Confucian Culture: The Scapegoat of Chinese EFL Students' Unwillingness to Communicate

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ABSTRACT

It is a stereotype and misconception that Confucian culture is generally viewed as the dominant factor resulting in Chinese EFL students' weak Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in class. First, Confucian culture has been misconstrued as respecting teachers' authority by suppressing one's own opinions. Second, it is an exaggeration to characterise and label all Chinese students as followers of Confucian cultural values. No study has yet surveyed Chinese EFL college students' identity formed from Confucian cultural values and their influence on their WTC. In this study, a questionnaire was administered to Chinese EFL college students to survey their identity formed from Confucian cultural values and explore the relationship between the identity formed from Confucian cultural values and Second Language (L2) WTC. Surprisingly, the result demonstrates that the majority of students only hold a weak identity formed from Confucian cultural values. Even more surprising, Confucian cultural identity and Chinese EFL students' L2WTC have a weak positive correlation. This finding indicates that a stronger identity formed from Confucian cultural values won't result in weaker L2WTC; conversely, a strong identity formed from Confucian cultural values may contribute to a strong L2WTC. Furthermore, the stronger influencing factor of L2WTC is being unable to speak due to the lack of vocabulary or language knowledge. Finally, in order to break the stereotype, an attempt is made to propose a Complex Dynamic System (CDS) insight for Confucian cultural influence on EFL students' L2WTC, based on the CDS principles of Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

Keywords: Confucian cultural values; L2 Willingness to Communicate (L2WTC); classroom reticence; Complex Dynamic System (CDS) theory; quality education

INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s, Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in the first language was initially studied as part of applied linguistics; since then, students' WTC in a Second Language (L2) has been proposed and attracted widespread concern (P. D. MacIntyre et al., 1998). Students' Unwillingness to Communicate (UWTC) has been a long-standing predicament in an EFL classroom (Ma et al., 2023). Chinese students are generally argued to be more silent and passive in class. Most Chinese college students are said to remain reticent even though they know the right answers in large-size EFL classes (Y. Zhou & Chen, 2020). Meanwhile, Confucian culture is habitually and certainly assumed to be one of the dominant factors influencing Chinese EFL students' WTC in the EFL

class, both in China and in other East Asian countries (S. Wang et al., 2022). Saving face is often considered to be from Confucian culture. However, according to H. Zhu and O'Sullivan (2022, p.5), for Chinese students, remaining silent in class is to avoid making mistakes and thus not "losing face", and this may be just a "choice" rather than being unwilling to communicate. Therefore, the fact is that Confucian culture has become the scapegoat for learners being unwilling to communicate in EFL classes (X. Yuan, 2022). Furthermore, J. Lee (2021) expresses his concern about the over-generalisation of all Asian countries into one Confucian cultural group and urges reconsidering previous assumptions regarding the consistency of Confucian culture in classrooms across all these countries.

Language learning should have been a quite complex dynamic process affected by various factors in different contexts, and the relationship between the identity formed from Confucian cultural values and EFL students' WTC can't be oversimplified as the simple linear causation. However, most previous studies usually were confined to a static and linear framework. Although some studies hold the dynamic perspective for L2WTC, they only regard WTC itself as a dynamic system (Geng & Wang, 2022). However, to our knowledge, no study has yet applied the Complex Dynamic System (CDS) perspective on the influence of Confucian culture on Chinese EFL students' WTC. Moreover, Ma et al. (2023) state that very few research studies have focused on Confucian cultural influence on L2WTC, and there have been debates and controversies about their findings; therefore, more such research should be undertaken in future studies. By addressing the gap, rather than habitually accepting the stereotype that Confucian culture has a strong influence on the general population, this study aims to investigate the relationship between the identity formed from Confucian cultural values and Chinese EFL students' L2WTC. This puts forth a CDS theoretical perspective on the Confucian cultural influence on Chinese EFL students' WTC.

LITERATURE REVIEW

WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE

In order to easily describe the predisposition in first language communication, Burgoon (1976, p.60) first proposed the concept of Unwillingness to Communicate and indicated it as "a chronic tendency to avoid and/or de-value oral communication". On this basis, "Willingness to Communicate" is presented as avoiding the negative expression and defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons", and WTC is considered the most direct factor in L2 communication (P. D. MacIntyre et al., 1998, p.547). To distinguish between general-speaking reticence and L2 Reticence, the latter refers to classroom reticence in the L2 context. And Chinese students' reticence in EFL classes has become a challenge for both students and teachers (Sang & Hiver, 2021). Many studies have focused on the inner factors such as individual emotions, behaviours, motivation, attitude, anxiety, and confidence; some research pays more attention to external factors like teaching methods and strategies and classroom atmosphere construction (Ma et al., 2023). Further, Ma et al. state that only a few research studies pay attention to social-cultural values, and even fewer studies focus on Confucian cultural influence.

According to Burgoon (1976), L2WTC is presented as a kind of personality trait variable, which is mainly determined by individual self-esteem, introverted temperament, extroverted temperament and so on. However, P. MacIntyre and Noels (1994) proposed a model to predict factors influencing WTC in First Language (L1), which showed that WTC was influenced by a

combination of different variables. Moreover, P. D. MacIntyre et al. (1998) argue that there is no necessity to limit WTC to being determined mainly by psychological variables. They claim that if the phenomenon is considered to be determined mainly by situational variables, then it can be improved through instruction. For example, Al-Saidat et al. (2023) highlight that teachers play a crucial role in creating a stress-free learning environment and encouraging engagement in the classroom. Research on situational variables influencing WTC is more directly beneficial to the design of lessons, which can focus on the construction of the classroom situation. Akdemir (2021) suggests that WTC has been viewed as the constant individuality and static system for the last twenty years based on conventional linear causality and reductionism; however, recently, a new theoretical perspective has been introduced into "Second Language Acquisition" (SLA) research based on the "Complex Dynamic System" (CDS) theory. Since then, some research has focused on various dynamic variables, including social, linguistic, emotional, and cognitive psychological variables, specifically individual experiences, context, topics, tasks, and so on (Ma et al., 2023). Only very few studies regard WTC as a CDS system (Geng & Wang, 2022), but obviously, the "dynamic turn" in WTC research has now emerged (Akdemir, 2021, p.158).

CDS PERSPECTIVE ON SLA AND WTC

Complex Dynamic System (CDS) Theory has its origins in the fields of physics, biology, chemistry and mathematics (Geng & Wang, 2022). Thelen and Smith (1994) first applied CDS theory to study language learning in early human development. The simple model of cause-and-effect based on predeterminism is denied; instead, CDS focuses on the contextual influence and dynamic changes emerging and generating in the process of human development. According to van Geert (1994), in order to adapt to new contexts, CDS remains open, changing and self-organising all the time with its subsystems. The interacting intensity between different subsystems changes over time. The subsystem's variation could lead to different external behaviours of the system, and mutual influence between different systems might also lead to subsystem changes. Geng and Wang (2022) state that this kind of interaction and changes between systems and subsystems make a system become nonlinear and dynamic, and complex, which happens to be the key feature of SLA.

As living beings, human beings are also complex dynamic systems, and the development of mental processes, including consciousness, attention, motivation and attitude, is a complex, dynamic, nonlinear process. As such, the study of problems in education and language learning should also focus on dynamics and nonlinearity, rather than just following the one-dimensional causal relationship. Larsen-Freeman (1997) initially explores how SLA has features similar to CDS as a dynamic system. In addition, De Bot et al. (2007) propose that CDS could supply a rational research method for SLA as this is a dynamic process, and it manifests some key features and principles of CDS as follows:

1. Changes within the individual and between individuals.
2. Sensitivity and dependence on starting conditions.
3. Appearance of attractor states in the process of development.
4. Subsystems are completely interconnected and interdependent.

Since then, some related research has applied a CDS perspective to SLA and WTC. Macintyre (2020) examines WTC as a dynamic process and proposes a new perspective on learning strategies, motivation and language competence based on CDS. Syed (2022) indicates some limitations of traditional linear thinking and discusses how CDS serves as a strong theoretical

framework for L2WTC research. However, to our knowledge, no previous studies have yet employed a CDS theoretical perspective on the influence of Confucian culture on EFL learners' WTC.

CONFUCIAN CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON WTC

Confucianism is named *Ju-Chia* in Chinese and was founded by Kung Chiu (551-479 B.C.), who is respectfully known as Confucius (K'ung-fu-tz). Confucius was born between the late Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.), and he was the first person to establish a private school in China. He was passionate about founding schools and giving lectures to promote his academic views and political ambitions. After his death, Mencius (circa 390-305 B.C.) and Tsun-tse (circa 313-328 B.C.) inherited and developed Confucian's academic thoughts and are known as the main representatives of Confucian culture (Tu, 2018). With the emergence and prosperity of the other famous mainstream Taoist and Buddhist cultures in the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907), Confucianism further developed and grew with a critical attitude. Confucianism took the form of Confucian idealist philosophy in the Sung Dynasty (A.D. 960-1279). In the late feudal society (A.D. 960-1840), Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism became the dominant governing philosophy at the time. Confucian culture is thus the product of historical development. For the political ruler to maintain the stability of feudal society, Confucian culture was developed by defining and prescribing virtues and harnessing harmonious interpersonal relationships. Cultivating internal virtues is the main approach to achieving interpersonal and social harmony. This is done by stressing the three main principles of benevolence, propriety and righteousness. Benevolence is the core and base of Confucian culture, which means being kind and merciful in order to love all humans. Propriety means learning and behaving with etiquette and having proper manners (Huang & Charter, 1996). Righteousness equates to justice, filial piety and altruism (Ho, 1995). Propriety and righteousness are both approaches to harmonising the relationships among people, between people and society, as well as between people and nature, aiming to achieve benevolence.

To date, only a few studies have focused on the relationship between culture and WTC, especially the Confucian cultural influence on WTC, which has been "under debate" (Ma et al., 2023, p.15). Wen and Clément (2010) claim that Chinese EFL students' weak WTC is originally "deeply rooted" in Chinese Confucian culture, which is not a general problem in EFL learning but a specific phenomenon for Chinese learners. Contrarily, Cheng (2000, p.435) argues that cultural influence on reticence and WTC have been exaggerated, and L2WTC is more a situational specific rather than a "cultural pre-set". Simple cultural attribution can only be interpreted as an "easier diagnosis" for complex WTC. The supporters who believe that Confucian culture influences WTC follow the reason that students are afraid of making mistakes and subsequently losing face, so they are unwilling to communicate. They further believe that saving face is part of Confucian culture; thus, Confucian culture results in weak WTC. However, "face" stands for a person's sense of self-identity and dignity; saving face is universal to all cultures and not only limited to Chinese culture (Hu-Chan, 2020). Moreover, individual attitudes towards making mistakes are related to their sensitivity to contexts and interpersonal relationships (Head, 2020), and this does not equate to fear of losing face. Further, Confucian culture advocates propriety, which is similar to the concept of 'gentleman' characteristics in Western culture (J. Lee, 2021), but this does not mean the same as fear of making mistakes and unwillingness to communicate.

It is a stereotype that Confucian culture is generally viewed as the dominant factor influencing Chinese EFL students' reticence and weak WTC in the EFL class. That is, it has become the scapegoat for the weak WTC in the Chinese EFL class (L. Yuan et al., 2023). Firstly, there is a huge fundamental misunderstanding of Confucian culture. The propriety and righteousness of Confucian culture state that one should be strict with oneself and lenient towards others, but this has been misunderstood and exaggerated to be more restrictive (Lin et al., 2021a) in behaviours to the extent of being silent in communication. In some research about the Confucian cultural influence on WTC, the culture has been interpreted and misconstrued as respecting authority figures, i.e., teachers, and suppressing one's own opinions and emotions to achieve interpersonal harmony (Lin et al., 2021a) and maintaining a stable classroom environment. This obviously goes against the original meaning of Confucian culture. However, Confucian culture advocates self-cultivation, proper family management, effective state administration, and bringing peace to the world (this is from Li Ji Da Xue, Chapter 42 of the Book of Rites) (Zheng, 2019). Therefore, Confucian culture originally intended to encourage people to enter the world and engage in interpersonal communication actively rather than passively withdrawing from social groups, with the ambition to strive to be the best person and to inspire others. *Interpersonal harmony* is not equivalent to *being the same with others,* including maintaining the same by keeping silent*,* but it stresses *being in harmony with differences* and encouraging one to actively engage in social and interpersonal communication*.* This means that people should express their own opinions in communication but should not be misunderstood as keeping silent. Likewise, *respecting teachers* does not mean accepting all their viewpoints unconditionally but emphasising that one should be polite and tolerant of others while expressing one's own views. According to Y. Zhu and Bresnahan (2018), the stereotype mainly comes from Westerners' or other cultural groups' limited understanding of Confucian culture. This kind of stereotype merely concentrates on the characters of the whole cultural group but not individual differences.

Secondly, there is a confusion between Confucian culture and the identity of Confucian cultural values in the stereotype of Chinese EFL students' WTC. All Chinese students are certainly supposed to hold an identity formed from Confucian culture due to being born in China. According to Tu (2018), it is an exaggeration to mark and characterise all Chinese people as holding Confucian cultural values. Moreover, X. Yuan (2022) discovered that there is no significant cultural difference between East Asian international students and non-East Asian international students in classroom WTC; reticence is quite a normal phenomenon in EFL learning generally, not only for Chinese students. In addition, Confucian culture is not exclusively identified by Chinese students. Not all Chinese students hold a strong identity in Confucian culture, and not only one cultural value is identified at the same time (X. Yuan, 2023). Therefore, it is fairly important to distinguish Confucian culture from the identity of Confucian cultural values. Thus, there is no inevitable causation between Confucian culture and Chinese students, and there is no inevitable causation between Confucian culture and Chinese EFL students' WTC.

Finally, Confucian culture has been regarded as a constant and static variable without changes, as a kind of traditional and time-honoured cultural heritage. It is important to maintain a dynamic and fluid perspective rather than a static stereotypic and deterministic viewpoint on the influence of Confucian culture on Chinese EFL students' WTC. Ma et al. (2023) indicate that most researchers have stressed WTC as a kind of dynamic process changing all the time, which makes WTC more complicated as a phenomenon.

By having reviewed previous studies carefully, a research gap has been identified as follows: To our knowledge, no study has yet surveyed the current state of Chinese EFL college students' identity formed from Confucian cultural values. Meanwhile, no study has yet revealed the misunderstanding of Confucian culture by exploring its influence on WTC. In addition, no study has yet proposed a CDS theoretical perspective on the Confucian cultural development itself and its influence on Chinese EFL students' WTC.

By addressing the gaps mentioned in the above text, the present study sets out to address the following two research questions (RQs):

RQ1: To what extent do Chinese EFL students hold an identity formed from Confucian cultural values?
RQ2: Is there a correlation between identity formed from Confucian cultural values and the Chinese EFL students' WTC?

Based on research question 2, the null hypothesis (H0) proposed is there is no correlation between identity formed from Confucian cultural values and L2WTC.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

The survey participants were recruited from a private university in China; the number of students majoring in English is about 3000. The G-power software was employed to calculate the sample size for the correlation analysis. Based on the above, assuming a confidence level of 0.95, an effective size of 0.3, and an alpha error probability of 0.05, using the two-tailed test, the required minimum sample size was calculated to be 138. A survey questionnaire was distributed randomly to 280 English major students using the random sampling technique. 252 questionnaires were returned. 19 cases with missing values were deleted after data filtering, and valid data from 233 participants were retained for further data analysis (45.1% male, n=105, 54.9% female, n=128). The age of participants ranged from 18 to 24 years. 81.1% participants (n=189) started learning English during their primary school years (7-12 years old), 17.2% (n=40) participants began to learn English in their preschool years (2-6 years old), 1.7% participants (n=4) started learning English in the first year (13–14 years old) in junior high school. Their majors are detailed as follows: hotel English, business English, medical science, nursing science, computer science and technology, elementary education, information management, Chinese language and literature, economics and finance, journalist and communication, and biomedicine.

INSTRUMENTS

Unlike using a laboratory-based method, which is not in an authentic context, and also trying to avoid the limited amount of data collected in the hydrodynamic video-recording method (Geng & Wang, 2022), this study employed a quantitative questionnaire survey in Qualtrics to collect data. Participants were asked to respond to items in three sections: identity formed from Confucian cultural values, willingness to communicate in EFL class, and main factors resulting in reticence or unwillingness to communicate in EFL classes.

A total of 8 items were selected to measure Identity formed from Confucian cultural values, according to the Confucian dimension from the Chinese Value Survey and Chinese Values Questionnaire, with 50 items and 38 items-CVQ50 and CVQ38 (Yang, 2019). Interpersonal harmony is the goal advocated and realised by Confucian cultural values, and benevolence, propriety, and righteousness are the three main principles to achieve this goal (L. Yuan et al., 2023). Based on the literature (Lin et al., 2021a), it can be concluded that the principle of benevolence is related to the universal factor of Kindness (forgiveness, compassion), propriety is related to the factor of Observation of rites and social rituals, and righteousness is related to Sense of righteousness. The items in the questionnaire were constructed based on the three universal factors. In addition, interpersonal harmony, being the objective of interpersonal relationships, is deemed a universal factor for the questionnaire items. Further, another universal factor is self-cultivation, which is the fundamental prerequisite to achieving interpersonal harmony (Lin et al., 2021).

In order to measure learners' WTC in the EFL class, a total of 5 items were selected, including two items modified from *the scale of willingness to Communicate in Appendix A* (P. D. MacIntyre et al., 2001, p.385) and three items from *the scale of L2WTC inside the classroom* (J. S. Lee & Lee, 2019, p.20). Since the original version (P. D. MacIntyre et al., 2001) was designed specifically for L2 French communication, all French words were translated into English. To make it easily understood, each question item was revised from the original second person to the first person, with the structure "when you are given a chance" revised to "I am willing to …, if given a chance" and "your" was changed to "my". Participants were asked to express their willingness to communicate in class by rating frequency based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from A to E, where A = I never think about this, B= I rarely think about this, C= I sometimes think about this, D= I often think about this, E= I almost always think about this. With regard to the main factors resulting in reticence or unwillingness to communicate in EFL classes (L. Yuan et al., 2023), seven common items were selected according to both learners' and teachers' perspectives (Zhang, 2023) and the *model of variables influencing WTC* (P. D. MacIntyre et al., 1998, p547), as well as factors of self-confidence and final academic assessment (Zulkepli & Hussin, 2021).

The content validity of the items in the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of 3 experts majoring in EFL who had worked as English teachers and studied in the field of EFL for at least 5 years at that point in time. Based on the original 30 items for the questionnaire, 10 repeated items have been deleted in order to reduce test-taker fatigue on the part of the respondents. To enable easier understanding of items, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese and reviewed by a panel of 2 experts who were majoring in English translation. Responses to all these items of the questionnaire were rated based on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from A Never, B Rarely, C Sometimes, D Often to E Almost Always. The reliability was assessed by employing Cronbach's alpha (α); data from 23 respondents were collected and analysed using SPSSRO. The Cronbach's alpha value was 0.867, indicating that the reliability of the items in the questionnaire is good.

DATA COLLECTION

First of all, this research was approved by the university's Academic Committee, and next, consent was sought from the semester course instructors to carry out data collection. All participants were informed of the research purposes and all the risks and benefits, including that voluntary participants would receive a random WeChat red envelope and that their responses would not influence their final examination scores. All voluntary participants signed a consent form before participating in the study to ensure that they would seriously and truthfully respond to the questions

in the survey. Prior to the survey, the researcher explained that the identity formed from Confucian cultural values would be assessed by self-report because this study assumed that an individual's cultural identity might change according to different times and situations.

DATA ANALYSIS

SPSS (Version 25.0) was employed to conduct the data analysis. First, descriptive statistics was conducted to analyse the demographic characteristics of the participants, their identity formed from Confucian cultural values, and WTC status, as well as the main influencing factors. And then, the Pearson correlation tests were employed to examine the relationships between their identity formed from Confucian cultural values, and WTC status, as well as the main influencing factors of WTC.

RESULTS

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Descriptive statistics were conducted for the collected data from three sections of the questionnaire as follows. The minimum value of 1 was allocated to *I never think about this*, 2 was for *I rarely think about this,* three was for *I sometimes think about this,* 4 was for *I often think about this,* and the maximum value of 5 was for *I almost always think about this*. All the values of skewness and kurtosis of each item are between -1 and 1. According to Kunnan (1998), if the threshold of ±2 is achieved for skewness and kurtosis, univariate normality can be supported. Thus, the data symmetry and an approximate normal distribution can be assumed. In addition, as shown in Table 1 and Table 7, due to the Std. Deviation values being generally high and most of the Kurtosis values being less than zero, it can be inferred that the degree of dispersion is high and participants have different responses with regard to *Section 1- identity formed from Confucian cultural values*, as well as *Section 3- main influencing factors of L2WTC*.

IDENTITY FORMED FROM CONFUCIAN CULTURAL VALUES

As detailed in Table 1 and Table 2, the average of all the means of eight items (Q1-Q8) is 3.14, and 75% of participants scored below four on items Q2, Q3, Q4, Q6, and Q7, but with the female participants scoring 4.75 and male participants scoring four on items Q6 and Q7. This result indicates that the majority of participants held weak identities formed from Confucian cultural values in general. Specifically, the majority of participants were sometimes modest and complaisant, and they only sometimes lived in harmony and avoided disputes. Meanwhile, they were only sometimes prudent and courteous, ambitious, diligent and persevering, but the female participants were a little more inclined to have these attributes. 75% of the participants scored below three on items Q1, Q5, and Q8, and this result indicates that they were rarely conservative and rarely behaved according to the status they were in.

In addition, as shown in Table 3, compared with most participants who started learning English in preschool (around 2-6 years old) or primary school (around 7-12 years old), the majority of participants who started learning English in junior middle school (around 13-14 years old) received higher scores on each item. That is to say, the majority of participants who started learning English in junior middle school maintained a stronger identity formed from Confucian cultural

values. It can be inferred that perhaps the fact may be that participants in rural areas hold a stronger identity formed from Confucian cultural values. As students in rural areas have limited teaching and learning facilities, they usually start learning English relatively late, that is in junior middle school, compared with students in urban areas who start learning English at Grade 3 or Grade 1 or even in preschool.

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics of Identity formed from Confucian cultural values

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Q1.I always think that forgiving those who offend us is very important to me	233	1	5	2.32	0.962	0.311	0.159	-0.085	0.318
Q2.I always think that people must be modest and complaisant	233	1	5	3.32	1.039	-0.411	0.159	-0.114	0.318
Q3.I always think that I should feel ashamed and dislike myself when I have done something wrong, and that is very important to me	233	1	5	3.17	1.053	-0.170	0.159	-0.325	0.318
Q4.I always think that people should live in harmony and avoid disputes	233	1	5	3.60	1.017	-0.624	0.159	0.208	0.318
Q5.I always think that one should not show off even though they have high intellectual ability, even to the extent of pretending to be not in the know	233	1	5	2.84	1.028	0.083	0.159	-0.143	0.318
Q6.I always think that people should keep being prudent and courteous all the time	233	1	5	3.73	0.957	-0.616	0.159	0.486	0.318
Q7.I always think that people should be ambitious, diligent and persevering, and it is very important to me	233	1	5	3.66	0.984	-0.526	0.159	0.151	0.318
Q8.I always think that people should always behave and act according to the status and position that we have	233	1	5	2.52	1.130	0.330	0.159	-0.568	0.318
Valid N (listwise)	233								
Average				3.14					

TABLE 2. Differences between genders in Identity formed from Confucian cultural values

	Gender		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
Male	N	Valid	105	105	105	105	105	105	105	105
		Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Percentiles	25	2.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	2.00
		50	3.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.00
		75	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.00
Female	N	Valid	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128
		Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Percentiles	25	2.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	1.00
		50	2.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	2.00
		75	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.75	4.75	3.00

TABLE 3. Differences in identity formed from Confucian cultural values
according to the age at which students began to learn English

How old were you when you began to learn English			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
2-6	N	Valid	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
		Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Percentiles	25	2.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	1.00
		50	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	2.00
		75	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.00
7-12	N	Valid	189	189	189	189	189	189	189	189
		Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Percentiles	25	2.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	2.00
		50	2.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.00
		75	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.00
13-14	N	Valid	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
		Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Percentiles	25	2.25	2.25	1.50	2.25	1.50	3.00	3.25	2.25
		50	3.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	3.50	4.50	3.00
		75	3.75	4.50	4.50	5.00	4.50	4.75	5.00	4.50

WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE

As shown in Table 4 and Table 5, the sample mean of each item is mostly around 2. The average of all the means of eight items is 2.46, and 75% of the participants scored below 3. This result indicates that the majority of participants held a weak WTC in the EFL class. Only on item Q9 is the sample mean 3.23 with a Std. Deviation of 1.012 and 75% of participants scored below 4. That is to say, if they were confused about a task in English that they had to complete, they would often be willing to ask for instructions or clarification, but the participants' responses varied considerably. It can be speculated that they have to ask for instructions to pass the final academic assessment because some classroom exercises may be related to the final academic assessment according to their responses on item Q20 in *Section 3*, the *main influencing factors of L2WTC*. Chinese students cared more about passing the final academic assessment than actually practising English in class. As shown in Table 5, the result for item Q10 indicated that 75% of the male participants scored below 3, while 75% of female participants scored below 2. That is to say, female students were rarely willing to describe the rules of their favourite game in English to their classmates. As

described in Table 6, there is no difference in WTC according to the age at which they began learning English.

TABLE 4. Descriptive statistics of L2WTC

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Q9.If I am confused about a task in English that I must complete, I am willing to ask for instructions or clarification	233	1	5	3.23	1.012	-0.252	0.159	-0.201	0.318
Q10.I am willing to describe the rules of my favorite game in English to my classmates	233	1	5	2.09	0.936	0.647	0.159	0.188	0.318
Q11. I am willing to talk freely in an English class, if given a chance	233	1	5	2.36	0.978	0.425	0.159	0.000	0.318
Q12.I am willing to have a group discussion in an English class, if given a chance	233	1	5	2.55	0.977	0.240	0.159	-0.121	0.318
Q13.I am willing to talk to make a presentation in front of a large group, if given a chance	233	1	5	2.05	0.994	0.851	0.159	0.412	0.318
Valid N (listwise)	233								
Average				2.46					

TABLE 5. Differences between genders in L2WTC

	Gender			Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13
Male	N		Valid	105	105	105	105	105
			Missing	0	0	0	0	0
	Percentiles		25	3.00	1.50	2.00	2.00	1.00
			50	3.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	2.00
			75	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Female	N		Valid	128	128	128	128	128
			Missing	0	0	0	0	0
	Percentiles		25	3.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	1.00
			50	3.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	2.00
			75	4.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	3.00

TABLE 6. The difference in WTC according to the age at which students began to learn English

How old were you when you began to learn English			Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13
2-6	N	Valid	38	38	38	38	38
		Missing	0	0	0	0	0
	Percentiles	25	2.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	1.00
		50	3.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
		75	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
7-12	N	Valid	158	158	158	158	158
		Missing	0	0	0	0	0
	Percentiles	25	3.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	1.00
		50	3.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	2.00
		75	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00

	N	Valid	37	37	37	37	37
		Missing	0	0	0	0	0
13-14		25	3.00	2.00	1.50	2.00	1.00
	Percentiles	50	3.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	2.00
		75	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00

MAIN INFLUENCING FACTORS OF WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE

As described in Table 7 and in Table 8, each mean of items Q14, Q16, Q17, and Q18 is below three but above 2.5, except for item Q15, where the score is 3.48. On item Q16, 75% of the female participants scored below 4 compared with male participants who scored below 3. This result indicates that, on average, participants only sometimes feared making mistakes and losing face and were only sometimes introverted and shy to talk. Meanwhile, female participants were more often introverted and shyer. The mean of item Q19 is 1.94, and 75% of the female participants scored below 2 compared with male participants who scored below 3. This result indicates that the majority of participants rarely thought asking questions was impolite and challenging teachers' authority; female participants, especially, rarely thought in this way. The mean of item Q20 is 2.33, and this finding indicates that participants rarely thought engaging in communication was not a requirement for the final academic assessment. However, the score of Q15 is 3.48, and this indicates that the majority of participants were often unable to speak English due to *limited vocabulary or lack of knowledge of appropriate phrases*.

As illustrated in Table 9, on item Q16, participants who began to learn English in primary school (around 7-12 years old) were more often introverted and shyer to speak, with 75% scoring below 4, compared with participants who began to learn English in preschool (around 2-6 years old) or junior middle school (around 13-14 years old) with 75% scoring below 3. It can be speculated that probably in the exam-oriented primary school EFL class, students are not encouraged to engage in communicative activities due to English being considered a subject to learn for a good score in examinations but not a kind of language communicative tool to use.

TABLE 7. Descriptive statistics of main influencing factors of WTC

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Q14.I fear making mistakes in front of others as I might lose face	233	1	5	2.69	0.995	0.096	0.159	-0.273	0.318
Q15.I don't know how to speak due to limited vocabulary or lack of knowledge of appropriate phrases	233	1	5	3.48	1.079	-0.478	0.159	-0.133	0.318
Q16.I'm very introverted and feel shy to talk in the EFL class	233	1	5	2.88	1.049	0.048	0.159	-0.361	0.318
Q17.I had negative and embarrassing experiences while speaking in English	233	1	5	2.72	0.999	0.253	0.159	-0.055	0.318
Q18.There are limited opportunities to speak because of large class size	233	1	5	2.70	1.027	0.138	0.159	-0.240	0.318

and limited time, as teachers have to spend most of the class time for presentation									
Q19.Asking questions is impolite and it challenges teachers' authority	233	1	5	1.94	0.963	0.647	0.159	-0.554	0.318
Q20.Engaging in communication is not a requirement for final academic assessment	233	1	5	2.33	1.067	0.632	0.159	0.057	0.318
Valid N (listwise)	233								
Average				2.68					

TABLE 8. Differences between genders in factors influencing WTC

	Gender		Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19	Q20
	N	Valid	105	105	105	105	105	105	105
		Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Male		25	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	2.00
	Percentiles	50	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	2.00
		75	3.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
	N	Valid	128	128	128	128	128	128	128
		Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Female		25	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.00
	Percentiles	50	3.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	1.50	2.00
		75	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	3.00

TABLE 9. The difference in factors influencing WTC according to the age at which students began to learn English

How old were you when you began to learn English			Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19	Q20
	N	Valid	38	38	38	38	38	38	38
		Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2-6		25	2.00	2.75	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.00
	Percentiles	50	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	2.00
		75	3.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
	N	Valid	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
		Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7-12		25	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	1.75
	Percentiles	50	3.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	2.00
		75	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
	N	Valid	37	37	37	37	37	37	37
		Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
13-14		25	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	2.00
	Percentiles	50	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	2.00
		75	3.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00

CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between participants' identities formed from Confucian cultural values and L2WTC. As shown in the scatter plot in Figure 1, identity formed from Confucian cultural values and L2WTC have a positive correlation. According to Table 10, the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.384 (less than 0.4), and the p-value is 0.00,

which indicates that identity formed from Confucian cultural values and L2WTC are weakly positively correlated at the 0.01 level. The P-value of 0.00 is less than 0.05, and therefore, the H0 can be rejected. The result indicates that the correlation is statistically meaningful in the population from which the sample was selected. The effective size is equal to the correlation coefficient of 0.384, and this suggests that the correlation is also practically meaningful.

The partial correlation analysis was further conducted, as detailed in Table 11. After the main influencing factors were controlled, the first-order partial correlation coefficient is 0.377 (less than 0.4), and the p-value 0.00 is less than 0.05; hence, the H0 can be rejected. This result indicates that identity formed from Confucian cultural values and L2WTC are weakly positively correlated at the 0.01 level by controlling the main influencing factors of WTC. This result indicates that a stronger identity formed from Confucian cultural values may result in stronger L2WTC in the population.
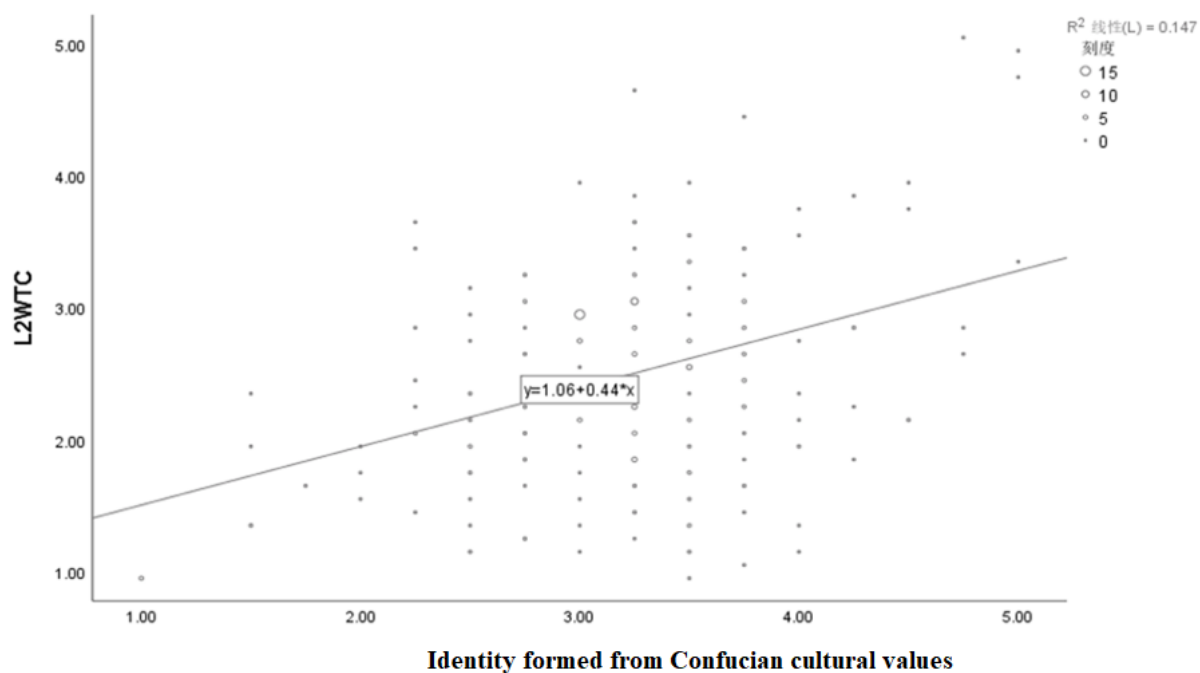
FIGURE 1. Scatter plot between L2WTC and identity formed from Confucian cultural values

TABLE 10. Correlation analysis between identity formed from Confucian cultural values and L2WTC

		Identity formed from Confucian cultural values	L2WTC
Identity formed from Confucian cultural values	Pearson Correlation	1	.384**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	233	233
L2WTC	Pearson Correlation	.384**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	233	233

*Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

TABLE 11. Partial correlation analysis

Control Variables			Identity formed from Confucian cultural values	L2WTC
Main influencing factors on WTC	Identity formed from Confucian cultural values	Correlation	1.000	0.377
		Significance (2-tailed)		0.000
		df	0	230
	L2WTC	Correlation	0.377	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.000	
		df	230	0

DISCUSSION

ANSWER TO RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

The present study demonstrates that the majority of Chinese EFL students maintain a weak identity formed from Confucian cultural values. In particular, they rarely *fear making mistakes and losing face*, are rarely *introverted and shy*, and rarely think that *asking questions is impolite and challenging teachers' authority*. Furthermore, the stronger influencing factor of L2WTC is being unable to speak *due to the lack of vocabulary or language knowledge*. This finding is contrary to most previous studies that regarded Chinese college students as strongly identifying with Confucian cultural values and being deeply influenced by them (X. Yuan, 2023). A possible explanation may be because the new generation of Chinese college students is growing up in a multicultural and cross-cultural context, and their cultural values are dynamic and complex, influenced by Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Western individualism, neoliberalism, patriotism, etc. (Zhuang & Kong, 2023).

In addition, the present study reveals that students in rural areas maintain a stronger identity formed from Confucian cultural values compared with students in urban areas. This finding is in accordance with Shuming (1989), who believes that Confucian culture is deeply rooted in rural areas but not urban districts. However, to our knowledge, no recent studies have focused on this point. Another important finding is that female participants are more introverted and shyer to speak English in the EFL class than male participants. This is consistent with the finding of a recent study that showed female students tend to be shyer in various contexts while practising speaking in the EFL class (Sajjad et al., 2022). Moreover, participants who started learning English in primary school are more introverted and less willing to speak in the EFL class. This could be because students who began learning English in primary school have experienced a longer period of teacher-centred instruction with paper-based exams as the learning goal and have developed a passive learning habit of primarily listening to lectures and taking notes. Meanwhile, in accordance with most previous research, the majority of Chinese EFL college students are found to have weak L2WTC (Chen et al., 2022).

ANSWER TO RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

An important finding is that identity formed from Confucian cultural values, and L2WTC have a weak positive correlation. That is to say, a stronger identity formed from Confucian cultural values will not result in a weaker L2WTC. Conversely, a strong identity formed from Confucian cultural values may contribute to a strong L2WTC. Therefore, it can be concluded that the true Confucian cultural values originally encouraged students to communicate in class actively and encourage

people to participate in social activities. This finding is consistent with the true Confucian culture, which originally stresses that a man of virtue pursues harmony but does not seek uniformity. However, this finding is contrary to previous research, which states that Chinese college students' weak L2WTC is mainly due to the influence of Confucian culture, which was considered to be related to being afraid of losing face or challenging teachers' authority (Chen et al., 2022). Possible explanations for this might be as follows: First, Chinese EFL college students' identity formed from Confucian cultural values has not been truly measured in some L2WTC-related research but is based on a vague conjecture (H. Zhu & O'Sullivan, 2022). Second, there is a simple attribution and stereotype due to a limited understanding of the true Confucian culture (X. Yuan, 2023). Yuan further states that east-Asian students in his study do not identify solely with Confucian culture, and cultural determinism cannot accurately reflect and predict Chinese students' Confucian cultural identity.

A COMPLEX DYNAMIC SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

Based on the four key CDS features and principles of SLA in the literature review (De Bot et al., 2007), the present study attempts to propose a CDS perspective on Confucian cultural influence on Chinese EFL students' L2WTC. The first CDS perspective is that dynamic changes happen within the individual and between individuals. The majority of participants only sometimes but not always follow Confucian cultural values, and their identity is in the dynamic process of constant deconstruction, dissolution and reconstruction in the context of multicultural symbiosis. Different participants (including females and males) have a significant discrepancy in the identity formed from Confucian cultural values. This finding is consistent with previous research that states the new Confucian individualism is emerging due to the dynamic changes in Confucian culture itself (C. Wang, 2022). The second CDS perspective is the sensitivity of and dependence on individual initial conditions. Similar to the previous research, the majority of participants think that the stronger influencing factor of L2WTC is *limited English vocabulary and phrases*, and it is a part of the initial learning conditions of different participants (Q. Zhou, 2023). The third CDS perspective is attractor states appear in the process of development, representing stable states of communication in general. Weak identity formed from Confucian culture contributes to the stable weak L2WTC, and both of them are stable attractors. The fourth CDS perspective is that subsystems are completely interconnected and interdependent. In line with previous research, as a dynamic system, identity formed from Confucian cultural values has three main subsystems, including benevolence, propriety, and righteousness (Lin et al., 2021). Participants maintain a significant discrepancy among these three subsystems, and that these subsystems may have antagonistic synergistic or interdependent influence on each other (Lin et al., 2021) .

CONCLUSION

The results of the study demonstrate that the majority of Chinese EFL students maintain a weak identity formed from Confucian cultural values. Identity formed from Confucian cultural values and L2WTC have a weak positive correlation, and the stronger identity formed from Confucian cultural values would not result in weaker L2WTC. Conversely, a strong identity formed from Confucian cultural values might contribute to a stronger L2WTC. In addition, being unable to speak due to the lack of vocabulary or language knowledge was found to have a stronger influence

on Chinese EFL students' L2WTC. Participants in rural areas maintain a stronger identity formed from Confucian cultural values compared with students in urban areas. Female participants were found to be more introverted and shyer about speaking English in the EFL class. Moreover, participants who began to learn English in primary school were more introverted and shyer about using it in English class.

It should be noted that if an in-depth interview were to be adopted, the qualitative data would demonstrate more details of Confucian cultural influence on L2WTC that is not captured by the quantitative data. Notwithstanding this limitation, the present study employed a quantitative survey to examine students' actual responses on their identity formed from Confucian cultural values because, to our knowledge, no previous studies have yet applied the quantitative method to explore students' personal reports on their identification of Confucian culture (X. Yuan, 2023). This study breaks the stereotype and puts forward the weak positive relationship between the identity formed from Confucian cultural values and Chinese EFL college students' L2WTC. Furthermore, the present study has shown that employing a novel CDS perspective on Confucian cultural influence on Chinese EFL students' L2WTC has produced significant results. Taken together, the findings of the study can contribute to the teaching and learning of EFL in the Chinese context, which could lead to overall quality education.

The findings of the study have inspired further reflections for future research, and the following questions come to mind: 'Why do the true Confucian cultural values encourage students to actively communicate in the EFL class?' and 'How does one employ CDS perspective to remove the stereotype of Confucian cultural influence on Chinese students' L2WTC?'. In this, an effort should be made to explore more details about the differences between male and female students, as well as between rural and urban students' identities formed from Confucian culture. Such studies and their findings can further enlighten us in this area.

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