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Community Identity Research in China: A Ten-Year Review and Outlook

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Abstract

Community identity constitutes a core element of community psychology and is regarded as a two-dimensional structure encompassing community functional identity and emotional identity. Functional identity denotes the degree of residents' satisfaction with and recognition of community functions, whereas emotional identity signifies residents' emotional connection to and acceptance of the community. Over the past decade since the publication of the two-dimensional structure of community identity and its corresponding measurement instruments, scholars across various disciplines in China have conducted numerous empirical investigations into the antecedent variables (including both resident-level and community-level factors) and outcome variables of community identity; nevertheless, extant research exhibits limitations such as insufficient theoretical construction and monolithic methodological approaches. Henceforth, we should endeavor to construct theoretical frameworks elucidating the formation mechanism of community identity from the dual perspectives of residents' "need satisfaction" and the "bidirectional mutual embedding" between residents and community, attend to the diachronic evolution of community identity and the interactive influences exerted by factors at both resident and community levels, examine the characteristics of community identity through both qualitative and quantitative lenses, and promote evidence-based intervention experiments alongside action research grounded in local knowledge.

Full Text

Preamble

A Decade Review and Future Prospects of Community Identity Research in China

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Abstract: Community identity is the core element of community psychology and is considered a two-dimensional structure comprising functional identity and emotional identity. Functional identity refers to residents' satisfaction and recognition of community functions, while emotional identity refers to their emotional connection and acceptance of the community. Over the past decade since the introduction of the two-dimensional structure of community identity and its corresponding measurement tools, scholars from various disciplines in China have conducted extensive empirical research on the antecedents (including resident and community factors) and consequences of community identity. However, existing studies suffer from limitations such as insufficient theoretical construction and a lack of methodological diversity. Moving forward, we should construct a theoretical framework for the generation of community identity from the perspectives of "need satisfaction" of residents and the "mutual embedding" between residents and the community. Emphasis should be placed on the temporal changes in community identity and the interactive influences of factors at both the resident and community levels. Additionally, the characteristics of community identity should be examined from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives, advancing evidence-based intervention experiments and action research grounded in local knowledge.

Keywords: Community identity, Neighborhood interaction, Community participation, Community governance

Community refers to a social life 共同体 (community) composed of a group of people living in a particular area with psychological and spiritual connections (Wu Qungang & Sun Zhixiang, 2011). The formation of a community depends on residents who share the same locality developing a common psychology and generating identification with the community. Traditionally, Western scholars used "sense of community" to refer to this communal psychology, arguing that it comprises four elements: "membership," "influence," "integration and fulfillment of needs," and "shared emotional connection" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Meanwhile, Chavis et al. (1986) developed the "Sense of Community Scale" with 44 items, the first instrument of its kind. Later, some simplified it into the 12-item "Sense of Community Index" (Perkins et al., 1990). However, factor analysis of this scale failed to confirm the four-factor theory, and its subscales showed inadequate internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.07-0.72$) (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999). Additionally, some items were criticized for overlapping with the Place Attachment Scale, raising questions about its content validity (Long & Perkins, 2003). Consequently, Long and Perkins (2003) revised the scale into the 8-item "Brief Sense of Community Index," comprising three factors: mutual concern, social connection, and community values, which fundamentally diverged from the original four-factor theory. Thus, as a foundational concept in Western com-

munity psychology, “sense of community” exhibits significant shortcomings in both theoretical conceptualization and measurement tools. This may be because the concept is overly broad and complex to measure with a single instrument; moreover, the diversity of “community” types increases measurement difficulty.

“Community” is a multifaceted concept. In Western contexts, the “community” studied by sense of community researchers includes both “geographic communities” such as neighborhoods, residential areas, and villages, and “relational communities” without geographic connotations—associations or organizations formed around shared goals or tasks (Dalton et al., 2010). Because communities of different meanings vary greatly in their causes and nature, they inevitably create confusion in the meaning of “sense of community” and differences in measurement results. In China, “community” typically refers only to “geographic communities,” most commonly urban residential areas or “neighborhood committee jurisdictions,” sometimes including rural village communities. Since “community” is not a culturally equivalent concept, Chinese community psychology research is not well-suited to simply adopt the Western concept of “sense of community.” Some foreign researchers focusing on community identity have emphasized geographic communities (Brodsky & Marx, 2001; Puddifoot, 1996), an approach that better fits the reality of Chinese communities. Consequently, Chinese scholars prefer to use “community identity” (社区认同) to specifically refer to residents’ psychological identification with their residential community (Chen Fuping & Li Rongyu, 2019; Wang Yanli et al., 2019; Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015; Zheng Jianjun & Liu Jing, 2021; Zhou Jiteng, 2021; Fan, 2024; Wu et al., 2024), thereby avoiding conceptual and measurement confusion.

Although Western community identity research began earlier and proposed definitions of community identity, these definitions lack operational strength and cannot support corresponding instrument development. The earliest scholar to focus on community identity, Puddifoot (1995), defined the concept as residents’ sense of belonging to a specific geographic area, long-term residence, and family, dividing it into 14 dimensions including “residents’ evaluation of community quality of life” and “residents’ perception of emotional connection to the community.” Such a cumbersome dimensional distinction failed to produce an effective measurement tool. Other researchers have simply adapted tools measuring social identity to examine community identity; for example, McNamara et al. (2013) directly used Cameron’s social identity measure in their community identity survey. Although community identity and social identity are related, community identity emphasizes identification with a specific “place,” whereas social identity emphasizes identification with a “group.” The two are distinctly different, making the direct adaptation of measurement tools inappropriate.

Currently, the concept of community identity and indigenous measurement tools developed based on Chinese community realities have been widely applied in empirical research and proven stable and effective. This paper primarily uses these mature measurement tools as a 线索 (thread) to collect and summarize indigenous empirical research findings on community identity in China, analyz-

ing how future breakthroughs can be achieved in theoretical construction and methodological innovation.

2. The Connotation and Measurement of Community Identity

Given the obvious shortcomings in Western community psychology's theoretical understanding and tool development regarding sense of community and community identity at the time, Chinese researchers systematically analyzed the connotation of community identity and proposed a two-dimensional structure (Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015). They argued that a community is a place of residence, and its "place" attribute creates emotional connections and attachment between residents and the place; therefore, community identity should include residents' emotional identification with the community. As the environment for residents' daily lives, a community must satisfy people's various needs and provide convenience. Thus, the functional quality of a community (e.g., transportation convenience, availability of recreational spaces) will inevitably affect residents' identification with it (Puddifoot, 1995, 1996). Consequently, community identity should encompass two dimensions: emotional identity and functional identity. "Functional identity" refers to residents' satisfaction and recognition of community functions, such as views on the community's convenience, management level, environmental conditions, and whether it meets family needs. "Emotional identity" is the emotional connection between residents and the community and their emotional acceptance of it, manifested in whether residents care about others' opinions of their community, whether they have special feelings for the community, whether the community has become part of their life, and whether it provides a sense of home.

Based on this theoretical conceptualization of the two-dimensional structure of community identity, researchers developed the Community Identity Scale (Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015). The scale comprises 8 items belonging to two dimensions: functional identity and emotional identity (Table 1). This was the first systematic indigenous measurement tool for community identity research in China, which was later introduced abroad (Xin et al., 2017; Yang & Xin, 2016) and subsequently used by foreign researchers (Erol & Gormez, 2025).

Table 1. Items and Factor Analysis Results of the Community Identity Scale

Living in this community is very convenient.
I highly recognize the management level of this community.
Compared with other places, the environmental conditions of this community are satisfactory.
Living in this community meets our family's needs.
The community I live in has special emotional meaning for me.
I feel this community has become part of my life.
The community gives me a sense of home.

I care a lot about what others think of my community.

Note: Adapted from Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015.

The psychometric properties of the Community Identity Scale have been thoroughly examined. First, it demonstrates good construct validity. Factor analysis conducted by Xin Ziqiang and Ling Xihuan (2015) showed (Table 1) that the two factors of functional identity and emotional identity explained 76.21% of the total variance. Items belonging to each factor loaded highly on their respective factor (all above 0.73) and had low loadings on the other factor (below 0.30), with the item-factor relationships fully consistent with theoretical expectations. The proportion of variance in each item explained by the two factors (communalities) ranged from 0.63 to 0.86, indicating that the two factors explained most of the variance in each item. Second, the scale's reliability has been tested in empirical studies. In multiple studies, the scale's internal consistency reliability has generally been above 0.80, even reaching 0.93 (Chen Fuping & Li Rongyu, 2019; Wang Yanli, Zong Fanyu, & Wang Bin, 2023; Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015; Zheng Jianjun & Ma Xuan, 2021; Zheng Jianjun & Liu Jing, 2021; Zhou Jiteng, 2021; Erol & Gormez, 2025; Xin et al., 2017; Yang & Xin, 2016).

Currently, the two-dimensional structure concept of community identity and its corresponding scale have been widely applied in relevant research across various disciplines. Since 2015, 183 Chinese and English-language documents have cited this community identity concept, with over 30 empirical studies using the Community Identity Scale to investigate urban and rural communities in China. Research findings span psychology, sociology, social work, public administration, tourism management, sports, human geography, and other fields, covering topics such as residents' mental health, community governance, urban integration, rural tourism and cultural-ecological protection zone development, and industrial heritage community transformation and preservation.

In 2024, public administration researchers, building on the two-dimensional structure of community identity, emphasized the managerial attributes of communities and developed a three-dimensional Urban Community Identity Scale (Fan, 2024). The scale comprises 12 items across three dimensions: functional identity, governance identity, and emotional identity, serving as the foundation, guarantee, and core of community identity, respectively. Functional and emotional identity share the same meaning as in the previous Community Identity Scale (Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015). Governance identity consists of recognition of community organizations and their work, which plays a guarantor role for community identity—that is, the proactive efforts of community party organizations and neighborhood committees help establish and maintain emotional connections among residents. This newly developed scale expands the original two-dimensional structure by adding the governance identity dimension to meet the needs of public administration research and has proven to be a valid instrument (Fan Yangyang & Lü Xiaojun, 2025; Fan, 2024). However, this tool awaits verification and application by peers.

Using the aforementioned measurement tools as a 线索 (thread), we retrieved empirical studies from various professional fields that employed these tools and their corresponding concepts and theories. We systematically reviewed research findings related to community identity from two aspects: antecedent variables (resident and community characteristics) and consequence variables (psychological and behavioral outcomes). We attempted to integrate contradictory results, extract regular patterns, and provide theoretical interpretation. Since community identity is a subjective variable, it is often difficult to determine the direction of prediction between it and other subjectively reported variables. Therefore, in the following review, we will focus more on summarizing relationships between community identity and objectively measured antecedent variables and behavioral consequence variables.

3. The Influence of Resident Characteristics and Community Residential Features on Community Identity

Community identity essentially examines the relationship between residents and their community, so most studies treat characteristics of both as antecedent variables of community identity.

3.1 The Influence of Resident Characteristics

Existing empirical research has examined the effects of residents' demographic characteristics (gender, age, education level, income) and psychological and behavioral variables such as subjective socioeconomic status on community identity. However, many findings are inconsistent. We hope to uncover the explanatory logic behind these contradictory results through the two-dimensional structure of community identity, thereby enhancing understanding of relevant research findings.

First, gender. Many studies have examined whether gender differences exist in overall community identity scores but have not reached unified conclusions. Evidence can be found for no gender differences in community identity (Chen Wanji et al., 2021; Wu Wenfeng et al., 2024; Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015; Zheng Jianjun & Ma Xuan, 2021), higher identity among women than men (Chen Fuping & Li Rongyu, 2019; Wang Yanli, Zong Fanyu, & Wang Bin, 2023; Zheng Jianjun & Liu Jing, 2021), and higher identity scores among men than women (Liang Xiaowei et al., 2020). The main reason for this inconsistency may be that these studies did not examine which dimension contributed to the total score differences. Research has indicated that the functional identity and emotional identity dimensions of community identity are relatively independent (Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015); residents with high identity on one dimension may not necessarily score high on the other. Therefore, exploring gender differences using total scores may obscure, distort, or confuse the role of gender, leading to contradictory findings. A large-sample survey confirmed that the gender difference patterns for the two dimensions differ: no gender difference exists

in community functional identity, but women score significantly higher than men in emotional identity (Zhou Jiteng, 2021; Zhou Jiteng & Fu Yuqi, 2021). Additionally, household registration and housing property rights may moderate the effect of gender on community identity. For example, among renters and commercial housing residents, men show higher community functional identity than women, whereas among relocated housing and work-unit housing residents, women show significantly higher emotional identity than men (Zhou Jiteng, 2021). Thus, on the one hand, the two dimensions must be distinguished—one is an indicator of residential needs, while the other reflects emotional connections and cannot substitute for each other. On the other hand, the interactive effects of various demographic or community characteristic variables cannot be ignored.

Second, age. Most studies support a positive association between residents' age and community identity, with older residents showing higher community identity than younger residents (Chen Fuping & Li Rongyu, 2019; Chen Wanji et al., 2021; Wang Yanli, Zong Fanyu, & Wang Bin, 2023; Liang Xiaowei et al., 2020; Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015; Zhou Jiteng, 2021; Fan, 2024; Wang, Yang, Hu, & Chen, 2021; Wang, Yang, Zhang, & Hu, 2021). However, when analyzed using the two-dimensional structure of community identity, the relationship patterns between age and the two dimensions show differences: only community emotional identity increases with residents' age, while functional identity is unrelated to age (Zhou Jiteng & Fu Yuqi, 2021; Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015; Fan, 2024). Some research further suggests that the positive predictive effect of age on community emotional identity may be nonlinear, exhibiting diminishing marginal returns (Zhou Jiteng & Fu Yuqi, 2021). Unfortunately, this study did not identify the inflection point age for emotional identity. Additionally, researchers noted that residents over 50 scored significantly higher than those under 50 in both community governance identity and emotional identity (Fan, 2024). Thus, emotional connections with both neighbors and community management or service organizations appear to be related to age.

We can explain the positive association between age and community emotional identity through the “mutual embedding” mechanism between residents and communities. Older residents may have lived in the community longer, with more important life events and interpersonal relationships occurring there, making the community more easily incorporated or embedded into their life course (Fleury-Bahi et al., 2008). Simultaneously, due to their longer residence, older residents are more involved in community events and exert influence on community management, achieving individual embedding into community development history. We term this process “mutual embedding” between residents and communities. The deeper the embedding, the higher the residents' community emotional identity. A study that found no effect of age on community identity (Wu Hongxiang, 2023) provides counter-support for the “mutual embedding” perspective. The study's survey subjects were relocated poverty alleviation residents with short community tenure (average 3.22 years). After relocation, their life courses, social relationships, and production and lifestyle underwent tremendous changes.

Due to insufficient mutual embedding with their current community, their age could not predict their community identity.

Third, education level. Whether community identity differs among residents with different education levels largely depends on the heterogeneity of the surveyed sample. Studies using residents of a particular street or community as samples tend to conclude that “residents’ education level does not affect community identity” (e.g., Wang Xiaocen, 2016; Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015). Such studies have small sampling ranges and limited variation in residents’ education levels, which may be insufficient to reveal education differences in community identity. Education level and related income may constitute a “threshold” mechanism for community environmental selection (choices when buying or renting homes), increasing similarity in education and income among people in the same community while reducing individual variation. In contrast, studies with broader sampling ranges (e.g., cross-street, cross-provincial, or national samples) are more likely to obtain results showing that “residents’ education level affects community identity” due to higher sample heterogeneity (e.g., Chen Wanji et al., 2021; Wang Yanli, Zong Fanyu, & Wang Bin, 2023; Zheng Jianjun & Liu Jing, 2021). However, whether the effect of education level on community identity is positive or negative remains inconclusive, which is not unrelated to studies using only total community identity scores without distinguishing dimensions.

Community identity is a two-dimensional structure, and analysis at the dimensional level may reduce contradictory results. Researchers found that residents’ education level predicts the two dimensions differently: education years positively predict community functional identity but cannot predict emotional identity (Zhou Jiteng & Fu Yuqi, 2021). Another national survey clustered respondents into four subgroups based on their two-dimensional community identity scores: strong identity type (high on both emotional and functional), emotional identity-dominant type (high emotional, low functional), functional identity-dominant type (low emotional, high functional), and weak identity type (low on both). The study found that emotional identity-dominant residents were more likely to be those living in rural areas with lower education levels and lower economic income (Wang et al., 2022). These individuals lacked the conditions to live in communities with better hardware resources and management services that could meet life needs, resulting in lower functional identity, but this did not affect their emotional attachment to neighbors and villages. Although total community identity scores did not differ much between emotional identity-dominant and functional identity-dominant residents, they identified with different aspects of the community.

Fourth, income level. Similar to education level, whether residents’ income correlates with community identity largely depends on sample heterogeneity. Most studies of urban community residents have not found stable associations between community identity and income level (Chen Fuping & Li Rongyu, 2019; Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015; Wu Wenfeng et al., 2024; Zhou Jiteng & Fu Yuqi, 2021; Zhou Jiteng, 2021). In contrast, two studies with higher sam-

ple heterogeneity concluded that higher resident income correlates with higher total community identity scores (Liang Xiaowei et al., 2020; Zheng Jianjun & Liu Jing, 2021). Unfortunately, neither study distinguished between community functional and emotional identity, so future research should report results at the dimensional level. Income level may reflect the functional strength of the community where residents live; those with higher incomes are more likely to reside in functionally complete communities that meet family needs, resulting in higher community functional identity. To detect such differences, sampling should increase community variability to separate the main effects and cross-level interactions of individual characteristics like income and community characteristics.

Fifth, household registration. Household registration is typically used to distinguish urban and rural residents (non-agricultural and agricultural household registration) and local and non-local residents. Researchers compared community identity types between agricultural and non-agricultural household registration residents (roughly corresponding to rural and urban residents) and found that agricultural household registration residents (usually with lower income) were more likely to belong to the subgroup with high community emotional identity but low functional identity (Wang et al., 2022). This again reveals differences in the formation mechanisms of the two community identity dimensions: emotional identity stems from mutual embedding between residents and community, while functional identity depends on need satisfaction. Rural areas are traditional acquaintance societies where neighbors may even have blood or kinship ties, resulting in deep mutual embedding and strong emotional identity; however, rural living conditions are poor with limited ability to meet residents' life needs, resulting in weaker functional identity. Studies of communities with migrant populations used household registration to distinguish locals and migrants, finding that local household registration residents had higher total community identity scores (Liang Xiaowei et al., 2020), especially significantly higher emotional identity scores than migrant populations (Wang Li et al., 2021). Survey data and interview results both showed that local household registration populations had longer community tenure and deeper mutual embedding, thus stronger community emotional identity.

In summary, residents' gender, age, education level, income, and household registration all exert certain influences on community identity, and their effects on community functional identity and emotional identity often differ. Additionally, marital status, political affiliation, and occupation type have been examined as influencing factors by a few researchers, but no stable and reliable associations with community identity have been found (Chen Fuping & Li Rongyu, 2019; Wang Yanli, Zong Fanyu, & Wang Bin, 2023; Zheng Jianjun & Liu Jing, 2021).

Beyond demographic variables, residents' socioeconomic status and community-related psychological variables (e.g., community responsibility, community governance expectations) and community participation have also been examined as antecedent variables of community identity. First, socioeconomic status. Re-

searchers compared the relationships of objective socioeconomic status (synthesized from education, income, and occupation) and subjective socioeconomic status (self-rated on a 10-point scale) with community identity, finding that only residents' subjective socioeconomic status significantly correlated with and positively predicted total community identity, while objective socioeconomic status was unrelated to community identity (Wang, Yang, Hu, & Chen, 2021). This study did not show the "threshold" mechanism of education and income, which we suspect is related to the failure to distinguish functional and emotional identity dimensions. Another study (Wang et al., 2023) manipulated subjective social class through a resource availability task and found that residents manipulated into lower social class positions also had lower community identity levels.

Second, community-related psychological variables. Variables such as community responsibility, community consciousness, community governance expectations, perceived governance performance, and the discrepancy between perceived performance and expectations all reflect residents' perceptions or beliefs about community affairs (e.g., welfare, public participation, governance conditions) and can positively predict total community identity scores (Fan Yangyang & Lü Xiaojun, 2025; Liu Wenjia, 2022; Yang et al., 2020). However, these cross-sectional studies explore relationships among subjective variables, and the process of establishing predictive direction is highly subjective, essentially representing a rough correlational analysis.

Finally, community participation. A longitudinal follow-up study of poverty alleviation relocation households found that residents' community participation behaviors after relocation could predict their total community identity scores, thereby explaining changes in life satisfaction. That is, community participation can promote increased life satisfaction among relocated households through community identity as a "bridge" (Wu Wenfeng et al., 2024). Participating in community activities or joining community organizations is an important path for residents to influence and embed themselves in the community, and its role in enhancing community identity has been confirmed by multiple studies (Liang Xiaowei et al., 2020; Liu Wenjia, 2022; Deng et al., 2024). It should be noted that the process of community participation promoting community identity may be only one aspect of their bidirectional causal relationship; the opposite process will be discussed below.

3.2 The Influence of Community Residential Features on Community Identity

In community identity research, community residential features are primarily measured by length of residence, housing type, community environment, spatial characteristics, and governance features. While conclusions from relevant studies may vary, comparing and sorting through contradictory results highlights the necessity and importance of applying the two-dimensional structure of community identity in empirical research.

First, length of residence. When examining the relationship between length of residence and community identity, studies using total community identity scores as the dependent variable have yielded inconsistent results: some found length of residence positively predicted community identity (Chen Fuping & Li Rongyu, 2019; Liang Xiaowei et al., 2020; Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015), while others found no relationship (Wang Yonggui, 2017). However, when distinguishing between community emotional identity and functional identity, researchers reached consistent conclusions: length of residence can only positively predict emotional identity, not functional identity (Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015; Zhou Jiteng, 2021; Zhou Jiteng & Fu Yuqi, 2021). Fan's (2024) study compared community identity scores across three groups of residents with community tenure of less than 5 years, 5–10 years, and more than 10 years, finding that residents with less than 5 years of tenure scored higher on functional identity than emotional identity, while those with more than 10 years scored higher on emotional identity than functional identity. Governance identity, which involves both community services (functional meaning) and interpersonal interactions with staff (emotional connection), scored between the two. Length of residence, along with residents' age and household registration (which affect length of residence) mentioned earlier, are variables reflecting the "time" attribute, and they can stably predict residents' emotional identity with the community: residents with longer residence, older age, and local household registration (likely long-term residents) have deeper "mutual embedding" with the community and thus stronger emotional identity.

Second, housing type. The operational definition of housing type is highly diverse in specific studies, including various measurement indicators such as housing property rights, community nature, and residential area type. For example, survey results show that commercial housing residents have higher community identity than relocated housing and old urban district residents (Chen Fuping & Li Rongyu, 2019), and that residents living in rural areas, towns, county seats, and cities show progressively higher total community identity scores (Zheng Jianjun & Liu Jing, 2021). However, these two studies did not distinguish between emotional and functional identity, so we do not know which dimension accounts for the identity differences. When examined separately, the effects of housing type on community emotional identity and functional identity show regular differences: those who choose residential communities based on market rules (renters, commercial housing groups) have higher functional identity but relatively lower emotional identity; those who reside in communities due to geographic or occupational ties (relocated housing, work-unit housing groups) have higher emotional identity but lower functional identity (Zhou Jiteng, 2021). This again confirms our view on the different formation mechanisms of the two community identity dimensions: functional identity stems from "need satisfaction," while emotional identity comes from "mutual embedding" between residents and community.

Third, community environmental settings. Research found that different community environmental settings affect community identity through different

paths: the presence of sufficient green space in a community affects residents' flow experience, while the planning of buildings and road facilities may "shape" residents' interpersonal interactions, thereby influencing community identity (Mao et al., 2022). Thus, the community's physical environment can enhance functional identity by satisfying residents' needs (e.g., relaxation, transportation convenience) and boost emotional identity by providing platforms for interaction that help residents build community interpersonal networks and increase their community embedding. Place attachment research even suggests that simply providing an open space where residents can do their favorite activities daily (e.g., exercising, chatting, sunbathing) helps embed the community into residents' self-systems (Chi Liping, 2019). If residents' activities attract neighbors or receive community support, then resident embedding in the community occurs. Additionally, a study on community identity in industrial heritage communities showed that excessive transformation of industrial parks during industrial land conversion destroyed the mutual embedding between original industrial park workers and the park, causing emotional isolation from the community and park and weakening their community emotional identity. Meanwhile, the physical and functional isolation between the transformed park and the original workers' residential area worsened residents' living conditions, reducing their community functional identity (Sun Shuting et al., 2022).

Fourth, community spatial design. Turkish scholars compared how different spatial designs affect neighbor relations through sense of community (Erol & Gormez, 2025). They found that single-family residential areas have advantages in promoting social interaction, community identity, and sense of belonging, while apartment-style residential communities only have some effect on sense of belonging. Residents in local single-family areas have more similar values and mostly own their homes (likely with longer residence), have more interactions with neighbors, and may have deeper mutual embedding with the community, thus showing stronger community identity. Apartment-style residential community residents are relatively more "atomized" (likely with higher mobility), have fewer neighbor interactions, and shallower mutual embedding with the community, resulting in weaker community identity.

Fifth, community emotional governance. Emotional governance refers to a people-centered approach in community governance practice that intervenes in the community's emotional reproduction process, reconstructs interpersonal interactions among residents and between residents and community workers, thereby enhancing residents' initiative in community participation and achieving governance goals. This soft governance approach consciously increases mutual embedding between residents and community to enhance residents' community emotional identity. Researchers surveyed 854 residents across 52 communities in Shanghai to examine whether emotional governance practices enhance residents' community identity, finding that higher levels of community emotional governance correlate with higher resident community identity levels (Fan Yangyang & Lü Xiaojun, 2025). This study did not distinguish community identity dimensions in its data analysis, but we suspect that emotional governance's pre-

dictive effect on community emotional identity and governance identity should be greater than its effect on functional identity.

In summary, resident characteristics and residential features individually or interactively influence community identity. While the effect of each variable or category requires specific analysis, the influence of all community identity antecedent variables reveals a similar underlying logic: the strength of community functional identity depends more on whether community hardware and software conditions meet residents' life needs, while emotional identity scores are influenced by the degree of "mutual embedding" between residents and community.

4. The Psychological and Behavioral Consequences of Community Identity

Once formed, community identity inevitably affects other community psychology variables (temporarily called "proximal variables"), such as neighborhood interaction, community participation, community psychological ownership, and community cultural identity. Additionally, it may influence broader "distal" psychological and behavioral variables, such as sense of control, life satisfaction, subjective well-being, altruistic behavior, and political psychology.

4.1 Proximal Consequence Variables

First, neighborhood interaction and neighbor relations. Neighborhood interaction, neighbor relations, or neighbor mutual assistance are all used by researchers to reflect the degree of interaction and relationship status between residents and neighbors in the same community, and they are all closely related to community identity. Multiple studies have found significant positive correlations between community identity and neighborhood interaction, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.39 to 0.51 (Liang Xiaowei et al., 2020; Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015; Zhou Jiteng & Fu Yuqi, 2021; Shi et al., 2022). A community experimental study distinguished the two dimensions of community identity to examine whether they have different effects on residents' willingness to help neighbors, finding that only community emotional identity could positively predict residents' helping intentions toward neighbors, while functional identity' s predictive effect was not significant (Yang & Xin, 2016).

With the rapid development of mobile internet technology and the popularization of smartphones, the internet has become an important platform for resident interaction, partially compensating for the lack of offline interaction among urban community residents (especially in commercial housing communities) due to unfamiliarity or busy work schedules. Surveys have found that residents' use of platforms like Weibo and WeChat to communicate with neighbors can enhance their community identity (Chen Fuping & Li Rongyu, 2019). Analysis using the two-dimensional structure of community identity showed that residents' online interaction behaviors could only positively predict their community emotional identity, not their functional identity (Zhou Jiteng & Fu Yuqi, 2021). This result

is consistent with findings from offline neighborhood interaction studies, indicating that both online and offline neighborhood interactions are important carriers for achieving mutual embedding between residents and community. However, how interaction in virtual communities promotes mutual embedding, especially the mechanism by which online interaction achieves community embedding into individual life courses, remains to be answered by future research.

Second, community participation. Community participation refers to the degree of residents' involvement in community activities and affairs. Numerous studies have found that community identity not only positively predicts residents' willingness to participate in community activities but is also significantly positively correlated with their actual participation in community management affairs (e.g., participating in resident-organized activities and meetings, reporting problems to property management departments, expressing opinions in community public spaces), with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.22 to 0.53 across studies (Chen Wanji et al., 2021; Liang Xiaowei et al., 2020; Pan Xiaofu et al., 2022; Wu Wenfeng et al., 2024; Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015; Deng et al., 2024; Shi et al., 2022; Xin et al., 2017). Further analysis indicates that both dimensions of community identity are significantly correlated with various indicators of community participation (Pan Xiaofu et al., 2022; Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015; Wang et al., 2022), and only residents with high scores on both functional and emotional identity are likely to have higher community participation willingness and behaviors (Wang et al., 2022). Thus, the two dimensions of community identity have similar relationships with community participation.

Beyond linearly predicting community participation, community identity has also been found to function as a moderator, reversing the direction of influence of out-migration—a “disembedding” disadvantage from native villages—on community participation. Li Fen'ni et al. (2020) surveyed over 1,000 rural households in Hubei and found that although out-migration negatively affected participation in rural human settlement environment improvement, out-migrating households with different levels of village identity showed differences in participation in this matter. As households' village identity strengthened, the negative effect of out-migration on their participation gradually weakened, and positive effects began to emerge. Especially when households' village identity exceeded a threshold value, the effect of out-migration on participation in human settlement environment improvement would shift from negative to positive—that is, village identity could play a “turning the tide” role in the effect of out-migration on household participation. Although this study did not distinguish the two dimensions of community identity, it can be inferred that it is precisely the strong emotional connection to the village that motivates out-migrating households to participate more enthusiastically in affairs that improve community functions.

Third, community psychological ownership. Community psychological ownership refers to residents' attitudinal tendency to perceive the community and related objects as part of the self, measured in empirical research with items such as “I feel that every tree and blade of grass in the community belongs to

me or us” (Pan Xiaofu et al., 2022). Thus, community psychological ownership essentially reflects residents’ community subjectivity consciousness and sense of control over the community, representing one form of community embedding into residents’ self-system, and should be significantly positively correlated with community emotional identity. Empirical research has confirmed a high correlation between the two ($r = 0.74$), while the correlation between community psychological ownership and functional identity is somewhat lower ($r = 0.58$) (Pan Xiaofu et al., 2022).

Fourth, community cultural identity. A study of residents in the Huizhou Cultural-Ecological Protection Experimental Zone found that higher community identity levels correlate with stronger identification with the culture attached to the community, transcending their sense of belonging and attachment to the living environment and neighbors (Wang Yonggui, 2017). Thus, residents’ identification with the community may include not only satisfaction with the community’ s physical environment, management, and services, and emotional connections with neighbors and the community collective, but also identification with and belonging to the community’ s cultural or spiritual environment.

In addition to serving as proximal consequence variables of community identity, these variables are sometimes treated as antecedent variables of community identity (e.g., Liang Xiaowei et al., 2020; Wu Wenfeng et al., 2024; Deng et al., 2024). Consequently, some researchers propose that community identity, neighborhood interaction, and community participation are mutually influential community psychology variables that can jointly serve as measurement indicators for community governance or community integration (e.g., Chen Fuping & Li Rongyu, 2019; Zhou Jiteng & Fu Yuqi, 2021). Thus, these proximal consequence variables and community identity all belong to community psychology variables, with community identity being the core element (Xin Ziqiang, 2016), which alone or together with other community psychology variables exerts important influences on distal consequence variables.

4.2 Distal Consequence Variables

As a psychological resource, community identity can provide residents with intrinsic belonging, thereby positively influencing their distal psychological variables (e.g., positive emotions, altruistic behavior, political psychology and behavior). These studies did not specifically distinguish the two dimensions of community identity but treated community identity as the core of community psychology variables, positing that higher community identity can satisfy residents’ psychological needs for belonging, love, and respect, promoting the emergence of various positive emotions and prosocial behaviors.

First, positive emotional experiences such as sense of control, being accepted by others, life satisfaction, and well-being. Research shows that community identity can positively predict residents’ sense of control (Wang Yanli, Hu Xiaoyong, & Wang Kang, 2023; Wang, Yang, Hu, & Chen, 2021), meaning that having

needs satisfied and emotional connections with the community may generate feelings of mastery and efficacy. A longitudinal follow-up study of relocated migrants found that being accepted by others and community identity, as well as community identity and life satisfaction, mutually predicted each other in cross-lagged paths, exhibiting complex dynamic interactive relationships (Wu et al., 2024). This indicates that relocated residents with higher levels of being accepted by others may perceive more social warmth and support, potentially promoting community identity and forming a virtuous cycle; higher community identity may lead to higher life satisfaction. Over time, enhanced community identity may further promote residents' acceptance by others, while increased acceptance may in turn strengthen community identity, jointly exerting positive effects on life satisfaction. Community identity correlates with life satisfaction (Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015), and total community identity scores can positively predict life satisfaction (Wu Wenfeng et al., 2024; Wang, Yang, Zhang, & Hu, 2021) and subjective well-being (Wang Yanli, Hu Xiaoyong, & Wang Kang, 2023; Wang Yanli, Zong Fanyu, & Wang Bin, 2023; Deng et al., 2024). Unfortunately, these studies did not distinguish the relationship patterns between the two dimensions of community identity and these psychological variables, preventing us from understanding and analyzing the essence of these associations.

Second, altruistic and prosocial behavior. Community identity can not only predict residents' helping intentions toward neighbors (Yang & Xin, 2016) but also positively predict their prosocial behavior tendencies toward general others beyond neighbors (Yang et al., 2020). One study found that community identity mediates the relationship between socioeconomic status and altruistic behavior (Wang, Yang, Hu, & Chen, 2021). This suggests that residents with lower status are more likely to live in poorer community environments, lack emotional connections with neighbors, and have unmet needs, resulting in lower community identity and ultimately fewer opportunities to learn and express prosocial or altruistic behaviors.

Third, influence on political psychology and behavior. Researchers have examined the effects of community identity on civic participation, government trust, and political trust, finding that community identity can positively predict these political psychology and behavior variables. That is, citizens' identification with their residential community helps activate their enthusiasm and actions in grassroots governance practices, which may further transform community identity into trust in various components of the political system (Zheng Jianjun & Liu Jing, 2021; Zheng Jianjun & Ma Xuan, 2021).

5. Future Prospects for Community Identity Research

Currently, the field of community identity research in China has two indigenous measurement tools. However, given that the Urban Community Identity Scale (Fan, 2024) was proposed relatively recently and has limited application, the following discussion will still focus primarily on the two-dimensional structure concept and corresponding scale (Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015). Ten years

have passed since the development and application of this scale, and indigenous research on community identity in China has achieved phased progress while also showing regrets and deficiencies. First, insufficient theoretical construction. Previous research has provided detailed quantitative analysis results, which help us induce common patterns of community identity and discover the rationality of the two-dimensional structure, but there has been no corresponding theoretical construction on the generation mechanism of the two-dimensional structure. Second, scarcity of research on community-level factors. Scholars have fully explored antecedent variables of community identity at the individual level, such as residents' demographic characteristics and length of residence, but have relatively neglected research on community-level antecedent variables, especially in psychology. Third, lack of a temporal research perspective. Although numerous cross-sectional survey studies have presented static relationships between community identity and antecedent/consequence variables, they cannot answer how these relationships emerge and evolve. Fourth, single research methodology. Current community identity research mostly collects data through surveys and uses quantitative analysis techniques to describe variable relationships or explain variance in outcome variables, with little emphasis on utilizing textual materials or graphical information. This methodological orientation may lead to neglect of heterogeneous groups and artificially separates communities from their social spatiotemporal contexts. Finally, lack of intervention research. Most current research remains at the stage of describing variable relationships, with intervention studies based on these empirical results being very rare. Therefore, there is room for improvement in future research content, methods, and approaches.

5.1 Constructing a Theoretical Framework for the “Need Satisfaction” and “Mutual Embedding” Mechanisms of Community Identity Formation

The rationality of the two-dimensional structure of community identity has been confirmed: community functional identity and emotional identity are independent, with different connotations, influencing factors, and generation mechanisms that are even distinctly different. Community functional identity refers to residents' satisfaction and recognition of community functions. It is essentially an indicator of community functional strength. Usually, moving into functionally complete communities that meet individual and family needs involves a “threshold.” Community type or housing property rights, education, and related income levels jointly constitute the “threshold” for community function selection. Those with high income and high education can choose urban commercial housing communities with complete functions according to their residential needs, thus having higher community functional identity; residents with low functional identity scores have not reached the “threshold” for high-function communities and have unmet needs. Thus, the “need satisfaction” of community functional identity determines the interest-based connection between residents and community.

Community emotional identity refers to residents' emotional acceptance and recognition of the community and their emotional connection with it. This emotional connection comes from the “mutual embedding” between residents and community. Sociologists call the cyclical mutual construction of community identity and resident participation the community embedding mechanism (Yan Yufan & Ye Nanke, 2019), emphasizing that residents embed themselves into the community through neighborhood interaction and community participation to enhance community identity. Differently, we believe that the generation of community emotional identity follows the “mutual embedding” mechanism between residents and community—simultaneously focusing on “community embedding into individual life course” and “individual embedding into community network.” On the one hand, the community may be the background and inseparable component of important life events (e.g., schooling, making friends, marriage) and interpersonal relationships, being incorporated into residents' life courses. On the other hand, residents continuously embed themselves into the community network through neighborhood interaction and community participation. “Mutual embedding” requires time; therefore, variables that reflect time attributes (e.g., residents' age, length of residence, household registration) can all predict residents' community emotional identity.

In this paper, we tentatively propose the “need satisfaction” and “mutual embedding” mechanisms of community identity. This theoretical perspective not only awaits further testing but also generates some new research topics. First, “mutual embedding” and “need satisfaction” manifest as associations between individual-level and community-level variables—how do they jointly influence community identity? Second, “embedding” is not completed at once and has a temporal dimension; residents' “need satisfaction” may be the result of long-term bargaining between residents and community. How then do individual temporal variables (e.g., age, period, cohort evolution) and community temporal variables (e.g., community life history, evolution of community events) affect the temporal evolution of community identity? Third, “embedding” expresses not only quantitative relationships but also the generation of shared meaning and the facilitating or hindering role of “thresholds” in meaning production. Fourth, “embedding” is a process of actors changing their environment, including using actions to break “threshold” mechanisms, improving community functions through community participation, and promoting community identity.

5.2 Exploring Influencing Factors of Community Identity from Both Individual and Community Levels

Community identity research should adopt a systematic view of mutual construction between people and community, simultaneously and comprehensively exploring influencing factors of community identity from both the resident individual level and the community level. Currently, most community identity research only analyzes antecedent variables of community identity at the individual resident level, neglecting the collection and analysis of community-level

variables. Future research could use multilevel linear models to explore how variables at both levels independently and interactively influence community identity.

Currently, only a few studies use the community as the unit of analysis to examine the effect of community-level variables on community identity. For example, a survey of 546 neighborhoods in Shanghai collected data on the work of community governance's "three carriages" (residents' committees, homeowners' associations, and property management companies) and residents' community identity at the neighborhood level. The analysis found that the work status of all three governance bodies was significantly positively correlated with residents' community identity levels, and the work capacity of residents' committees could modify the effect of conflicts between residents' committees and homeowners' associations on community identity. When residents' committees had strong work capacity, conflicts between the two committees had little effect on residents' community identity; when residents' committees had weak capacity, residents' community identity was higher if relations with homeowners' associations were harmonious, but decreased substantially if relations were not harmonious (Ma Dan & Yuan Hao, 2018).

Another researcher simultaneously collected residents' media resource usage at both individual and community levels to assess which types of media resources could improve community governance levels (Chen Fuping & Li Rongyu, 2019). The study collected data on "official" new media platform construction in 22 communities (community-level variable) and residents' use of "civilian" media resources such as WeChat, QQ groups, and Weibo in these communities (individual-level variable), examining whether residents' use of these two types of media resources improved community governance levels (with community identity as one indicator). Results showed that residents' perceived improvement in community governance mainly came from the contribution of "civilian" media like WeChat, with little contribution from "official" formal platforms. Further analysis revealed that the poor effectiveness of "official" platforms was not due to inadequate community internet platform operation technology and capacity but because information content released on official platforms was overly administrative and disconnected from residents' needs.

5.3 Examining the Temporal Evolution of Community Identity on Individual and Community Time Scales

Cross-sectional designs can only present static relationships between community identity and other variables, whereas temporal studies using dynamic perspectives can reveal the emergence, development, and weakening processes of community identity on different time scales of residents and communities, and can also examine dynamic causal relationships between community identity and other variables.

First, examine the evolution of community identity on the individual resident

time scale. Individual resident time scales include not only the currently studied residents' age and length of residence but also survey period and cohort. Through multi-wave data collection from community residents, a continuous independent sample design can be constructed to separate the effects of residents' age, length of residence, survey period, and cohort. For example, by integrating analyses across different time scales, we can more clearly identify the causes of older residents' higher community identity: deep "mutual embedding" brought by age and length of residence (Xin Ziqiang, 2015; Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015), the influence of special periods or events like public health crises (Wang et al., 2022), and possibly cohort effects (Tang Youcai & Hu Bing, 2016).

Second, examine the temporal evolution of community identity on the community time scale. Community time scales include community construction, use, and transformation history, and the evolution process of key community events. For example, tracking how residents of a community get to know each other and gather to protect common interests, and how they evolve from strangers to various "buddies" and even friends, throughout the processes of community property planning, construction acceptance, home decoration, and moving in. Community key events typically occur in public issues involving the interests of all community residents, such as installing elevators in old residential communities through cost-sharing among residents or negotiating rights protection with developers. These events can make atomized families and residents trust and cooperate with each other to protect their own and common interests. This is a process of rapid mutual embedding between community and residents. Examining the influence of these key events and community development history on larger time scales on community identity requires longitudinal research.

Third, examine the dynamic causal relationships between community identity and other variables. In cross-sectional community identity research, neighborhood interaction and community participation are sometimes treated as consequence variables of community identity but sometimes as antecedent variables. When temporal dimensions are added to conduct longitudinal research, we may discover that the three variables cyclically co-construct each other in the process of mutual embedding between residents and community: residents' connections with the community and neighbors are incorporated into residents' individual life histories and become part of the self (i.e., community embedding into the individual), generating community identity; simultaneously, community identity prompts individuals to participate more in community activities, integrate into neighbor relations, and even gradually change and reshape community ecology, embedding individuals into the community network, thereby reproducing community identity. Thus, they exhibit mutual causality. A longitudinal study of community volunteers confirmed the process of community identity reproduction through cyclical co-construction of three variables. The study found that community volunteers who were willing to serve their community before the COVID-19 outbreak had closer relationships with assisted residents and higher community identity; this high community identity increased their probability of participating in community anti-epidemic volunteer activities during the subse-

quent outbreak (Wakefield et al., 2022).

5.4 Elucidating the Characteristics of Community Identity from Both Qualitative and Quantitative Perspectives

Research on community identity should leverage the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine and explain the characteristics of community identity from different angles. Quantitative research should reveal relationships between community identity and other variables and examine the heterogeneous expression of these relationships across different groups. Meanwhile, the unique methods and perspectives of qualitative research should not be rejected, and their role in hypothesis testing and theory construction should be valued.

First, appropriately supplement individual-oriented analyses in quantitative research. Most community identity research uses variable-oriented methods, focusing on 挖掘 (mining) common patterns applicable to the whole population, but this analysis neglects heterogeneity among communities and populations. Individual-oriented analysis acknowledges the diversity of communities and resident groups, aiming to identify various subgroups described by association patterns of community identity variables (Yang Zhixu & Xin Ziqiang, 2016). Wang et al. (2022) used latent profile analysis to identify subgroups of community identity and their proportions: strong identity type (43.7%), functional identity-dominant type (25.0%), emotional identity-dominant type (19.8%), and weak identity type (11.5%), and described demographic profiles of residents in different subgroups and compared their community participation levels, providing a basis for community mobilization and targeted community intervention.

Second, emphasize the use of qualitative research methods. First, comprehensively use multiple methods such as observation, interviews, and online data scraping to collect research materials. For example, one study evaluating the implementation effect of the “Internet + Community” action plan comprehensively used resident questionnaires, in-depth interviews with community managers and information platform operators, and online-scraped platform usage information to objectively and comprehensively describe the current state of internet-assisted community governance (Chen Fuping & Li Rongyu, 2019). Second, utilize multiple types of research materials such as archival documents, policy papers, and geographic information to 立体呈现 (three-dimensionally present) the background of community identity formation. For example, a study on the relationship between industrial heritage community transformation and community identity incorporated relevant heritage protection documents, physical environment field survey results, and community topographic maps before and after transformation into the analysis (Sun Shuting et al., 2022). Finally, use case studies to support theoretical thinking. While community identity research emphasizes large samples and generalizable results, it also needs to value case studies. Through detailed descriptions of event processes, group interactions, and environmental changes, case studies help researchers conduct deep theoretical thinking. For

example, some scholars tracked the entire process of elevator installation in an old residential community in Shanghai, deeply describing through interviews how community residents gradually transformed the community from an atomized state with little neighbor interaction into a triple community of interests, governance, and emotions through repeated resolution of interest conflicts, and proposed that community spatial production includes three processes: physical space, social space, and emotional space, which intertwine to promote community identity formation (Lü Junyan et al., 2024).

5.5 Advancing Evidence-Based Intervention Experiments and Action Research Grounded in Local Knowledge

The distinction between functional identity and emotional identity provides indicators and frameworks for describing community identity status, diagnosing problems, and developing intervention plans. Community identity research over the past decade has accumulated sufficient empirical evidence, reaching a point for practical translation. Future efforts should adopt experimental and practical thinking to advance evidence-based intervention experiments and action research grounded in local knowledge, using community identity cultivation as an entry point to solidly promote community psychological construction. Current community management or governance practices emphasize institutions over “human factors” and administrative control over psychological construction (Xin Ziqiang, 2016). Governance behaviors produced by hierarchical community governance structures often fail to meet residents’ needs despite consuming human, material, and financial resources (Chen Fuping & Li Rongyu, 2019), and may even weaken horizontal connections among residents, hindering the formation of residents’ psychological community.

Community psychological construction cares about “human factors” and “psychological construction,” taking residents’ identification with the community, mutual trust and support among residents, and concern for and participation in community affairs as the “psychological goals” of community building (Lan Yihua & Xin Ziqiang, 2020). Community identity intervention experiments and action research are the practical 抓手 (handles) for community psychological construction.

First, strengthen evidence-based intervention experiments. Empirical research based on the two-dimensional structure of community identity suggests that community functional identity and emotional identity may not be “synchronized,” with different formation mechanisms requiring different intervention strategies. Taking the enhancement of community emotional identity as an example, previous research found that commercial housing residents and migrant populations have weaker community emotional identity. While we can explain this phenomenon with insufficient “mutual embedding,” for residents with short tenure and high mobility, passively increasing embedding through “time” alone does not help solve current low identity problems. Xin et al. (2017) identified a core psychological variable affecting residents’ “embedding” perception

– “self-construal” –to enhance residents’ perceived community embedding and attempted to operationalize it into actionable measures for community workers. Their research found that residents’ views of their relationships with others (i.e., self-construal) affect their community identity. Self-construal is divided into independent self-construal (focusing on the self and maintaining independence from others) and interdependent self-construal (emphasizing attention to others and embedding oneself in social roles and relationships). People may possess both types simultaneously but at different levels. Residents with high interdependent self-construal show higher community emotional identity than others. In the study, residents whose interdependent self-construal was successfully primed showed higher community emotional identity and greater willingness to participate in community affairs than those primed with independent self-construal (Xin et al., 2017). Based on this, researchers proposed posting slogans and propaganda with “we” as the subject in communities, printing cultural shirts and signs representing the community, to activate residents’ interdependent belonging and enhance community emotional identity. Additionally, researchers proposed that adding friendly competition between this community and other communities in cultural and sports activities and sanitation evaluations could strengthen residents’ “in-group” identity with their community and enhance community identity (Lan Yihua & Xin Ziqiang, 2020).

Second, conduct action research grounded in local knowledge. The process of general community identity empirical research is typically unilaterally designed by researchers. Throughout the process, residents (the “subjects” of the study –passively receiving the study) are only data providers, unaware of research results, which cannot be directly applied to governance practices in their communities. In contrast, community identity action research directly uses the community as the research site, with research questions directly derived from “pain points” in community governance, and the research purpose is to effectively solve these real problems from the community context. Therefore, residents and community workers (personnel involved in research questions) participate throughout the research as “actors,” discussing, determining, or modifying research questions and action plans with researchers, implementing actions, evaluating results, and ultimately solving problems. The entire research process is the governance process of solving community problems. Since residents or community workers can actively participate throughout the process in action research, their sense of responsibility and self-awareness is stimulated, and the changes triggered by the research can usually be sustained for a long time, even directly becoming successful community governance measures. For example, Qu Yingbei and Xin Ziqiang (2017) used the “photovoice” technique in a community action study that guided residents to photograph garbage classification scenarios in their homes or communities, organized residents to discuss the photos, guided them to identify problems themselves, collectively discuss and establish common goals and tasks, develop work plans together, and put them into action, thereby partially solving the community garbage classification promotion problem and simultaneously enhancing residents’ community identity.

Community is residents' dwelling place and should be an organically united living community built on the basis of common psychology. Community identity is the core of this common psychology and should also be the core of community psychological construction (Xin Ziqiang, 2016, 2020). Based on the community identity concept and corresponding measurement tools proposed by Chinese scholars (Xin Ziqiang & Ling Xihuan, 2015), China has conducted a decade-long study on community identity, achieving rich results. However, both research content and methodology need further deepening. Looking forward, in terms of content, we should systematically explore the relationships between community identity and various antecedent and consequence variables, focusing on revealing the different generation mechanisms and action mechanisms of community functional identity and emotional identity, and strengthening relevant theoretical construction. In terms of methods and approaches, future social identity research should adopt a systematic view of mutual construction between people and community, simultaneously and comprehensively exploring influencing factors of community identity from both individual resident and community levels; should adopt a dynamic perspective to examine the temporal evolution of community identity and its dynamic causal relationships with other variables on individual time scales (e.g., age, length of residence, cohort evolution) and community time scales (e.g., community construction, use, and transformation history, evolution of key community events); should elucidate community identity characteristics from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives, revealing relationships between community identity and other variables while examining heterogeneous expressions of these relationships across different groups; and should adopt experimental and practical thinking to advance evidence-based intervention experiments and action research grounded in local knowledge, using community identity cultivation as an entry point to solidly promote community psychological construction.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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