural security, cultural security awareness, and national security awareness. This includes theoretical research, such as conceptual analysis of Xi Jinping’s discourse on cultural security, and empirical research, such as empirical surveys of college students.

3) Relevant items from existing scales. For example, the “National Security Awareness Evaluation Dimension Scale” of the “Questionnaire for Research on National Security Awareness of College Students in Guangxi” developed by Lu (2017), and the “College Students’ National Political Security View Scale” developed by Pan (2021). Through the above sources, an initial item pool of 60 items was compiled.

4.3. Expert Evaluation

Four experts and four members of the research team were invited to form an item evaluation panel to review, evaluate, screen, and revise the item pool. All members of the evaluation panel have a master’s degree or above, or a senior professional title, have certain research and insights on concepts related to “cultural security”, and have some experience in the process of scale compilation. Following the basic points of the Delphi method, the evaluation panel members scored each item in the item pool for importance (Likert 5-point scale) and selected appropriate items from the item pool. To assess the reliability of the experts’ ratings, the average of the basis for the experts’ judgments on the questions and the coefficient of the experts’ familiarity with the indicators were used as the coefficient of expert authority. The basis for the experts’ judgments on the questions includes four aspects: practical experience, theoretical analysis, domestic and foreign reference literature, and subjective judgment, with quantified values of 0.8, 0.6, 0.4, and 0.2,

respectively. The quantified values of the familiarity coefficient include 0.2 (very unfamiliar), 0.4 (unfamiliar), 0.6 (average), 0.8 (familiar), and 1 (very familiar).

The arithmetic mean of the sum of all experts' self-evaluations was calculated according to the above-quantified values to obtain the expert authority coefficient. The concentration of expert opinions was judged by the mean and coefficient of variation of the importance assignment, and the coordination of expert opinions was judged by Kendall's coordination coefficient. Finally, based on the comprehensive opinions of the evaluation panel members, the items were revised and reduced to form the initial draft of the scale.

4.4. Small Sample Pilot Test

Through convenience sampling, 27 college students from different regions and universities across the country were recruited to conduct a small sample pilot test and content evaluation of the initial draft of the scale, and their opinions and suggestions on the language expression, semantic logic, ambiguity, and redundancy of the items in the initial draft of the scale were collected. Based on the feedback and discussion by the evaluation panel, the scale was further revised to form the formal scale.

4.5. Large Sample Survey

In October and November 2023, online questionnaires were distributed twice to college students who met the criteria in the sample database through a sample service platform. In the first round, 377 valid questionnaires were received, and in the second round, 259 valid questionnaires were received. The selection criteria for valid questionnaires were: 1) currently enrolled college students (including undergraduate and junior college students); 2) the answering time was not less than 60 seconds and not more than 600 seconds; 3) able to pass the test of three lie detection questions. The scale used a Likert 7-point rating method, with each item assigned a value of 1-7 from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Except for reverse-scored items, a higher score indicated a higher level of cultural security awareness. The average answering time for the scale was 203 seconds.

4.6. Item Analysis and Reliability and Validity Testing

This study used the critical ratio method, item-total correlation test, and homogeneity check for item analysis. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used for item screening and model construction. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to evaluate the structural validity of the scale. The reliability of the scale was tested by evaluating the internal consistency of the scale, with a test level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

5. Results

5.1. Demographic Information of the Samples

Among the 377 valid samples, 283 were male and 94 were female; 33 were freshmen,

147 were sophomores, 152 were juniors, 42 were seniors, and 3 were in their fifth year; 96 were junior college students and 281 were undergraduate students; 67 were members of the Communist Party of China (including probationary members); the survey covered 29 first-level administrative regions, with the most students coming from Guangdong Province (48), Shandong Province (41), and Hunan Province (32), while college students from Hainan Province, Xizang Autonomous Region, Hong Kong SAR, Macao SAR, and Taiwan regions were not covered.

5.2. Expert Evaluation Results

This study conducted two rounds of expert evaluations, collecting expert ratings through expert rating forms, with a recovery rate of 100%. The expert authority coefficient was 0.81, and the Kendall coordination coefficients of the two rounds of consulting experts were 0.62 ($\chi^2 = 293.703$, $p < 0.001$) and 0.60 ($\chi^2 = 291.945$, $p < 0.001$), respectively, indicating good consistency of expert opinions.

According to expert opinions and item screening criteria, 20 items with poor content validity were deleted, such as items weakly related to the theme like “I am friendly to strangers on the Internet”, items with unclear implications like “Western values are more popular among college students”, and items with poor typicality like “I will discuss cultural security-related issues with relatives and friends”. Three items were revised, such as changing the overly general expression “cultural innovation is important” to “cultural innovation is conducive to China’s culture winning in the international competition”.

5.3. Small Sample Pilot Test Results

Regarding the 40 items after expert evaluation, some interviewed college students indicated that two items, “I will participate in online discussions on topics related to cultural security” and “I often discuss cultural security issues with others online”, were repetitive and redundant, and the latter was eventually deleted. For the remaining items, the interviewees believed that the expressions were clear, easy to understand, concise, and refined, so no deletions or revisions were made. At this point, a formal scale containing 39 items was formed.

5.4. Item Analysis Results

To test the reliability of the scale items, item analysis was conducted on the scale before testing its reliability and validity. First, using the critical ratio method, the mean differences between the high-scoring group (top 27%) and the low-scoring group (bottom 27%) on each item were compared. According to the criteria of p -value < 0.05 and critical ratio > 3 (Cureton, 1957), three items that did not meet the criteria were identified and deleted. Second, through item-total correlation analysis, 13 items with low homogeneity with the overall scale (item-total correlation coefficient < 0.4) were identified and deleted after comprehensive analysis. Finally, all items were greater than the discrimination index of 0.2 in the homogeneity check (Reynolds et al., 2021).

5.5. Factor Analysis Results

EFA was conducted on the remaining 26 items of the scale, yielding a KMO value of 0.921 and a Bartlett's sphericity test $\chi^2 = 4023.66$, reaching a significance level above 0.01, indicating that it is very suitable for factor analysis. Principal component analysis was used to extract factors and Promax oblique rotation was used for rotation. Combined with eigenvalues greater than 1, scree plot, and selection criteria with academic consensus, 11 items were deleted. The selection criteria included: factor loading of items less than 0.4, factor loading of items greater than 0.4 on two or more factors, and less than 3 items included in a single factor. Finally, the scale extracted a total of 3 factors, which was consistent with the initial conception. The cumulative explained variance of the three factors was 51.153%, and they were named: emotional attitudes, rational cognition, and situational thinking, respectively, as shown in **Table 1**. Among them, "situational thinking" corresponds to "behavioral orientation" in the initial conception, both pointing to the practical dimension, but the term "situational thinking" better summarizes the meaning of the subordinate items. However, we found that one item in the "situational thinking" dimension, "I feel angry about the phenomenon of foreign brands appropriating Chinese culture in fashion design", is more appropriate to be classified into the "emotional attitudes" dimension. In this regard, we ultimately considered it more reasonable to keep it in the "situational thinking" dimension because this item, along with the other 3 items in this dimension, requires respondents to put themselves in a specific "situation" and "think" about how they would react in that situation.

Table 1. Results of EFA.

Factors	Items	Factor Loading
Emotional Attitudes	Q30 I am concerned about the inheritance of Chinese traditional culture.	0.814
	Q28 I am concerned about the phenomenon of foreign cultural invasion.	0.790
	Q29 I am concerned about the ideological infiltration in online discourse.	0.708
	Q5 We are overly sensitive to cultural security issues.	0.697
	Q6 I can perceive the phenomenon of cultural invasion.	0.663
	Q24 Based on my observation, the phenomenon of foreign cultural invasion truly exists.	0.538
	Q17 I am alert to the ideological infiltration in online discourse.	0.489
Rational Cognition	Q12 Cultural conservatism is detrimental to cultural development.	0.817
	Q14 Cultural innovation is conducive to China's culture winning in international competition.	0.770
	Q13 A balance needs to be sought between inheritance and innovation.	0.706
	Q10 In today's increasingly globalized world, cultural hegemonism no longer exists.	0.620
Situational Thinking	Q20 I find that the currently popular artificial intelligence products can always provide fair and objective information.	0.910
	Q21 I observe that foreign popular culture has a huge influence on Chinese college students.	0.881
	Q37 I will participate in online discussions on topics related to cultural security.	0.608
	Q25 I feel angry about the phenomenon of foreign brands appropriating Chinese culture in fashion design.	0.454

5.6. Reliability and Validity Testing

After item reduction, a second-round survey ($N = 259$) was conducted, and CFA was performed on the three-factor model of the scale using the lavaan package in RStudio. The results showed that $\chi^2/df = 1.19 < 3$, RMSEA = 0.035, SRMR = 0.073, CFA = 0.975, TLI = 0.969, all indicating good model fit. The internal consistency of the scale was 0.864. The α value of the emotional attitudes dimension was 0.819, the α value of the rational cognition dimension was 0.748, and the α value of the situational thinking dimension was 0.749. The α values of the three dimensions were all within the acceptable range above 0.7.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the materialist epistemological logic of “perceptual-rational-practical” and combining the characteristics of cultural security awareness and the requirements of policy documents, this preliminary study referred to previous national security awareness scales to develop an original and useful scale. After item analysis, factor analysis, and reliability and validity testing, the final CSAS for college students was determined, which includes three dimensions: emotional attitudes, rational cognition, and situational thinking. The three-factor model has good explanatory power for college students’ cultural security awareness, and the items under each dimension are reasonable and can fully assess the level of cultural security awareness of individual college students. The fit indices of the theoretical model of the scale all meet the requirements of psychometrics, and it also has good reliability and validity, indicating that it can be used as an evaluation tool for college students’ cultural security awareness. By summing the scores of each item in the scale, the self-evaluated level of cultural security awareness of college students can be calculated, and correlation analysis and mean tests can be conducted in conjunction with demographic variables.

The CSAS developed in this study has the potential for application beyond the Chinese context. The scale can be adapted and validated for use among college students in other countries, enabling cross-cultural comparisons and providing insights into cultural security awareness in different contexts. By assessing the level of cultural security awareness among college students worldwide, researchers and educators can identify gaps in understanding and develop targeted interventions to enhance students’ ability to navigate and respond to cultural security challenges. Furthermore, the scale can be used to inform educational policies and guide the development of cultural security education programs in universities worldwide, ultimately contributing to the safeguarding of national cultural interests and the promotion of cultural diversity and understanding.

This study has the limitation of a small sample size, so we claim it as a “preliminary study”. It is recommended that future research further validate the scale structure through large-scale surveys and enhance the accuracy and reliability of the scale through methods such as cross-validation. In addition, the scale should be applied to actual educational activities, and its effect on enhancing cultural

security awareness should be evaluated through empirical research to achieve continuous optimization and improvement of the scale. Through these measures, the scale can better serve cultural security education in colleges and universities and play a role in scientifically guiding the enhancement of college students' cultural security awareness.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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