

Drama and Cultural Identity of College Students: A Case Study of a Campus English Drama Club

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Abstract

This study examines how drama consolidates college students' cultural identity through activities organized by a campus English drama club. By organizing English drama competitions, operating a bilingual WeChat official account, and conducting questionnaires, the research reveals that students exhibit heightened interest in English adaptations of Chinese classic dramas rooted in cultural and historical themes, actively supporting such content through interactive behaviors like liking and sharing. Interviews further indicate that participation in drama performances not only enhances students' English language acquisition but also fosters a stronger sense of cultural identity and pride.

Keywords

Cultural identity; Drama; English drama club.

1. Introduction

The wave of globalization has promoted interconnectivity among countries and facilitated their modernization. In the process of China's integration into the world, English as an international language has gained significant emphasis in the field of education. However, language serves as a carrier of culture, inherently embedded with ideology and value. With the proliferation of English courses and the popularity of western cultural products, Western culture and values have gradually permeated Chinese society, leading to confusion and anxiety among students regarding cultural identity. As Fan Juan (2009) has pointed out in *A Study on the Cultural Identity Crisis of New Generation College Students* that college students, as the representatives of China's intellectual class in the next half a century, will definitely influence the value orientation of the whole Chinese society in the future. Therefore, the construction of college students' cultural identity is an important issue in the field of education.

Taking the campus English drama club as an example, this study explores how cultural identity of college students can be promoted through the promotion and performance of Chinese and Western plays with shared themes in English. Scholars such as Dong Wenna, Sun Zhihong, and Li Feng (2017) have pointed out the important role of college drama in enhancing the comprehensive quality of college students and helping them establish a correct outlook on life and values. Through the art form of drama, campus English drama club integrates language learning with cultural comparison, guides college students to deeply understand Chinese and Western cultures and their underlying values. This approach aims to cultivate their critical thinking ability, strengthen their awareness and appreciation of Chinese culture, and enhance their cultural confidence and national pride.

2. Current Situation and Challenges of College Students' Cultural Identity

Under the background of globalization, the current situation of college students' cultural identity is characterized with diversity and complexity. On the one hand, with the popularization of the Internet and the rapid development of information technology, college

students are exposed to increasingly rich and diversified cultural resources, which provides more space for them to choose cultural identification. On the other hand, the cultural impact and collision brought by globalization make some college students feel lost and confused in the multicultural environment, making it difficult for them to form a stable cultural identity. In recent years, studies on the cultural identity of college students have gradually increased. It has been found that some college students are confused about their cultural identity and have cultural identity anxiety in the process of English learning. While they are eager to understand and absorb the elements of Western culture in order to improve their English proficiency and international vision, they simultaneously feel estranged from their native culture, even exhibiting cultural inferiority complex. This cultural identity confusion not only affects the psychological health of college students, but also has a negative impact on their personal growth and social integration.

In addition, some studies have also pointed out that the lack of cultural identity of college students is closely related to the deficiencies in cultural identity education in colleges and universities. Empirical studies highlight problems like insufficient attention, fragmented content and outdated pedagogical methods in cultural education, and point out that the existing problems make it difficult for students to form a systematic cultural cognition system. Yuan Min (2025) believes that college students lack in-depth knowledge of Chinese culture due to limited exposure to traditional courses, as curricula prioritize professional skills and Western cultural education.

Current challenges in college students' cultural identity include mainly three aspects: insufficient knowledge of traditional culture, blind pursuit of western culture and confusion in cultural identity. Firstly, insufficient knowledge of traditional culture. In the context of globalization, Western culture, with its powerful influence and dissemination capabilities, has had a great impact on local culture. In the process of pursuing fashion, some college students overlook the value and significance of traditional culture, resulting in inadequate knowledge of its core principles. This deficiency is evident not only in their cognitive grasp of traditional culture, but also in their attitude and behaviors towards it. For example, many college students show little interest in or understanding of traditional cultural elements such as traditional festivals and folk customs, and even hold dismissive or resistant attitudes towards them. The lack of knowledge about traditional culture has led to insufficient understanding and identification with local cultural heritage, which further weaken their cultural identity.

Secondly, the blind pursuit of Western culture. With the advancement of the Internet and the popularization of information technology, college students are increasingly exposed to Western culture influences. In their quest for novelty and excitement, some students uncritically idolize and imitate foreign cultural practices, neglecting the uniqueness and intrinsic worth of their own heritage. For instance, some college students blindly imitate Western culture in terms of dress, eating habits, language expression, etc., and thereby jeopardizing the inheritance and development of local culture.

Third, confusion in cultural identity. In a multicultural environment, some college students struggle to develop a stable cultural identity due to insufficient understanding of well-defined cultural identity concepts and values. They neither fully embrace their native culture nor completely adopt Western culture, leaving them in a state of confusion and ambivalence regarding their cultural identity. The confusion in cultural identity results in a lack of belonging and self-confidence in multicultural environments. This deficiency not only negatively impacts their mental health and personal development but also hinders their social integration and career advancement.

3. The Role of Drama in Cultural Inheritance and Cultural Identity Consolidation

According to Chen Guoming (2009), culture is a shared symbolic system that guides human behavior and directs people to participate in groups. In other words, culture can only be transmitted through communication, and different cultures inevitably influence communication systems. Li Xiang & Yan Guangyao (2021) believe that campus drama holds inherent advantages in promoting “China’s outstanding traditional culture” due to its creative participants, high participation and artistic qualities. As a vital art form, drama serves unique functions in cultural inheritance and cultural identity construction.

Firstly, through role-playing and narrative enactment, drama vividly reconstructs historical scenarios and cultural traditions, allowing audiences to subtly absorb the allure of culture during performances. This immersive and dynamic form of expression enables audiences to understand cultural connotations and historical contexts, thereby fostering stronger identification with and respect for cultural heritage.

Secondly, as a collective art form with profound historical depth and cultural significance, drama strengthens the audience’s sense of collective belonging and cultural identity. Through role-playing and narrative reenactment in performances, it vividly reconstructs historical scenes and cultural traditions, allowing audiences to deeply explore the origins, development, and evolution of culture during the viewing process. For example, historical dramas illuminate the context and essence of cultural history by recreating pivotal events and individual destinies, while ethnic dramas showcase distinctive customs and practices, enabling audiences to appreciate the uniqueness and value of ethnic cultural heritage.

In addition, during the performance, the audience can develop a profound sense of collective consciousness and cultural identity through shared participation and interaction. This sense of collective belonging and cultural identity not only helps them better integrate into the social and cultural environment, but also promotes the exchange and integration of different cultures. Finally, as a tool for cross-cultural communication, drama can foster mutual understanding and integration between different cultures. By watching and participating in Chinese and Western drama performances centered on shared themes, college students are able to gain deeper insights into cultures, and at the same time integrate their native heritage into performances. This process cultivates inclusivity and respect for cultural diversity. Such cross-cultural exchanges and interactive experiences not only bridge cultural divides but also empower students to broaden perspectives, deepen mutual understanding, and foster social harmony.

4. Campus English Drama Club Activities and Practices

The club has organized English Drama Competition and operates a WeChat Official Account on drama. The English Drama Competition, held once per semester, attracts a large number of student participants. The plays include both Chinese and Western classics as well as innovative adaptations, highlighting the integration and diversity of Chinese and Western cultures. At the same time, the club operates an WeChat Official Account, which regularly shares Chinese and Western classic plays alongside bilingual scripts, catering to the needs of both drama enthusiasts and English learners.

4.1. Preliminary survey

To comprehensively understand college students’ preferences for drama-related cultural content and their attitudes toward drama as a language learning tool, a questionnaire was distributed during the initial phase of the drama club’s establishment. Students from diverse faculties and majors were selected as sample participants, and data collection was conducted

through a combination of online and offline methods, with a total 287 valid questionnaires collected.

The survey results indicated significant findings across multiple dimensions. In terms of knowledge about drama, 62.72% of respondents demonstrated limited familiarity with drama, rarely encountering drama in their academic or leisure activities. However, when asked about their interest in attending bilingual (Chinese-English) performances on campus, half of the participants expressed strong enthusiasm. Regarding cultural preferences in drama, 53.31% of respondents reported equal appreciation for both English adaptations of Chinese plays and original English-language dramas, while 30.66% showed a stronger inclination toward English adaptations of Chinese works. In the dimension of drama's impact on English learning, 81.75% of respondents affirmed that drama-based approaches effectively enhanced their language acquisition. Furthermore, concerning drama's role in promoting Chinese culture, 64.81% identified a deficiency of traditional cultural content in university-level English education. Notably, 82.23% voiced keen interest in English adaptations of Chinese classical stories and believed that it would enhance their cultural pride and identity.

The preliminary survey results indicate that college students generally lack sufficient awareness of drama. The establishment of campus drama clubs can address this gap by enriching their cultural activities and enhancing their understanding of drama. Regarding content preferences, students show greater interest in English adaptations of Chinese classic plays while also demonstrating moderate interest in original English-language dramas. This preference stems from their affinity for Chinese cultural heritage, as familiarity with the storyline reduces linguistic barriers, enabling them to infer underlying meanings through contextual cues and educated guesses. Unlike conventional language learning methods in which students often stagnate at vocabulary, this immersive approach facilitates more effective English acquisition.

4.2. Activities

Based on preliminary findings, the campus English drama club has initiated two core practices: English Drama Competition and a WeChat Official Account on drama. The English Drama Competition, a university-level event held once per semester, is open to students from all majors and academic years, establishing itself as a significant cultural activity. Meanwhile, the WeChat Official Account provides weekly updates to all followers, featuring content such as Chinese and Western classic plays and bilingual script excerpts.

During the preparatory phase, members in drama club adopted clear divisions of labor, dedicating efforts to script selection, rehearsals, venue setup, and promotional activities. Script with cultural depth and character complexity are selected to enhance the appeal of performances. To elevate production quality, the club invited experts to collaborate on scriptwriting and rehearsal guidance. For publicity, a hybrid approach was implemented: traditional media such as campus radio broadcasts and posters were combined with digital platforms like the WeChat Official Account and QQ groups to disseminate competition details and team recruitment information widely, thereby attracting broader student participation.

The competition process strictly adhered to principles of fairness and openness, with expert judges invited to ensure equal opportunities for all participants to show their talents. The successful hosting of the English Drama Competition has not only enriched campus culture but also provided students with a platform for self-expression and cultural identity enhancement. Meanwhile, the drama club's official account continues to promote content through weekly posts featuring Chinese and Western classic plays and bilingual script excerpts.

With the support of the university, English drama competition attracted extensive participation from students across diverse faculties and majors. The event selected Chinese and Western stories, including adaptations such as Western classics like *The Million Pound Note*, *Black Snow*

Princess (a radical reworking of *Snow White*), and Chinese stories such as *The Flowers of War* and *Thunderstorm Illusion* (from the Chinese masterpiece *Thunderstorm*). These works not only embodied profound cultural connotations but also demonstrated cultural diversity through performances.

4.3. Results

English Drama Competition achieved great success, which not only aroused a warm response within the university, but also won high praise from teachers and students. The competition received a total of 60 submissions from different colleges and majors, which covered a wide range of genres such as Chinese and English classic plays, modern adaptations and original scripts, and fully demonstrated the creativity and artistic talent of college students. Participants spanned all academic years, from freshmen to seniors, with over 300 students actively involved in performances and more than 2000 audiences attending.

Meanwhile, our WeChat Official Account has achieved remarkable results. Since its establishment, the follower count has steadily continued to grow and reached 1,200 to date, including not only on-campus faculty and students but also drama enthusiasts and English learners nationwide. The weekly updates—featuring Chinese and Western classic plays and bilingual script excerpts—not only cater to followers' demand for drama but also serve as a platform for English learning and cross-cultural exploration.

Each post averages over 1,000 views, with retweets exceeding 200 times, accompanied by lively interactions and active engagement in the comment sections. These not only validate the account's popularity but also reflect college students' keen interest in drama.

These achievements not only demonstrate the proactive role of the campus English drama club in promoting drama and advancing English language learning but also significantly enhance college students' sense of pride and identification with Chinese culture. By participating in or attending English drama performances, students have not only improved their English listening and speaking skills but also deepened their understanding and appreciation of both Chinese and Western culture and value.

Furthermore, the hosting of the drama competition has ignited students' enthusiasm for drama, motivating more students to actively explore and study drama-related knowledge, thereby fostering the flourishing development of campus drama culture. The successful operation of the WeChat Official Account has expanded the reach of drama culture while providing students with a convenient, on-demand learning resource to enhance their English proficiency anytime and anywhere. Collectively, these activities have facilitated cultural exchange and integration within the campus.

5. Campus English Drama Club Activities and College students' cultural identity

This study conducted in-depth interviews with selected participating actors and audience members, alongside analyzing the WeChat Official Account backend traffic data to assess the impact of bilingual (Chinese-English) drama content pushed by the drama club. The investigation encompassed multiple dimensions: students' engagement levels, satisfaction rates, cultural identity development, and cross-cultural communication competencies.

The findings demonstrate that the drama club's practical initiatives have heightened college students' attention to traditional Chinese culture, rekindled their interest in Chinese cultural heritage, and strengthened their cultural identity through dual engagement with linguistic and cultural learning, effectively bridging the gap between linguistic proficiency and ideological belonging.

Through monitoring the backend traffic data of the drama club's WeChat Official Account and conducting detailed analyses of metrics such as article views, likes, and shares, this research elucidates college students' attention patterns and content preferences toward the club's posts. The findings indicate that the bilingual (Chinese-English) content promoted by the drama club has gained widespread attention among students. Notably, topics centered on traditional and historical cultural themes have attracted significantly higher engagement and resonance.

Data from the WeChat Official Account backend reveal that content closely tied to traditional and historical cultural themes has attracted significantly higher readership. For example, posts addressing Chinese traditional festivals, folk customs, and historical narratives consistently outperformed other categories in terms of views. This phenomenon indicates that college students exhibit a profound interest in drama content reflecting indigenous cultural characteristics, demonstrating strong cultural identity and deep-rooted affinity for local heritage. As an art form, drama possesses a unique appeal in preserving and revitalizing traditional culture, as such content not only educates but also emotionally anchors audiences to their cultural roots.

Furthermore, the quantity of likes and comments serves as a critical metric for gauging content popularity. The analysis reveals that posts centered on traditional and historical cultural themes consistently receive substantially higher engagement through these interactive behaviors. College students not only read such content but actively express appreciation and endorsement via liking and commenting. This dynamic interaction demonstrates that the drama club's content not only strikes a chord with students' emotional resonance but also stimulates profound reflections on and identification with local culture, fostering an intellectual reconnection to indigenous stories.

Sharing and reposting behaviors are pivotal indicators for assessing content popularity. Data demonstrate that content focusing on traditional and historical cultural themes has been extensively shared, significantly amplifying its societal reach and cultural impact. College students' willingness to redistribute such content reflects their endorsement of the drama club's efforts in promoting local cultural heritage, as well as their proactive commitment to supporting and promoting Chinese traditions. This phenomenon not only extends the content's visibility but also attracts broader attention and follower growth for the drama club, creating a virtuous cycle of cultural advocacy.

Furthermore, some popular plays and adapted versions of classics have also garnered higher readership. This means that college students' sustained attention not only attracted to traditional culture but also to contemporary theatrical works and innovative adaptations. The high counts of likes and comments on such content reflect students' strong identification and active engagement, as they utilize these interactive features to express support and initiate dialogues with other audiences. These interactions not only enhance the dissemination of drama content, but also foster cultural exchange and cultural identity consolidation among college students.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates the pivotal role and value of drama in cultural dissemination and enhancing college students' cultural identity through the practical activities of the campus English drama club. Empirical findings reveal that drama with profound cultural depth and educational significance attracts heightened attention and engagement from students. Through the promotion, adaptation and performance of both Western and Chinese traditional dramas, students not only enhance their comprehension of cultural heritage by exploring its symbolic depth and historical continuity but also cultivate a dialectical lens to critically engage with Western cultural paradigms, while simultaneously consolidating their intellectual and affective

bonds with Chinese traditions. In all, the campus English drama club not only facilitates an understanding of diverse cultural and historical contexts but also elevate students' cultural cognition and cultural identity.

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