

# The Necessity of Implementing Theatre and Aesthetic Education in Inner Mongolia Colleges and Universities

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**To Link this Article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i4/23857> DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i4/23857

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**Published Online:** 27 November 2024

## Abstracts

This dissertation researches the theatre aesthetic education in colleges and universities in Inner Mongolia, China, and examines the following two issues, draws results, and presents personal conclusions: first, the status of theatre aesthetic education in colleges and universities in Inner Mongolia; second, what qualities and competencies are enhanced for college students through the study of theatre aesthetic education. In this study, the qualitative research method was adopted, using text content analysis, literature research method, and interview method. Through the study, it was found that the aesthetic education of theatre in the region is not valued in colleges and universities, the curriculum lacks inclusive consideration, teaching resources are scarce, the theatre atmosphere is not sufficiently created, the students' artistic foundation is not balanced, and there is insufficient integration with national and regional cultures, and other problems. The implementation of theatre aesthetic education courses in colleges and universities can help students in Inner Mongolia in the following five aspects: broadening artistic horizons, enhancing collective awareness, cultivating critical thinking, strengthening communication skills, and enhancing cultural identity and confidence.

**Keywords:** Inner Mongolia Universities, Theatre, Aesthetic Education, Current Situation, Ability Cultivation

### **Introductory**

Theatre aesthetic education has an important role in the cultivation of personal quality ability of college students in Inner Mongolia colleges and universities. In this paper, two issues will be examined: an analysis of the current situation of theatre aesthetic education in Inner Mongolia colleges and universities, and an examination of what kind of personal competence training theatre aesthetic education has for college students. The following two points of view are put forward: firstly, theatre aesthetic education courses play a dispensable role in the education system of Inner Mongolia colleges and universities, and theatre aesthetic education in colleges and universities in the region is not widely recognised and valued at present. Secondly, theatre aesthetic education is of great help in improving the personal ability of college students, which cannot be given in specialised academic courses, such as broadening artistic vision, enhancing collective consciousness, cultivating critical thinking, enhancing communication ability, and strengthening cultural identity and cultural confidence.

In the latest Chinese Ministry of Education's document "Notice of the Ministry of Education on the Comprehensive Implementation of School Aesthetic Education Immersion Action", it is clearly stated that aesthetic education aims to comprehensively improve the quality and level of aesthetic education in schools, in which theatre, as an important component of aesthetic education, is particularly emphasised (2023.). Through the study, the authors concluded that as a curriculum integrating theatre and aesthetic education, the curriculum focuses on interdisciplinary and comprehensive education, which not only involves arts and humanities, but also can be integrated into science, engineering and other fields to help students build a diversified knowledge system. The significance of this study is to provide improved theoretical support and practical guidance for theatre and aesthetics education in colleges and universities in Inner Mongolia, as well as to provide certain theoretical basis and reference for promoting theatre and aesthetics education in colleges and universities in other minority regions in China.

### *Formulation of the Research Question*

Located in China's northern border region, Inner Mongolia is an economically and culturally underdeveloped region of China. The region's slow development of economic production, irrational industrial structure, lagging behind in infrastructure construction, resulting in brain drain. Based on the objective fact that the development of the region is not balanced, the aesthetic education resources and education level of colleges and universities in Inner Mongolia are also lagging behind the developed regions.

According to the list of names of higher education institutions (2024.) published by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2024, there are a total of 54 colleges and universities in the region, of which 17 are undergraduate colleges and universities and 37 are specialised colleges and universities. Only one of the colleges and universities offers a theatre major. In Inner Mongolia, where the concept of theatre aesthetic education is not advanced and resources for theatre education are not abundant, how is the development of theatre aesthetic education, whether colleges and universities pay attention to theatre aesthetic education, and what kind of ability can non-theatre majors get through theatre

aesthetic education are all the questions this thesis wants to raise, so to have a deeper understanding of the development of theatre aesthetic education in Inner Mongolia colleges and universities, we have to explore the following two questions in this thesis. What is the status quo of theatre aesthetic education in colleges and universities in Inner Mongolia? What kind of ability can be cultivated by theatre aesthetic education for college students?

### *Related Review*

Based on the fact that the target population of the study is colleges and universities in Inner Mongolia, China, all the literature was selected from China Knowledge Network (CNKI). CNKI (China's largest academic paper database).

In the literature search, about "Inner Mongolia, colleges and universities, theatre aesthetic education" as the keyword search, there is no relevant literature for reference; with "theatre, aesthetic education, colleges and universities" as the keyword, only 26 articles can be searched. These studies are about "Theatre aesthetic education for the cultivation of aesthetic ability of college students", "How to implement ideological and political education through theatre education, and the export of Chinese historical and revolutionary culture", and "Creating campus culture through theatre". The research direction of "creating campus culture through theatre". In these studies, theatre is regarded as an auxiliary teaching tool in combination with disciplines, which is used to improve the aesthetic ability, emotion and patriotism of college students, but it does not deal with the necessity of implementing theatre aesthetics in colleges and universities, and at the same time, it does not have a comprehensive understanding of the abilities that can be improved by the students.

In this study, the status quo of theatre aesthetic education in colleges and universities in Inner Mongolia will be analysed and sorted out to comprehensively summarize the improvement of students' abilities and add gaps in research related to theatre aesthetic education in colleges and universities in Inner Mongolia.

### **Conceptual Definition**

#### *Theatre*

Zhang Haitao and Gao Jing define theatre in *Appreciation of Chinese and Foreign Theatre Works*, "Theatre, which contains four elements: actor, story, stage and audience, is a general term for the art of stage performance with lines, stage movements, dance, music and other forms of art as the purpose of narration, a comprehensive art of interpreting stories through the actors' portrayal of a certain character and the effective organisation of words and actions on the stage. It is a comprehensive art of story interpretation through actors playing a certain character on stage and effectively organising words and actions on stage. It involves the co-creative content of several art categories, such as: dialogue, singing, dance, set, props, lighting, music, etc." (Zhang, & Gao, 2014). In this way, it seems that theatre is an art of storytelling about human activities, through literature and factual acts played by people on stage. It requires the cooperation of many aspects on the stage, and the stage presentation is reached through the synthesis of many arts.

#### *Aesthetic Development*

Cai Yuanpei is a famous Chinese educator, he especially emphasised the importance of aesthetic education in education, in his book *Aesthetic Education* (Cai, 2022) Cai Yuanpei

argued that aesthetic education not only improves a person's aesthetic ability, but also cultivates sentiment and develops a sound personality. Zhu Guangqian, a famous Chinese aesthetician, cultural scholar and educator, has profound thoughts and views on aesthetic education in China. In his book *The Education of Beauty* (Zhu, 2022), he emphasises that aesthetic education enhances the individual's humanistic qualities and ability to express emotions and aesthetic appreciation, that cultivating the individual's aesthetic sensibilities is the core task of aesthetic education, and that it focuses on cultivating the individual's ability to think independently and his or her unique personality.

Generally speaking, the goals of Chinese aesthetic education are more comprehensive, focusing not only on art appreciation, but also emphasising the enhancement of moral cultivation and personality perfection through art education.

### *Theatre Aesthetic Education*

In this study, as an interdisciplinary educational tool, the authors view theatre aesthetics from a dramaturgical and pedagogical perspective, combining forms of art education and aesthetics education, encompassing knowledge and methods from multiple disciplines such as literature, art, psychology, and society, and the ability to broaden the students' artistic horizons, enhance their collective consciousness, develop critical thinking, and strengthen their communication skills through learning through hands-on theatre participation.

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, using the literature research method: reviewing and analysing existing relevant literature to obtain the background and theoretical support for the study; the content analysis method of textual analysis: content analysis of literature, course materials, syllabi, policy documents, etc.; and the interview method: in-depth interviews with theatre education specialists to obtain their detailed insights.

The following conclusions were drawn from the study: theatre aesthetic education in the region's colleges and universities lack awareness of the aesthetic education function of theatre, students' artistic foundation is not balanced, and there is insufficient integration with national and regional cultures. The study of theatre can strengthen artistic perception, critical thinking, collective consciousness and improve communication skills.

### **Findings and Discussion**

#### *Status of Theatre Aesthetic Education in Colleges and Universities in Inner Mongolia*

First of all, according to the relevant information on the Internet and documents released by authoritative departments, there is no record of holding regular college theatre festivals in Inner Mongolia, and the degree of recognition and acceptance of theatre culture in the region is low. Only in 2021 did the Inner Mongolia Academy of Arts host the 8th China Higher Drama Education Union Exchange Activity and the 2nd Student Drama Exhibition. Most of the participants in this event were colleges and universities with theatre majors in China, or associations of colleges and universities active in the field of theatre education, and only one college, the Inner Mongolia Arts College, participated, with no other colleges or universities from Inner Mongolia.

Secondly, in order to further approach the status quo of theatre aesthetic education in Inner Mongolia colleges and universities, the authors used the interview method in the study to obtain a more intuitive view from the authorities. In the interviews, five experts from Inner Mongolia universities were invited, who were engaged in theatre, aesthetics, education teaching and management, and were very familiar with the field of theatre aesthetics education in Inner Mongolia colleges and universities, in the interviews, the following questions were raised about the status of theatre aesthetics and education in Inner Mongolia colleges and universities:

1. What do you think should be the teaching objectives and core values of theatre aesthetic education or aesthetic education in colleges and universities in Inner Mongolia? Have you encountered any challenges in the implementation of theatre and aesthetic education or aesthetic education in Inner Mongolia's colleges and universities? 2. Is there a problem of unbalanced resource distribution? 3.

Summarising the experts' answers are as follows: 1. Teaching objectives and core values should be concerned with enhancing students' artistic cultivation, improving aesthetic literacy, and promoting the development of personality and all-round qualities. 2. The implementation of education is faced with a number of difficulties and challenges, which come from the degree of governmental concern together with the advancement of aesthetic education in schools as well as the problems of teaching resources. 3. In the colleges and universities of Inner Mongolia, the promotion and inheritance of ethnic minority regional cultures through the theatre is very necessary. The promotion and inheritance of regional culture of ethnic minorities is very necessary. Theatre aesthetic education also exists problems such as insufficient resources, lack of curriculum system, unbalanced students' art foundation, lack of inclusive consideration, and insufficient aesthetic integration in daily teaching.

Finally, by observing the curriculum of theatre courses, the researcher found that the same problem exists in the curriculum and selection. In the colleges and universities in Inner Mongolia, theatre only appears as a general education course, which students choose independently according to their willingness to learn and learning interests, and they can only study online after they have successfully selected courses through the Internet. The courses taught are mainly theoretical courses, with the content focusing on theatre theory, work appreciation and theatre history. The form of lectures through the Internet reflects the lack of resources for theatre teachers in our university, and the lack of attention to the construction of theatre teaching staff in colleges and universities. The Internet lectures are basically recorded lectures, with no practical content and a lack of interaction between teachers and students, so that students lose the opportunity to participate in practice. In view of the above observations, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. College students lack theatre experience. For a long time, theatre has been absent from China's aesthetic education, with music and art being the main content and means of implementing the aesthetic education curriculum from pre-school to high school. In popular opinion, theatre has always been an art category with a high threshold of professionalism, and students' lack of theatre experience has led to the lack of resonance of theatre in the general education curriculum.

2. Single way of theatre education. In Inner Mongolia, theatre courses in colleges and universities appear in general education, and most of the general education is based on network courses, which is poor in content updating, course resources, teacher-student interaction. The content of the lessons is mainly in the form of theatre theory, theatre history, theatre appreciation, etc., which has appeared a situation of heavy theory and light practice. As we all know, theatre is an art with strong practicality, and the single teaching method does not let the theatre course give full play to the advantages of practical education.

3. Theatre education atmosphere is not strong. Inner Mongolia colleges and universities in the student associations, most of the music, dance, literature-based, about the theatre associations are particularly scarce, and Inner Mongolia has not held a college drama festival and other activities, some colleges and universities have set up a theatre club, but ultimately due to the lack of performance platforms, the lack of professional teachers to guide the relevant policies to support the reasons for the closure, there is no corresponding system and conditions to stimulate the students' enthusiasm for the theatre. There is no perfect system and conditions to stimulate students' enthusiasm for theatre, which makes the atmosphere of theatre in colleges and universities in the region lukewarm.

4. The practical education function in theatre is weakened. Aesthetic education combines artistic practice and aesthetic education, whether from the perspective of artistic practice or from the perspective of aesthetic education, theatre is undoubtedly the best means of implementation. However, at present, the theatre in Inner Mongolia universities, and even China's aesthetic education curriculum system, does not occupy the position it should be, people look at the theatre is still from a professional point of view, not aware of the practice of the theatre to play aesthetic education function through the huge advantages.

5. Lack of official support. The level of government attention and the lack of promotion of aesthetic education in schools, in addition to the lack of support in terms of policy and funding, also faces problems such as insufficient resources for theatre teachers, incomplete interpretation of policies, lack of implementation and promotion, and insufficient understanding of the functions of theatre education. In some competitions and activities, theatre is more like a task to be accomplished out of the need to participate in a competition, with a temporary team being formed that is no longer active once the competition is over.

6. Transmission of regional culture. It is necessary to promote and pass on the regional culture of ethnic minorities through theatre, but the lack of resources and support has affected the development of this area. In the course of the nation's history, there have been many heroic figures, and borrowing these advantages not only provides creative material for theatre, but also has a positive effect on promoting national culture and fostering the cultural identity of university students, and both performers and audiences are educated in the process of participation.

### *The Role of Theatre Aesthetics in the Personal Development of University Students*

In Liao Ketui's *History of Theatre in Western Europe* (Liao, 2023) describes theatre in this way: "Primitive theatre is a part of the life of primitive human beings, a reproduction of their labour and struggle practices, a concrete manifestation of their knowledge and feelings about all kinds of things, and a form of art in which they express their thoughts and feelings". The stage of higher education is an important period of personal growth, an important stage of college students' self-exploration and self-knowledge of the world. Through theatre, college students enhance their perception and knowledge of things, and at the same time stimulate their expressive ability, which is the highest pursuit and goal of theatre aesthetic education.

Theatre is a group participatory art and at the same time gathers a variety of art forms, and from a pedagogical point of view, it not only imparts knowledge, but also pays more attention to cultivating students' creative thinking, critical thinking and communication skills. Theatre aesthetic education is a kind of education that focuses on participation and process, which stresses experience and reflection, encourages students to participate actively, and meets the requirements of constructivist learning theory.

According to the analysis of the literature and the author's many years of experience in guiding non-theatre students, receiving aesthetic education in theatre has significantly improved the ability to broaden artistic horizons, enhance collective consciousness, cultivate critical thinking and increase communication skills.

First, broaden the artistic vision. "Theatre, as a comprehensive art, combines the ideological nature of literature, the auditory nature of music, the spatial nature of painting, and the expressive nature of dance, and contains a rich traditional Chinese culture" (Xu, Y. 2024). After entering the new media era, all information is at hand, people's desire and collection of information is no longer the same as before, and the dissemination of art and culture appears to be rapid and fragmented. In the era of artistic diversification, college students are prone to indulge in popular culture and lack of attention to classical culture and art, and lack of correct aesthetics, leading to the lack of personal discernment. Through the knowledge of the script, the excavation of the characters, the conception of the stage layout, the use of music until the final stage presentation in the theatre, the participating students can be involved in the process of artistic creation, which can stimulate their artistic initiative, their interest in actively exploring the unknown field of art, and thus broaden their artistic horizons.

Secondly, it enhances collective awareness and teamwork. As a collective participatory art, theatre pursues collaboration, and students must work together to complete all aspects of script selection, role allocation, rehearsal and performance. Participants (college students) can achieve the unity of commonality and individuality through their own efforts under the premise of unity of purpose, so as to cultivate college students' collaborative ability and collective consciousness.

Thirdly, the development of critical thinking. At a time when information is fragmented and highly disseminated, which diminishes one's ability to reflect, plays often deal with complex human and social issues, and students need to think deeply about the background and implications of these issues when analysing and performing such content. Through analysing scripts, interpreting characters, plots and themes, students develop independent thinking and critical skills. Through character creation, students learn to think differently and develop the ability to think from multiple perspectives. Through the process of interaction and discussion in rehearsals, students communicate openly, share insights, evaluate and reflect on various perspectives, and enhance their critical thinking skills.

Fourthly, communication skills are enhanced to improve communication and empathy. By expressing lines clearly and using body language and facial expressions, students improve their communication skills in general. At the same time, understanding and responding to others' lines and emotions enhances comprehension. In co-operation, students continue to

cooperate, co-ordinate and share opinions, enhance their ability to co-operate and resolve conflicts, and learn to communicate effectively and improve themselves by receiving and adjusting feedback. Playing different roles, students enhance their empathy and deepen their understanding of the inner workings of the characters through authentic expression of their emotions, and improve their ability to express emotions and empathise.

Fifth, in Inner Mongolia universities, the study of theatre by college students plays an important role in enhancing cultural identity and cultural confidence. Through theatre performances, students can gain an in-depth understanding of the cultural history of the Mongolian people, pass on traditional arts, and enhance their sense of identity with their own culture. At the same time, participation in theatre activities enables them to express their cultural qualities more confidently, enhance their cultural self-confidence, promote ethnic cultural exchanges and integration, and strengthen their sense of cultural identity and national unity.

### **Conclusion**

As Tomashevskiy, V and others have said, "Although aesthetic education has historically been a key area for the development of an individual's aesthetics, creativity, and emotional intelligence, it tends to be marginalised in contemporary educational frameworks" (Tomashevskiy, et al 2022).

Theatre education should be included in aesthetic education, both from the point of view of ability cultivation and artistic participation. Unfortunately, however, theatre does not occupy its proper place in the current Chinese aesthetic education curriculum. Drama education seems to be in a dispensable position in the aesthetic education of Inner Mongolia colleges and universities. Despite the fact that drama is mentioned in many national documents, we can see through the curricular arrangement that drama has not really entered the teaching system of students and has not attracted the attention of colleges and universities to the aesthetic function of drama education. The lack of theatre education in the basic education stage, the lack of professional teachers, the negligence of the higher authorities to the theatre courses, the public's focus on the professionalism of theatre, and the lack of excavation of the local culture are a series of problems that have contributed to the lack of smooth development and implementation of theatre in colleges and universities in Inner Mongolia.

From the sociological point of view, theatre is an extremely effective way to cultivate the spirit of cooperation; from the aesthetic point of view, theatre also fully embodies the function of emotional sharing. Aesthetic education is not limited to the passive acceptance of art by the educated, but should play a special role in the art practice of aesthetic education, college students through the practice of theatre can gain skills outside the academic system, these abilities may be more important than his mastery of professional knowledge.

For individual students, theatre can mobilise their motivation, self-awareness and social development awareness, self-improvement, and ultimately knowledge of society as a means of promoting social progress. Based on the above conclusions, the authors suggest that in future research, the following issues can be continuously paid attention to, so that theatre can be promoted to better perform its function of aesthetic education and continue to



promote the research and development of this field. Firstly, theatre education throughout the whole education stage as well as the way and content of its implementation should be added from primary school onwards, just like other aesthetic education music and fine arts, and accompany students until they enter the higher education stage. Secondly, research on the popularisation of theatre in China should be conducted to enhance public participation by strengthening awareness and allowing more people to participate in theatre, no longer perceiving it from the perspective of a single art. Finally, the research and development of theatre aesthetic education courses, and the organic integration of aesthetic education, fully exploiting the educational function of theatre, so that theatre is no longer the art of the few, but becomes a popular art.

This article is based on " mini-theatre on campus: inherit the red gene, aesthetic education to light up life " college students innovation and entrepreneurship training programme project, project number: S202211427009; "" three whole education " perspective under the implementation of the path of higher education theatre and aesthetic education " project number: jssqyr202216, scientific research topics written.

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