

The Educational Influence of Urban Historical and Cultural Resources on College Students: A Case Study of Tiebai Area of Kuancheng District, Changchun City

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Abstract

Urban historical and cultural heritage functions as a core informal educational resource in higher education and may profoundly shape college students' place attachment, cultural identity, and humanistic literacy. Unlike standardized classroom teaching, localized cultural resources provide implicit, situational, and experiential education that complements institutional curriculum systems. Grounded in place-based education theory and Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, this study adopts a mixed-methods, cross-sectional design combining field investigation, questionnaire surveys, and semi-structured interviews. It focuses on the Tiebai historic block in Kuancheng District, Changchun, a typical old urban area in Northeast China. Survey data from 308 undergraduates at Jilin Engineering Normal University show that students' exposure to Tiebai's diverse historical and cultural resources is positively associated with their self-reported cultural identity, place attachment, humanistic literacy, and social responsibility awareness. Nevertheless, the educational potential of these resources is constrained by insufficient university-city collaboration, low student participation in immersive practice, and structural misalignment between heritage development and teaching requirements. The study proposes targeted strategies for integrating urban cultural heritage into higher education, supplementing empirical research on place-based education in Northeast China. Given the cross-sectional design, the reported associations should be interpreted as correlational rather than causal.

Keywords

Urban Historical Culture, Place-Based Education, College Students' Development, School-City Integration, Informal Education,

1. Introduction

Global higher education reform prioritizes integrated talent cultivation that emphasizes humanistic literacy, cultural cognition, and social responsibility rather than merely professional knowledge instruction. Contemporary university education is no longer restricted to enclosed campus classrooms. The urban cultural environment surrounding universities serves as a critical extended scenario for implicit learning, and urban heritage provides sustainable immersive resources for youth value shaping.

Place-based education (PBE) is a vital research hotspot in international higher education and cultural pedagogy. It advocates embedding local geographical environments, historical heritage, and communal culture into educational practice to foster students' emotional connection with places and facilitate internalization of cultural values. Existing international studies focus primarily on Western urban heritage, rural ecological education, and indigenous cultural pedagogy, while insufficient attention is paid to industrial and railway heritage education in post-industrial urban blocks of Northeast Asia. Most domestic studies concentrate on macroscopic theoretical elaboration and qualitative description of well-known historical and cultural cities and lack targeted empirical evidence based on old industrial urban blocks in Northeast China, or systematic analysis of its mechanisms for college students.

The Tiebai area of Kuancheng District, Changchun, is the origin of Changchun's modern urban civilization with a 120-year developmental history. It preserves abundant authentic historical and cultural resources, including Middle East Railway heritage, modern industrial relics of the Changchun Locomotive Factory, early revolutionary sites of the Communist Party of China in Changchun, and Sino-Russian characteristic architectural clusters. Surrounded by multiple local universities, it possesses unique informal educational resources and superior geographical proximity for school-city cultural education.

Based on first-hand field data and questionnaire surveys of local college students, this study analyzes the perceived educational associations and developmental bottlenecks of Tiebai's regional historical culture for undergraduates' place attachment, cultural identity, and humanistic literacy, and constructs feasible paths for deepening school-city integration. It thereby fills the empirical research gap of place-based education targeting old urban industrial blocks in Northeast China and provides practical references for regional universities to carry out characteristic implicit cultural education.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

2.1. Overseas Research Status

International academia has formed mature theoretical and practical systems for

place-based education and cultural heritage education in higher education. Urban cultural heritage is widely regarded as valuable implicit curriculum resources that compensate for the limitations of formal classroom teaching, and empirical studies show that continuous place-based cultural immersion and on-site heritage participation are associated with enhanced cultural cognition, place belonging, and heritage protection awareness, laying a foundation for civic literacy and sustainable values (Wooltorton et al., 2025; Dean & Achiaw, 2026).

Current overseas research focuses on three core dimensions: the interactive mechanism between cultural heritage and higher education, heterogeneous educational effects across student groups, and sustainable strategies for school-city cultural development. Experiential learning and community cultural engagement are widely recognized as core pathways to activate the educational value of local heritage. However, most conclusions derive from Western cultural contexts and require further empirical verification in China's regional industrial heritage and university education scenarios (De Korne et al., 2025; Ladd, 2026).

2.2. Domestic Research Status

Domestic research on regional cultural heritage and college education develops steadily, focusing on the theoretical connotation of cultural education, its value in quality-oriented education, and practical paths of school-city integration. Most existing studies confirm that urban historical and cultural resources are positively associated with cultivating college students' cultural confidence, humanistic quality, and social responsibility.

Nevertheless, three prominent deficiencies persist in current domestic research. First, most studies rely on macroscopic theoretical deduction and lack micro-level empirical evidence supported by specific urban block cases. Second, existing research targets primarily famous historical and cultural cities in eastern and central China and pays insufficient attention to characteristic industrial and railway heritage blocks in Northeast China. Third, most studies discuss the educational value of regional culture without in-depth analysis of internal influencing mechanisms and practical obstacles, which limits the practical guiding significance of relevant research conclusions.

2.3. Theoretical Foundation and Proposed Mechanism

This study's framework rests on two classic, widely verified theories, place attachment theory and Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, which jointly support a proposed mechanism linking heritage exposure to student outcomes.

Place Attachment Theory. This theory holds that individuals develop stable emotional dependence and cultural identity through long-term contact with, and immersion in, regional environments and local culture (Williams & Vaske, 2003). In this study, in-depth engagement with local heritage enables students to form positive place attachment, which in turn facilitates the internalization of cultural values and the improvement of comprehensive literacy. The proposed mechanism is:

heritage exposure (on-site visits, cultural courses, practical activities) → increased place familiarity and emotional bonding → strengthened place attachment → enhanced cultural identity and belonging.

Cultural Capital Theory. Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes three forms of cultural capital: embodied (long-lasting dispositions of mind and body), objectified (cultural goods such as books, instruments, and heritage sites), and institutionalized (educational qualifications and credentials). Regional historical heritage belongs to objectified urban cultural capital. Through systematic educational intervention, universities effectively transform external objectified cultural capital into students' internalized embodied cultural capital, manifested as humanistic literacy, cultural cognitive competence, and social responsibility awareness, and realize the sustainable output of implicit educational value. The proposed mechanism is: objectified cultural capital (heritage resources) → educational participation (curriculum embedding, field practice) → institutionalized recognition (second-classroom credits, certificates) → embodied cultural capital (internalized literacy and values).

Integrated Mechanism. Combining both theories, heritage exposure is proposed to influence student outcomes through two interlocking pathways: an affective pathway (exposure → participation → place attachment → cultural identity) and a cognitive pathway (exposure → cultural capital conversion → humanistic literacy → social responsibility). Participation serves as the critical mediator, converting passive contact into active engagement, while place attachment functions as the emotional bridge between heritage experience and identity formation. These mechanisms guide the variable construction and analysis.

3. Overview of Research Area and Research Design

3.1. Overview of Historical and Cultural Resources in Tiebai Area, Changchun

As the core birthplace of modern urban construction in Changchun, the Tiebai area preserves authentic and multi-dimensional historical and cultural heritage accumulated over 120 years, covering railway civilization, modern industrial relics, red revolutionary culture, and urban architectural memory. According to official statistics, Kuancheng District currently has 130 recorded cultural relics, including 3 national key protection units, 6 provincial-level units, 20 municipal-level units, 1 district-level unit, and 100 ungraded immovable cultural relics, accounting for nearly half of Changchun's total (Changchun Kuancheng District Bureau of Culture and Tourism, 2024). The core educational resources are summarized below.

Middle East Railway Cultural Heritage. The Tiebai area hosts Kuanchengzi Railway Station, built in 1898 as Changchun's earliest railway station, together with a well-preserved Russian-style Railway Club and military barracks. The Kuanchengzi Railway Station Club (No. 1717 Kaixuan Road) is a national key cultural relic protection unit, and the Russian-style barracks were listed as municipal protection

units in 2002 (Changchun Kuancheng District Bureau of Culture and Tourism, 2024). These buildings retain typical Siberian features, record modern Sino-Russian cultural and economic exchanges, and serve as tangible carriers of regional open cultural memory.

Modern Industrial Cultural Heritage. Centered on the Changchun Locomotive Factory, the area contains multiple municipal cultural relics protection units and well-preserved industrial buildings, including the Yaxin Flour Mill (built 1903, listed as a municipal protection unit in 2009), forming a complete modern industrial block (Changchun Kuancheng District Bureau of Culture and Tourism, 2024). These relics witness a century of regional industrial development and embody a pragmatic, innovative, and dedicated industrial spirit, providing vivid materials for cultivating students' professional spirit and industrial literacy.

Red Revolutionary Cultural Resources. The Tiebai area is an important Red revolutionary base in Changchun and preserves verified sites, including the earliest CPC secret communication station (Erdaogou Post Office Site, built 1924, listed as a municipal protection unit in 2002), the Fanghua Martyr Monument, and the "Return Our Rivers and Mountains" patriotic mural at Changsheng Primary School (Changchun Kuancheng District Bureau of Culture and Tourism, 2024). These officially recognized relics record the city's arduous revolutionary struggle and act as intuitive teaching materials for patriotism education and spiritual literacy.

Urban Memory and Sci-Tech Cultural Heritage. The block retains many century-old urban buildings and folk customs that reflect Changchun's urban evolution. In particular, the Instrument Museum of the Chinese Academy of Sciences on Tiebai Tianguang Road preserves valuable optical research and development heritage, integrating urban humanity with scientific and technological spirit into a diversified resource system for comprehensive literacy training.

3.2. Research Methods

This study adopts a mixed-methods design combining qualitative investigation and quantitative analysis to ensure the authenticity and comprehensiveness of the research results. A cross-sectional design was employed, meaning that all data were collected at a single point in time; consequently, the findings reflect associations rather than causal relationships.

Field Investigation Method. The research team conducted a 30-day continuous on-site investigation of all core heritage blocks, industrial relics, and red revolutionary sites in the Tiebai area, recording each site's protection status, cultural connotation, and public education conditions to form standardized first-hand data. More than 30 student volunteers recruited through open campus recruitment assisted with site documentation, photographic recording, and preliminary heritage cataloguing.

Questionnaire Survey Method. This study selected undergraduates from Jilin Engineering Normal University (JENU) as participants. Located in Kuancheng

District, JENU has a long history of teacher education and engineering training, and its campus is adjacent to the Tiebai historic block, providing a sample of students with routine access to local cultural resources. Participants were recruited through open campus recruitment, including announcements on the official student affairs platform, class group chats, and student organization networks. A total of 320 questionnaires were distributed, and 308 valid questionnaires were recovered (effective recovery rate 96.25%). The sample covered all four academic years and humanities, social sciences, science, and engineering majors: 142 local Changchun students and 166 non-local students; 156 humanities/social science majors and 152 science/engineering majors. Although the convenience sample from a single university limits generalizability, the university's location and diverse student body provide a meaningful case.

Semi-structured Interview Method. A total of 20 undergraduates and 8 university teachers at JENU participated in one-on-one in-depth interviews. Student interviewees were selected from questionnaire respondents through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in academic major, year of study, and place of origin; teacher interviewees were recruited from both humanities/social science and science/engineering departments to capture varied disciplinary perspectives. Each interview lasted 30 - 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participant's consent. Interviews focused on the current situation, practical bottlenecks, and optimization suggestions for integrating Tiebai cultural heritage into university education. Interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with two researchers independently coding the transcripts, and inter-coder reliability assessed by Cohen's $\kappa = 0.78$, indicating substantial agreement. Qualitative findings were integrated with quantitative survey results through methodological triangulation, whereby interview themes corroborated and elaborated survey patterns.

3.3. Questionnaire Instrument and Scale Construction

The questionnaire was developed based on the research variables and the cultural context of the Tiebai area. It comprises five sections: (1) demographics (gender, age, ethnicity, major, year, place of origin); (2) regional cultural cognition; (3) regional cultural inheritance attitudes; (4) regional cultural development preferences; and (5) open-ended suggestions. The instrument underwent expert review by three faculty members in cultural studies and education for content validity, and a pilot test with 20 students refined item wording. The following scales and indices were constructed from the items.

Heritage Exposure Index (HEI). This independent variable measures students' contact with Tiebai cultural resources as a composite of two items: (a) the number of Tiebai heritage sites whose background the respondent could recognize (Question 6, six listed sites, scored 0 - 6); and (b) whether the respondent had visited any Tiebai cultural venue (Question 10, binary, scored 0 - 1). The HEI was standardized to a 0 - 1 scale.

Cultural Identity Scale (CIS). This dependent variable was measured with three five-point Likert items: (a) self-rated understanding of Tiebai culture (Question 5, 1 = “not at all” to 5 = “very much”); (b) perceived impact of Tiebai culture on Changchun’s socioeconomic development (Question 7); and (c) perceived cultural influence of the Tiebai area (Question 8). The scale showed acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.82$).

Place Attachment Proxy (PAP). Because the questionnaire lacked a dedicated multi-item place attachment scale, satisfaction with the current protection and development of Tiebai historical culture (Question 9, five-point Likert) was used as a proxy for affective bonding. Place attachment was assessed in more depth through semi-structured interviews, in which students described their emotional connection to Changchun and the Tiebai area before and after cultural participation.

Humanistic Literacy Index (HLI). This dependent variable was operationalized as the breadth of students’ awareness of cultural preservation and promotion strategies, computed as the sum of endorsed options in two multiple-select items: (a) measures helpful for Tiebai cultural inheritance (Question 12, five options); and (b) effective channels for promoting Tiebai culture (Question 13, five options). Higher scores indicate greater cognitive complexity regarding heritage issues.

Social Responsibility Awareness Index (SRAI). This dependent variable was operationalized as the breadth of students’ recognition of civic and educational engagement approaches, computed as the sum of endorsed options in two multiple-select items: (a) approaches to advancing Tiebai ideological-political education (Question 14, four options); and (b) effective measures for promoting Tiebai cultural research (Question 15, five options). Higher scores indicate stronger awareness of social and educational responsibility.

Control variables included student origin (local vs. non-local), academic major (humanities/social sciences vs. science/engineering), year of study, and length of residence in Changchun.

3.4. Research Questions and Analytical Strategy

Core research questions: (1) What is the current situation of students’ cognition and participation in Tiebai historical and cultural resources? (2) What positive educational associations are observed between Tiebai’s regional historical culture and students’ comprehensive literacy? (3) What problems hinder the integration of Tiebai cultural resources with local university education? (4) How can school-city integration education based on regional historical and cultural resources be optimized?

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 26.0. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages) were computed for all variables; independent-samples t-tests compared group differences by student origin and academic major, with Cohen’s d as the effect size; Pearson correlation coefficient

cients examined associations between heritage exposure and the outcome variables; and a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed) was applied.

4. Research Results and Analysis

4.1. Current Situation of College Students' Cognition of Tiebai Regional Cultural Resources

Questionnaire statistics show that only 18.5% of respondents ($n = 57$) have systematic and comprehensive cognition of Tiebai's historical and cultural resources; 42.2% ($n = 130$) have superficial and fragmented understanding, and 39.3% ($n = 121$) have almost no relevant cognition. In terms of practical participation, merely 15.6% of students ($n = 48$) participate in on-site heritage investigation, red culture research, and other immersive practical activities. Most students obtain scattered cultural information only through online platforms and lack in-depth place-based experiential learning.

Significant group differences emerged in students' cultural cognition and participation. Independent-samples *t*-tests revealed that local Changchun students ($n = 142$, $M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.95$) scored significantly higher on cultural identity than non-local students ($n = 166$, $M = 2.68$, $SD = 0.87$), $t(306) = 4.31$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.49$. Humanities and social science students ($n = 156$, $M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.91$) also scored significantly higher than science and engineering students ($n = 152$, $M = 2.74$, $SD = 0.89$), $t(306) = 3.12$, $p < 0.01$, Cohen's $d = 0.35$. For heritage exposure, local students ($M = 0.42$, $SD = 0.23$) scored significantly higher than non-local students ($M = 0.28$, $SD = 0.19$), $t(306) = 5.87$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.67$. These associations thus vary with residential background and major.

Pearson correlations showed that heritage exposure was positively and significantly correlated with all four outcomes: cultural identity ($r = 0.42$), place attachment proxy ($r = 0.31$), humanistic literacy ($r = 0.28$), and social responsibility awareness ($r = 0.35$), all $p < 0.001$. These moderate correlations support the proposed mechanism, although the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference.

4.2. Perceived Educational Influences Associated with Tiebai Historical and Cultural Resources

The following findings reflect students' self-reported perceptions and observed cross-sectional associations, not causally verified educational effects.

Association with urban place attachment. The integrated railway, industrial, and red heritage of the Tiebai area constitutes the unique urban collective memory of Changchun. Students who participated in organized Tiebai cultural research activities reported significantly higher place attachment proxy scores ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.82$) compared with those who had not participated ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 0.91$), $t(306) = 5.63$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.78$. Interview data corroborated this pattern: non-local students frequently described how targeted place-based cultural immersion reduced their sense of strangeness toward the city and built stable emotional bonds with the urban environment. One third-year non-local student

remarked, “Before the Tiebai field trip, Changchun was just the city where I happened to study. Now I feel connected to its history.” Organized cultural participation may thus facilitate the conversion from passive residence to active place attachment.

Association with cultural identity and confidence. As a representative of modern urban civilization in Northeast China, the multi-dimensional heritage of the Tiebai area records the evolution of Sino-foreign cultural exchange, industrial construction, and revolutionary struggle. Students with higher heritage exposure reported significantly greater cultural identity ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$). Interviewees described how systematic learning and on-site perception of the local cultural context helped them sort out the veins of regional cultural development, recognize the unique value of local characteristics, and consolidate their cultural cognition and confidence. Humanities teacher interviewees noted that students completing Tiebai-themed course projects demonstrated more nuanced understanding of regional cultural dynamics than their peers.

Association with comprehensive humanistic literacy. The area’s diversified cultural resources form a complete implicit education system: railway culture is associated with an inclusive cross-cultural vision, industrial heritage with a rigorous and innovative professional spirit, and red revolutionary culture with patriotic feelings and social responsibility. The humanistic literacy index correlated positively with heritage exposure ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$), as did the social responsibility awareness index ($r = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$). These dimensions appear to jointly support students’ humanistic quality, moral literacy, and civic awareness, although longitudinal research is needed to establish causal direction.

4.3. Existing Problems in School-City Integrated Cultural Education

Insufficient institutional linkage between universities and urban cultural sectors. JENU and other local universities in Changchun have not established stable, long-term cooperative mechanisms with heritage protection institutions and cultural and tourism departments in Kuancheng District. Tiebai’s abundant heritage remains separated from university teaching systems, lacking specialized curriculum embedding and standardized practical teaching arrangements, which lowers the efficiency of converting cultural resources into educational resources. Interview data revealed that 7 of 8 teacher participants reported no formal collaboration with local cultural institutions.

Single participation channel and low student initiative. Students’ contact with Tiebai culture relies mainly on sporadic campus publicity and individual casual visits, without systematic, organized, and professional cultural learning and practical platforms. Most students lack subjective awareness of active cultural learning, which hinders the formation of deep cultural cognition and emotional value internalization. Survey data showed that 64.3% of respondents had never participated in any organized Tiebai cultural activity.

Mismatch between heritage development and youth educational demands. Current protection and development of Tiebai heritage focus on cultural tourism and preservation while overlooking targeted educational development for college students. Exhibition and interpretation remain macroscopic and universal, lacking youth-oriented, academic, and interactive content adapted to students' cognitive characteristics and learning needs. Student interviewees frequently commented that existing site exhibitions were "too tourist-oriented" and "not academically engaging".

5. Countermeasures and Suggestions

5.1. Building a Long-Term School-City Cooperative Education Mechanism

Local universities should actively build long-term school-city collaborative education mechanisms with heritage protection and cultural tourism departments in Kuancheng District. Both parties can jointly compile an educational resource catalogue of Tiebai cultural heritage, construct shared educational platforms, and establish stable off-campus practical teaching bases in typical heritage blocks. Incorporating Tiebai cultural practice into the second classroom assessment system will institutionalize and normalize place-based cultural education.

5.2. Developing Characteristic Regional Cultural Courses and Practical Activities

Universities can develop generalized cultural quality courses and major-based characteristic expansion courses based on the cultural characteristics of the Tiebai area. For humanities students, universities can offer courses on regional heritage protection and urban historical research; for science and engineering students, they can carry out industrial heritage innovation and practical design activities based on local industrial resources. Regular cultural research, heritage publicity, and red story activities fully mobilize students' enthusiasm for active participation.

5.3. Enriching Cultural Communication Channels and Immersive Educational Scenarios

Relying on campus new media platforms, universities can popularize the historical stories and heritage values of the Tiebai area to expand students' daily cultural cognition channels. Government and university departments jointly optimize heritage exhibition forms, add youth-oriented explanation content and interactive experience projects, and build immersive place-based educational scenarios. These measures promote students' transformation from passive cultural reception to active cultural exploration and deepen the internalization of educational effects.

5.4. Implementing Differentiated Cultural Education Guidance

Targeted differentiated education strategies should be implemented for heteroge-

neous student groups. For non-local students, universities strengthen regional cultural popularization and practical guidance to help them quickly integrate into urban cultural life. For humanities students, universities carry out in-depth heritage research and cultural innovation inheritance activities. For science and engineering students, universities guide the integration of regional industrial cultural spirit into professional learning, achieving precise educational empowerment for each student group.

6. Conclusion

Urban historical and cultural heritage serves as an irreplaceable implicit educational resource for regional higher education and effectively supplements and optimizes formal classroom teaching. The Tiebai area possesses unique and diverse cultural resources, including railway civilization, modern industrial heritage, and red revolutionary culture, which are positively associated with college students' self-reported place attachment, cultural identity, and humanistic literacy. However, the educational value of local heritage is constrained by insufficient school-city linkage, single student participation paths, and mismatched heritage development and educational demands.

This study takes a typical old industrial urban block in Northeast China as the research case and examines the positive associations between place-based cultural resources and college students' literacy development, filling the empirical research gap of localized place-based education in Northeast China. The proposed school-city integration strategies provide operable practical references for regional university cultural education. Several limitations warrant acknowledgement. First, the cross-sectional design cannot establish causal relationships; future research should employ longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs to test causal direction. Second, the sample was drawn from a single university, limiting generalizability. Third, self-reported perceptions may be subject to social desirability bias. Future research should also expand sample coverage across multiple universities, examine the dynamic long-term influence of regional cultural heritage on student growth, and further optimize how urban cultural resources empower high-quality higher education.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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