


Analysis of the Differences and Formation Paths of Individual Achievement Motivation under Different Cultural Backgrounds

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Abstract: In the context of globalization and cultural integration, the differences in individual achievement motivation and its formation path have become important topics in psychological research. This study systematically analyzed the performance characteristics, influencing factors and dynamic evolution of achievement motivation under different cultural backgrounds. The study found that individualistic cultures tend to cultivate achievement motivation centered on self-realization, emphasizing personal goals and ability proof; while collectivist cultures pay more attention to social role fulfillment and group identity, and achievement motivation is often closely linked to family expectations and social evaluation. Through case comparison and quantitative research between Eastern and Western countries, it reveals how cultural values shape individual motivation patterns through family education, education system, social norms and other paths. In addition, with the acceleration of the process of globalization, immigrant groups and individuals with bicultural backgrounds show mixed achievement motivation, reflecting the complexity of cultural adaptation and psychological adjustment. This study not only expands the cultural perspective of traditional motivation theory, but also provides practical inspiration for cross-cultural education, corporate management and psychological counseling. Future research needs to pay more attention to non-Western cultural samples, the dynamic evolution of motivation and the new impact of the digital age on achievement motivation.

Keywords: Achievement Motivation; Cultural Differences; Individualism; Collectivism; Cross-Cultural Research

1 INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary society where the process of globalization is deepening, it is of unprecedented importance to understand the differences in individual achievement motivation under different cultural backgrounds and their formation mechanisms. With the increasing frequency of cross-border exchanges, the collision and integration of cultural values have become a common phenomenon, which makes it difficult for motivation research from a traditional single cultural perspective to explain the psychological and behavioral differences in complex reality [1]. Social phenomena such as the internationalization of education, multinational operations of enterprises, and large-scale population mobility all urgently require us to have a more systematic and in-depth understanding of how cultural factors shape individual achievement pursuits. From an academic perspective, this study can not only make up for the long-standing "Western-centrism" bias in the field of psychology, but also provide

key support for the construction of a truly culturally universal human motivation theory. At the same time, at the practical level, the relevant findings will directly guide the work in application fields such as cross-cultural education and international human resource management, and help individuals from different cultural backgrounds achieve better psychological adaptation and development in the context of globalization [2].

As the internal force that drives individuals to pursue excellence and overcome challenges, the conceptual connotation of achievement motivation continues to enrich with the deepening of research. Early theorists such as McClelland simply defined it as "the intrinsic need for success", while contemporary scholars emphasize its multidimensional nature as a complex psychological system, including cognitive evaluation, emotional experience and behavioral tendencies. The latest research trends show that achievement motivation is no longer seen as a stable personality trait, but a psychological process that changes dynamically with cultural environment, development stage and specific situation [3]. Cross-cultural psychology research has found that Western society generally associates achievement motivation with the display of personal talents, while East Asian culture emphasizes its fit with social expectations. This fundamental difference has challenged the applicability of traditional measurement tools in different cultures, prompting researchers to develop more culturally sensitive assessment methods. New advances in neuroscience research have also revealed that the achievement motivation of individuals from different cultural backgrounds may correspond to different brain activity patterns, which provides a new perspective for understanding the biological mechanism of cultural shaping psychology [4].

This study aims to systematically explore three interrelated core issues: How do different cultural values shape the different manifestations of individual achievement motivation through the socialization process? What are the characteristics of these differences at the cognitive, emotional and behavioral levels? In the context of global cultural integration, what new evolutions are taking place in individual achievement motivation? Through in-depth analysis of these issues, we hope to achieve three main goals: first, to build an integrated theoretical framework to systematize the scattered cultural differences; second, to identify the key cultural factors and their action paths that affect the formation of achievement motivation; and finally, to provide evidence-based practical guidance for motivational strategies in cross-cultural environments [5]. This study not only helps to bridge the cultural divide of existing theories, but also provides valuable psychological insights for individual development and social governance in the era of globalization.

2 THEORETICAL BASIS OF ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION

Before exploring the differences and formation paths of individual achievement motivation in different cultural backgrounds, it is necessary to first clearly define the theoretical basis of achievement motivation itself. Achievement motivation is an important research topic in the field of psychology. It is usually regarded as the internal driving force generated by individuals to achieve a certain goal, achieve excellence or overcome challenges [6]. This motivation is not driven by a single factor, but a multidimensional and dynamically evolving psychological structure, the core of which includes goal orientation, self-efficacy, attitudes towards success and failure, and sensitivity to external evaluation. The strength of achievement motivation not only determines the degree of effort and persistence shown by individuals in their studies, work or life, but also profoundly affects their attribution patterns for failure and the choice of behavioral strategies.

In terms of theoretical development, Western academia has earlier included achievement motivation in systematic research. Among them, the "hierarchy of needs theory" proposed by Abraham Maslow laid the foundation for motivation research. He believes that the generation of individual motivation follows a hierarchical transformation process from low to high levels

of needs, and achievement motivation is between the higher-level "respect needs" and "self-actualization needs". Although this theory has been questioned in cross-cultural research due to disputes over cultural universality, it provides important insights into why individuals pursue achievements at specific stages. David McClelland proposed the "achievement need theory" in a more specific empirical way, pointing out that there are three basic motivations in human behavior: achievement needs, power needs and belonging needs [7]. Among them, achievement needs (nAch) are the key factors that drive individuals to set challenging goals and strive to achieve them. He revealed significant differences in the intensity of achievement motivation between different individuals through methods such as TAT (Thematic Apperception Test), and proposed that such differences may be caused by early family education and cultural environment.

With the advancement of psychometric technology, contemporary representation models have gradually replaced the single-dimensional structure of traditional theories and become a new path to understand achievement motivation. For example, the "Goal Orientation Theory" proposed by Elliot and Church divides achievement motivation into three types: mastery goals, performance-approach goals, and performance-avoidance goals, emphasizing that different definitions of success criteria by individuals will lead to differences in motivation expression. At the same time, Eccles' "Expectancy-Value Model" regards individuals' expectations of task success and the task value they assign as two core dimensions that affect motivation intensity. These models have stronger adaptability in multicultural research and can more carefully reveal the structural variation of motivation in different social contexts [8].

In terms of measurement tools, researchers have formed a relatively mature evaluation system from early projective tests such as TAT and Achievement Motivation Scale to modern structured scales such as AMS (Academic Motivation Scale) and AGQ (Achievement Goal Questionnaire). These tools are not only used for psychological research and diagnosis, but are also widely used in practical fields such as education and corporate management. Especially in cross-cultural research, how to localize these measurement tools in terms of language and context to ensure their reliability and validity is a prerequisite for the in-depth advancement of achievement motivation research.

3 DEFINITION AND CLASSIFICATION OF CULTURAL BACKGROUND

When exploring the impact of cultural background on individual achievement motivation, we first need to clarify the theoretical connotation of culture and its classification framework. Culture, as a complex social construction, not only contains explicit behavioral norms and symbol systems, but also permeates the values, beliefs and cognitive patterns shared by the group. Hofstede's cultural dimension theory provides a systematic analytical tool for this purpose. The six dimensions proposed by Hofstede, such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and long-term orientation-short-term orientation, reveal the deep differences in value rankings among different societies [9]. For example, high power distance culture is more accepting of hierarchical differences, which may inhibit the achievement motivation of individuals to break through the status quo; while low uncertainty avoidance culture encourages adventurous spirit and is positively correlated with innovation-oriented achievement motivation. Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations supplements the persistence of cultural differences from a macro-historical perspective, emphasizing how religious traditions and historical experiences shape the differentiated definition of "success" by groups. These multidimensional models together constitute the basic coordinate system for understanding the influence of culture on motivation.

The dichotomy of individualism and collectivism has a core explanatory power in motivation research. Individualistic cultures regard the self as an independent entity, emphasizing personal goals, autonomy and competitive success. Their achievement motivation is often manifested as the proof of unique abilities and the satisfaction of internal standards. Collectivist cultures emphasize the interdependence between individuals and groups. Achievement motivation is often achieved through maintaining harmonious relationships and fulfilling role responsibilities, and the standard of success relies more on social comparison and external recognition [10]. This fundamental difference leads to a significant differentiation in the expression of motivation: the former may be reflected in direct goal pursuit and self-promotion, while the latter tends to be indirect achievement accumulation and humble performance. It is worth noting that this division is not absolute - there is a widespread phenomenon of cultural mixing in contemporary society, but as an ideal type analysis, this framework can still effectively capture the cultural roots of motivation differences.

The cultural dimension shapes the motivation system through multiple mechanisms. From a cognitive perspective, cultural scripts affect individuals' evaluation frameworks for "what kind of achievements are worth pursuing", such as long-term oriented cultures that attach more importance to future returns on educational investment, while short-term oriented cultures may prefer immediate performance feedback. At the emotional level, different cultures have normative differences in emotional responses to success/failure. The sensitivity of collectivist societies to "face" may amplify failure anxiety and thus change risk preferences. At the behavioral regulation level, individualistic culture encourages ability-based attribution patterns, while collectivist culture prefers situational attribution. This difference directly affects the persistence and resilience of motivation. In addition, culture transforms abstract values into specific incentive structures through institutional carriers. For example, an education system that emphasizes exam rankings will strengthen competitive motivation, while a team performance-oriented organizational system will cultivate collaborative achievement motivation. These mechanisms together constitute a dynamic path network for cultural influence on individual motivation.

4 DIFFERENT MANIFESTATIONS OF INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION IN DIFFERENT CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

In different cultural backgrounds, there are significant differences in the manifestations of individual achievement motivation, which deeply reflects the shaping effect of social values on psychological motivation. In European and American societies dominated by individualistic culture, achievement motivation is usually driven by self-realization and personal excellence. Individuals tend to define success as proof of personal ability, pursue the achievement of independent goals, and show initiative in a competitive environment [11]. For example, the American education system emphasizes personal expression and innovative thinking. Students are often encouraged to set challenging personal goals and regard failure as a learning opportunity rather than a threat of social evaluation. Performance appraisal and personal bonus systems in the workplace further strengthen this motivation model, making individuals pay more attention to their own growth rather than group comparison. Quantitative research

shows that high achievement motivation in individualistic culture is more inclined to choose tasks of medium difficulty to balance the challenge and the possibility of success, which is in line with McClelland's "optimal motivation level" theory.

In contrast, achievement motivation in collectivist culture emphasizes social role fulfillment and group harmony. In East Asian societies such as China, Japan and South Korea, individual success is often closely linked to family expectations and social evaluation. For example, the "lifetime employment system" and "seniority system" in the Japanese workplace have shaped an achievement motivation centered on organizational loyalty, and employees pay more attention to team contributions rather than individual outstanding performance. The "college entrance examination competition" in the Chinese education system reflects the group orientation of achievement motivation - students work hard not only for their personal future, but also for family honor and social recognition. Cross-cultural psychology research has found that individuals in collectivist cultures are more inclined to external attribution, when facing failure to avoid direct denial of self-worth; when they succeed, they are more likely to attribute it to the support of others to maintain harmonious social relations. This motivation pattern is manifested in empirical data as higher social comparison sensitivity and stronger conformity tendency.

Case comparisons between Eastern and Western countries further reveal the differentiated shaping of achievement motivation by culture. Taking China and the United States as an example, American students generally show stronger intrinsic motivation in open and innovative tasks, while Chinese students are more persistent in tasks that require persistence and repeated practice. This difference is not only due to differences in educational methods, but also reflects the potential influence of cultural values at a deeper level. Quantitative research supports this view: Hofstede's cultural dimension index shows that the United States scores as high as 91 on the individualism dimension, while China only scores 20. This difference significantly predicts the differentiation of achievement goal orientations among students in the two countries. In addition, neuroscience research has found that when East Asian individuals complete group collaboration tasks, the activation of the brain reward system is higher than that of individual tasks, while European and American individuals show the opposite pattern, which provides evidence for the biological mechanism of cultural influence on motivation. Data from the Program for World Student Assessment (PISA) also show that students in East Asian countries generally score higher than those in Western countries in collective efficacy, while the latter have more advantages in self-efficacy, further confirming the systematic association between cultural background and achievement motivation.

5 ANALYSIS OF THE FORMATION PATH OF ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION DIFFERENCES

Cultural differences in individual achievement motivation are not innate, but are gradually formed through multiple paths in the long-term socialization process. Family education, as the earliest channel for cultural transmission, profoundly affects children's initial cognition of "success". In individualistic cultures, parents tend to adopt a parenting style that encourages autonomy, and strengthen their children's sense of self-efficacy by praising

personal efforts rather than talents. For example, American parents often say "you can do it", which subtly cultivates the belief in personal ability. In contrast, East Asian families emphasize the value of diligence and humility. Japanese mothers teach their children "don't cause trouble for others" in their early years. This socialization process makes achievement motivation closely tied to group evaluation from the beginning. Cross-cultural studies have shown that Chinese parents use social comparison language more frequently, while Swedish parents pay more attention to their children's personal progress. This difference has appeared before the child is 6 years old and continues to affect their subsequent motivation patterns.

As an institutionalized embodiment of cultural values, the education system further strengthens the achievement motivation orientation of different societies. The Finnish education model is centered on egalitarianism and personalized learning. By reducing standardized tests and ranking competition, it cultivates students' intrinsic interest in knowledge itself. The achievement motivation generated under this system is more autonomous. On the contrary, South Korea's "four-up and five-down" culture (sleeping four hours a day may lead to success, while sleeping five hours may lead to failure) institutionalizes high-intensity exam competition, making students' achievement motivation highly dependent on external recognition. This difference is not only reflected in learning behavior, but also at the neural level: research has found that East Asian students who have been in a high-pressure competitive environment for a long time have different activation patterns of the prefrontal cortex of the brain when facing failure than European and American students, indicating that culture has reshaped the neural basis of motivation through educational practice. Social expectations also play a role as an invisible normative force. In Germany, the vocational education system gives skilled jobs the same social status as academic paths, allowing achievement motivation to be expressed in multiple ways; in India, the professional prestige of engineers and doctors is much higher than that of other fields. This social consensus strongly guides the direction of individual achievement pursuit.

The internalization process of values ultimately transforms cultural norms into individual spontaneous motivation. Individuals in collectivist cultures gradually integrate concepts such as "bringing honor to the ancestors" into their self-concepts through observation and learning. The motivation for Chinese rural students to study hard often includes a strong sense of mission to "change the fate of the family". This internalization transforms external pressure into a lasting driving force. The advent of the social media era has added a new dimension to this process: platforms such as Instagram have shaped the "personal brand" culture in the West, closely combining self-display with achievement motivation; while WeChat Moments in China has strengthened the connection between "showing off achievements" and social recognition, and the number of likes has become a new form of achievement feedback. It is worth noting that cultural integration is generating new motivation patterns. Second-generation immigrants often develop mixed achievement strategies. For example, Chinese American students may pursue personal interest development (Western values) and academic excellence (Eastern values) at the same time. This dynamic adaptation process reveals the complexity and plasticity of motivation formation paths.

6 NEW TRENDS IN ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION UNDER THE BACKGROUND OF CULTURAL INTEGRATION

Under the wave of globalization, cultural integration is reshaping the manifestation and development trajectory of individual achievement motivation. With the increasing frequency of cross-border exchanges, the traditional single cultural motivation model is gradually replaced by a mixed strategy. This new motivation not only retains the core of the native culture, but also incorporates elements of foreign cultures. For example, while retaining a sense of collective responsibility, the younger generation in China increasingly emphasizes the pursuit of achievement guided by personal interests. This shift is particularly evident in the phenomenon of "slash youth" - they pursue career stability to meet family expectations and realize their self-worth by developing multiple professional identities. The integration of workplace culture in multinational companies has also given rise to new types of motivation. The "achievement-oriented" performance system introduced by Japanese companies coexists with the traditional seniority system, forcing employees to balance teamwork and personal performance. This cultural hybrid environment has prompted individuals to develop more flexible achievement strategies.

The achievement motivation adjustment process of immigrant groups and individuals with bicultural backgrounds is particularly worthy of attention. Studies have found that second-generation immigrants often form unique motivation integration mechanisms, and they can flexibly switch between different achievement standards according to the situation. Chinese American students may adopt East Asian-style high standards and strict requirements in academic fields, while following American-style self-expression principles in extracurricular activities and social interactions. This cultural adaptation strategy is also reflected at the neural level: fMRI studies have shown that when biculturals deal with tasks in different cultural contexts, the activation patterns of the brain regions responsible for cognitive control and emotional regulation are significantly different from those of monoculturals. However, this adjustment is not always smooth, and conflicts in cultural values may also lead to disorder in the motivation system. Some Arab European youths fall into an identity crisis in the tug-of-war between traditional family expectations and Western individualistic values, and their achievement motivation may be extremely polarized - either completely rejecting the success standards of mainstream society or excessively pursuing external recognition to prove their own value.

The rise of multicultural society has brought new inspiration to education and organizational management. The field of education is exploring the cultivation model of cross-cultural motivation. For example, the "growth mindset" course promoted by Singapore cleverly combines the Western emphasis on personal potential with the Eastern emphasis on diligence to help students establish a more adaptive achievement concept. In terms of corporate management, multinational companies have gradually developed a culturally contextualized incentive system. The performance appraisal of Google's Chinese branch combines American innovation incentives with Chinese team contribution assessments. These practices show that the development of achievement motivation in the future will tend to be more and more dynamic - it is necessary to respect the deep value differences of different cultures and create an inclusive environment that can stimulate multiple motivations. It is worth noting that the

cultural identity of the digital native generation is more fragmented. They absorb multiple cultural elements through social media at the same time, and their achievement motivation may show unprecedented hybridity and fluidity, which poses new challenges to the traditional motivation theory based on a single cultural framework.

7 CONCLUSION AND PROSPECT

This study reveals how cultural values profoundly shape human psychological dynamics through a systematic analysis of the differences in individual achievement motivation and their formation paths under different cultural backgrounds. The core findings show that individualistic culture tends to cultivate achievement motivation centered on self-realization, which is manifested in the pursuit of personal ability and independent goals; while collectivist culture emphasizes achievement motivation oriented towards social role fulfillment and group harmony, and its success criteria are often closely linked to social evaluation. Comparative studies between Eastern and Western countries further verify that these differences are not only reflected in the behavioral level, but also in cognitive patterns, emotional reactions and even neural mechanisms. The new mixed motivation model that emerged in the context of cultural integration shows that globalization is driving the traditional single cultural motivation framework to develop in a more flexible and diversified integration direction. These findings are supported by empirical data from multiple disciplines such as education, psychology, and neuroscience, including cross-cultural comparative studies, longitudinal follow-up surveys, and biological evidence provided by brain imaging technology.

The theoretical significance of this study lies in expanding the explanatory boundaries of traditional motivation theory, challenging the limitation of regarding the Western individualistic motivation model as a universal standard, and laying the foundation for establishing a more culturally inclusive motivation theory framework. At the practical level, these findings have important implications for transnational education, corporate management, and psychological counseling in the era of globalization. Educators need to be aware that there may be essential differences in the learning motivation of students from different cultural backgrounds, and should avoid simply applying the incentive methods of a certain culture to other cultural groups. Human resource management of multinational companies needs to design a culturally adapted incentive system. For example, in a branch with a collectivist cultural background, team achievement recognition may be more effective in improving employee motivation than individual bonuses. The field of psychological counseling can also draw on these findings to help immigrant groups and those with cross-cultural adaptation difficulties better integrate different cultural values and build a healthy achievement motivation system.

Although this study has achieved certain results, there are still several limitations that need to be overcome. Existing research focuses on the binary comparison between Eastern and Western cultures, and has not explored the characteristics of achievement motivation in the cultural context of Africa, Latin America and other regions. The lack of longitudinal follow-up research also limits the dynamic understanding of the motivation formation process. In addition, how the new cultural identity and virtual communities spawned by the digital age

affect achievement motivation remains to be explored in depth. Future research can be expanded in three directions: first, adopt more diverse cultural samples and interdisciplinary methods to build a more comprehensive global motivation difference map; second, strengthen developmental research to track the evolution of individuals' motivation from childhood to adulthood; third, pay attention to the disruptive impact of technological change on motivation patterns, especially the reconstruction of human achievement motivation in the era of artificial intelligence. These explorations will not only deepen the understanding of the nature of human motivation, but also provide a scientific basis for coping with the cultural and psychological challenges brought about by globalization.

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