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Essay

# Probing the Essential Characteristics of Campus Culture in Chinese Vocational Colleges

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**Abstract:** A comprehensive understanding of the connotation and basic characteristics of campus culture in vocational colleges is a prerequisite for ensuring their sustainable development. Campus culture in vocational colleges is a concentrated reflection of their educational philosophy, ideal beliefs, and value pursuits. It possesses basic characteristics such as practicality, vocational orientation, ethics, contemporaneity, integration, and regionality.

**Keywords:** vocational colleges; campus culture; connotation definition; basic characteristics

## 1. Introduction

Schools represent a microcosm or epitome of society, and campus culture is a reflection of social culture, as well as the fundamental guarantee for a school's survival and development. With the rapid development of vocational education in the process of massification of higher education, vocational colleges have gained a significant foothold in higher education. However, the construction of campus culture in vocational colleges, compared to traditional universities with rich cultural backgrounds, still lags behind. In particular, theoretical research on the definition of its connotation and basic characteristics remains a topic with diverse and disorderly opinions, posing a pressing issue for educational theorists.

## 2. Definition of the Connotation of Campus Culture in Vocational Colleges

The term "culture" originates from Latin and originally referred to "cultivation," "processing," and "civilization." The earliest documented research on "culture" in China can be found in the "Yijing" (the Book of Changes), which states, "Observe the changes in the heavens to discern the times; observe human behavior to cultivate the world." This can be understood as "cultivating with culture," with the goal of transforming human spiritual space from "instinctual," "primitive," and "individualized states" into "free," "harmonious," and "universal" states. In the modern context, due to different perspectives and interpretations among scholars, there are more than 200 different definitions of culture. According to "Cihai" (a comprehensive Chinese dictionary), culture can be defined broadly and narrowly. In the broad sense, it refers to the sum of the material and spiritual production capacity and the material and spiritual wealth that humans acquire in the process of social practice. In the narrow sense, it refers to the capacity for spiritual production and spiritual products. In China, research on campus culture started relatively early and has yielded fruitful results, while research on campus culture in vocational colleges began relatively late. To understand the development of campus culture in vocational colleges in China, a search was conducted using the keyword "vocational college campus culture" in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database. Research on campus culture in Chinese vocational colleges can be divided into three stages: the proposal stage (before the 1980s), the initial exploration stage (from the early 1980s to the late 1990s), and the systematic research stage (from the late 1990s to the present).

Campus culture in vocational colleges refers to the behavior patterns and cultivated atmosphere created by teachers and students in the campus environment of vocational colleges. It mainly consists of elements such as material culture, management culture, teacher culture, student culture, activity culture, and institutional culture. Campus culture in vocational colleges is a unique cultural structure formed by vocational colleges after selecting and refining elements from social culture. It is a concentrated expression of the intrinsic nature of vocational colleges and a reflection of their educational philosophy and value pursuit. It primarily consists of elements such as ideological and political education, campus scientific and technological activities, campus educational environment construction, institutional development, and organizational management. Campus culture in vocational colleges is a form of social culture attached to the specific carrier of vocational colleges, primarily consisting of spiritual culture, institutional culture, and environmental culture, with the distinction of incorporating corporate culture. It is a spiritual culture with vocational characteristics that vocational colleges have gradually accumulated over a long period and is the essence and symbol of vocational colleges. Campus culture in vocational colleges is a unique cultural spirit created collectively by teachers, students, and staff in the context of vocational college campuses. It includes idealism, concepts, values, emotions, spirits, behavioral guidelines, and patterns of behavior, encompassing spiritual culture, material culture, and institutional culture. Campus culture in vocational colleges is a humanistic atmosphere and learning environment closely related to the social era, characterized by the vocational college context and is distinct from general university culture. Campus culture in vocational colleges is built around the construction of the school's ethos, teaching style, and academic atmosphere. It is formed based on spiritual culture, institutional norms, and public opinion environment, relying on the campus environment, cultural life, workplace atmosphere, and vocational spirit. Campus culture in vocational colleges is the material and spiritual wealth created collectively by the people in vocational college campuses. It is composed of material culture, behavioral culture, institutional culture, and spiritual culture, among others. Campus culture in vocational colleges refers to the collective consciousness and its external manifestations of the people in vocational colleges, including spiritual culture, behavior patterns, organizational structures, rules and regulations, and material facilities. Campus culture in vocational colleges is the campus spirit and living environment created collectively by teachers and students in vocational college campus settings.

In summary, domestic scholars' research on campus culture in vocational colleges generally shares similar views or perspectives to some extent. However, upon careful analysis, most of these findings are based on traditional universities, and applying these conclusions to vocational colleges may not be entirely appropriate, as they do not adequately reflect the uniqueness of campus culture in vocational colleges. The author believes that campus culture in vocational colleges refers to the personalized values and behavioral norms gradually formed by all teachers and students in vocational colleges under the guidance of contemporary vocational education concepts. This occurs within the campus area and during specific vocational education activities. Such culture plays a guiding and leading role in the intrinsic development of vocational colleges, the professional improvement of vocational teachers, and the comprehensive development of vocational students. This definition includes three layers of meaning: first, campus culture in vocational colleges is created collectively by all teachers and students, including administrators, teachers, and students. Only when these three groups work together with sincerity and unity can they form a positive and progressive campus culture. Second, campus culture in vocational colleges is the result of the accumulation, inheritance, and innovation of values and behavioral norms over the course of vocational colleges' development. It has its own characteristics. Third, campus culture in vocational colleges can be divided into four aspects: material culture, institutional culture, spiritual culture, and behavioral culture. It encompasses values, educational philosophies, characteristics of education, and behavioral norms, making it one of the core competitive strengths of vocational colleges today.

### 3. Basic Characteristics of Campus Culture in Vocational Colleges

Vocational education is different from traditional undergraduate education. It aims to cultivate technical and applied talents for front-line production, construction, management, and service. Therefore, campus culture in vocational colleges cannot simply imitate, borrow, or replicate the campus culture model of traditional universities. It must be constructed based on the educational philosophy and characteristics of vocational education. Campus culture in vocational colleges has the following basic characteristics:

**Practicality:** Students must possess certain professional knowledge and practical skills to be competent in their job positions upon graduation. Practicality is a special requirement of campus culture in vocational colleges. "Vocational colleges have cross-disciplinary teaching resources and a corporate culture with obvious characteristics, creating an on-site practical teaching environment." This environment combines professionalism, humanism, and practicality. It emphasizes both comprehensive regulations for maintaining normal teaching order and the integration of campus and corporate culture, which helps students shorten the adaptation period to corporate culture. It promotes the values of "integrity and dedication" in character development and emphasizes "excellence and innovation" in professional learning. This approach facilitates the integration of students' values with those of the workplace and enhances their practical skills. Administrators and teachers promote the idea of "caring about enterprises, getting closer to enterprises, and serving enterprises." They actively participate in corporate projects, participate in corporate discussions and technology transformations, and students engage in various practical activities such as experiments, inventions, and innovations. All of these activities effectively enhance individual practical capabilities.

**Vocational Orientation:** Vocational education is not only about obtaining a degree but also about acquiring vocational qualifications. Therefore, students must have certain vocational qualities and possess specific skills. Vocational orientation is the foundation of campus culture in vocational colleges. High-standard standardized laboratories integrate training, experiments, technical services, and production, creating a multimedia teaching environment that includes experiments, physical demonstrations, and practical training. This environment provides students with a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere conducive to unleashing their potential, laying a solid foundation for their vocational development. Vocational colleges advocate fine management processes, standardized operating procedures, and quality control standards in vocational management systems. They focus on instilling students with professional beliefs, vocational ethics, and vocational responsibilities, emphasizing the core values of "loyalty to the profession, diligence in practice, excellence in skills, and innovation." Vocational colleges invite entrepreneurs, skilled workers, and experts to give lectures, conduct special presentations, and teach skills. They organize diverse and colorful skill competitions tailored to the specific characteristics of each profession, effectively improving students' vocational quality.

**Ethics:** Compared to traditional universities, students in vocational colleges often have lower overall quality, unclear values, weaker psychological intervention skills, and more severe faith crises. Therefore, enhancing ethical and moral values is a crucial task of campus culture in vocational colleges. A campus environment rich in cultural heritage and elegant style allows students to experience a strong cultural atmosphere firsthand, inspiring moral awareness and emotional responses, and effectively achieving the integration and interaction of moral education subjects' external objectivity and internal subjectivity. Feasible and operable regulations and rules become collective value norms that make students willingly accept and autonomously adhere to them, achieving a harmonious unity between external collective requirements and internal self-awareness. Positive values, school culture, and collective public opinion create a fresh and harmonious humanistic atmosphere, arousing students' moral sentiments and enhancing their sense of moral duty. Courses on humanistic qualities, academic lectures by humanists, the infiltration of ethics into various professional disciplines, and moral practice experiences, as well as learning from exemplary individuals, provide rich and diverse campus activities that effectively elevate students' moral quality.

**Contemporaneity:** Vocational education has developed rapidly in response to China's fast-growing economy and the trend toward mass higher education. Campus culture in vocational colleges inevitably bears the imprint of the times while also exerting an influence on contemporary society. Campus culture in vocational colleges incorporates both traditional elements and a modern atmosphere in terms of hardware facilities, environmental design, cultural themes, and cultural heritage's impact on modern culture. Based on the guiding values of education policy and philosophy, regulations and rules are continually transformed, developed, and innovated to suit the characteristics and needs of the times. Campus culture in vocational colleges adapts to various trends of thought, culture, concepts, and information interweaving, influence, and stimulation, aligning with the trends of contemporary development. In terms of behavioral culture, it keeps up with the times, maintains consistency with the direction of contemporary development, adheres to the main theme of the times, and establishes a concept of the times and a harmonious mindset, continuously innovating and enriching.

**Integration:** To cultivate well-rounded talents for the 21st century, it is necessary to implement "education that integrates scientific and humanistic spirits for comprehensive and harmonious development." Vocational colleges must emphasize not only students' "scientific qualities" but also their "humanistic qualities." The integration of science and humanism is an essential requirement for campus culture in vocational colleges in contemporary society. The greening and beautification of campus environments, as well as the design of campus buildings and landscapes, create a favorable environment for humanistic education. The integration of scientific and humanistic spirits is a clear guiding principle that runs through the teaching process of professional courses, ensuring the rational arrangement of teaching plans, educational objectives, and training programs. By analyzing current cultural phenomena and criticizing the "fake, bad, and ugly" aspects of culture, vocational colleges consolidate and integrate various social forces, achieving a harmonious unity of the highest values of "truth, goodness, and beauty." Through effective means such as speeches, debates, academic lectures, social practices, part-time work and support for study, students gain experience in social life, learn about human care, and master the criteria for being a good person. This improves their humanistic qualities.

**Regionality:** Vocational colleges are located in specific regions, and they inevitably carry strong regional characteristics. Regional culture is a representation of local characteristics, and vocational education can better serve local economic and social development requirements only when it integrates the essence of regional culture. Realistic conditions such as building facilities, library materials, experimental equipment, and living facilities emphasize regional characteristics. Various regulations, moral standards, behavioral norms, work rules, and reward and punishment systems focus on compliance with regional characteristics. Cultural concepts, life beliefs, value concepts, and campus spirits based on regional characteristics and relying on unique human and ecological resources create a campus culture style with a strong regional atmosphere. By participating in local activities, teachers and students not only strengthen their emotional connection with the local people but also receive the influence of outstanding ethnic culture in subtle ways. Simultaneously, their research, teaching, and learning benefit from social practice, ensuring that their academic achievements are supported by practical experience and characterized by regional uniqueness, achieving a close integration of theory and practice.

**Internationalization:** Vocational education is undeniably becoming increasingly international in nature, and this trend holds numerous advantages for individuals, industries, and economies worldwide. Several key factors contribute to this globalization of vocational education. Firstly, globalization has transformed the job market. Businesses now operate on a global scale, and they seek skilled workers who can adapt to diverse cultural and professional environments. International vocational education equips individuals with the necessary skills and cultural competence to thrive in this interconnected world. Secondly, advancements in technology and online learning have made it easier for individuals to access vocational education programs from anywhere in the world. This has opened up opportunities for cross-border learning and collaboration. Students can take courses from institutions worldwide, gaining exposure to different teaching methods and perspectives. In-



person study overseas was also possible, even for students from low-class families to study in developed countries, with the help of rigorous scientific publications (1–15), according to one student who received full funding from abroad for living and studying expenses (16). Furthermore, international vocational education fosters diversity and promotes cultural exchange. When students from different backgrounds come together to learn, they bring unique experiences and perspectives to the classroom, enriching the educational experience for all. Additionally, international vocational education can address skills gaps on a global scale. By sharing best practices and collaborating on curriculum development, countries can ensure that their workforce remains competitive in the global marketplace. The internationalization of vocational education is a positive development that aligns with the demands of the modern workforce and promotes diversity and collaboration on a global scale. This trend is poised to continue growing, benefiting individuals, industries, and nations alike.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on campus culture in vocational colleges and provides a foundation for further exploration and development in this field. It is our hope that this study will inspire educators, administrators, and policymakers to recognize the significance of campus culture in vocational colleges and work towards its continued enhancement, ultimately ensuring the sustainable development of vocational education in China.

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