

# AN ANALYSIS OF ASSUMPTIONS AND AUTHENTICITY OF DRAMATIC CHARACTERIZATION BASED ON CULTURAL CONTEXTS<sup>\*</sup>

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## Abstract

This study aims to examine (1) in order to understand the influence of cultural contexts on assumptions and authenticity in theatrical representations, and (2) in order to explore the ways in which the art of theater can be adapted and enriched by adjusting the balance between assumptions and authenticity in different cultural contexts. The research methodology includes a literature review and a interview. The findings reveal the multifaceted effects of cultural contexts on dramatic characterization, including characterization, plot development, and thematic expression. The Research Discussion and Suggestions section further deepens the reflection on this issue and provides new perspectives for theater creation and research.

**Keywords:** Cultural Context; Dramatic Characterization; Assumptions; Authenticity

## Introduction

Dramatic characterization has always occupied a central position in the study of drama, serving as the medium through which stories are conveyed,

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emotions are expressed, and social realities are reflected. However, despite its significance, gaps remain in understanding how cultural context—a vital influencing factor—shapes the assumptions and authenticity embedded in characterization. Addressing these gaps is critical for advancing dramatic theory and practice, particularly in an era of globalization where cultural exchanges are increasingly frequent.

The interplay between cultural context and dramatic characterization remains underexplored, especially in terms of its specific mechanisms and implications for cross-cultural comparisons. While previous studies have examined dramatic techniques and narrative structures, insufficient attention has been given to how cultural values, beliefs, and traditions shape characterization, influence audience reception, and provide rich yet constraining materials for playwrights and actors. For example, traditional Chinese opera and Western classical drama differ significantly in their cultural logic, character development, and thematic expression. Yet, a systematic analysis comparing these traditions remains lacking, particularly in the context of contemporary global challenges.

Cultural context encompasses the values, beliefs, customs, and traditions of a society or group, playing a fundamental role in shaping dramatic works. It not only influences the expectations of audiences but also provides playwrights and performers with a framework for creative expression. This dual role—both as a source of inspiration and a constraint—leads to significant variations in characterization across cultures. Understanding these variations is essential to appreciating the diversity of dramatic traditions and identifying opportunities for innovation. From a historical perspective, the evolution of drama reveals that different cultural contexts have profoundly shaped character assumptions and authenticity. For instance, the highly stylized character archetypes in traditional Chinese opera reflect Confucian values and

hierarchical relationships, while Western classical drama often emphasizes individual agency and psychological depth, rooted in humanist traditions. These differences highlight the importance of cultural context in determining how characters are created and understood.

The necessity of this study lies in addressing the lack of comprehensive research on the role of cultural context in dramatic characterization. By examining the assumptions and authenticity within specific cultural frameworks, this research aims to enrich dramatic theory, offer insights into the creative process, and provide practical guidance for playwrights and performers working in cross-cultural contexts. The study's findings are expected to have both theoretical and practical benefits, such as: Theoretical Contributions: Expanding existing dramatic theories by introducing a comparative perspective that integrates cultural analysis. Practical Applications: Offering strategies for adapting dramatic works to diverse cultural contexts without losing their distinctive characteristics. Educational Value: Enhancing the appreciation and understanding of dramatic traditions among global audiences and practitioners.

While prior studies have examined dramatic characterization within single cultural frameworks, few have systematically analyzed its cross-cultural dimensions or explored the influence of cultural context on assumptions and authenticity. This research will address these gaps by conducting a comparative analysis of traditional Chinese opera and Western classical drama. It will explore how cultural context shapes characterization and how dramatic art can navigate the challenges of globalization while maintaining its unique identity.

In summary, the study seeks to contribute to the innovative development of dramatic art by bridging theoretical gaps and providing actionable insights for contemporary practitioners.

## Research objective

- 1) To understand the influence of cultural context on assumptions and authenticity in dramatic representations.
- 2) To explore the ways in which theater arts can be adapted and enriched by adjusting the balance between assumptions and authenticity in different cultural contexts.

## Research Methodology

1. Literature review method: sorting out the previous research results on cultural context and dramatic characterization and establishing a theoretical framework.

2. Interview method: Used to collect first-hand information on "the influence of cultural context on assumptions and authenticity in theatrical representations" in order to strengthen the empirical basis of the study, namely.

Table 1 : Interview method

Name	Form	Title	Unit (of measure)
Mr. Sui	Drama writing specialists	associate professor (university post)	Beijing People's Art Theater
Mr. Liu	Theater performance specialists	associate professor (university post)	East China Normal University (ECNU)
Mr. Han	Theater performance specialists	lecture on	Jilin Academy of Fine Arts

## Results

1. The impact of cultural context on assumptions and authenticity in dramatic representations.

### 1.1 The Influence of Cultural Context on Assumptions in Dramatic Characterization

Different cultural contexts have produced rich and unique fictional elements and symbols, and shaped specific plot settings and character fantasies, all of which have had a profound impact on the creation of dramatic characters. From the myths and legends and traditional plots of Chinese culture, to the unique symbols and specific situations of Japanese culture, to the religious elements and narrative modes of Indian culture, as well as the classic materials and fantasy themes of Western culture, they all provide diversified and distinctive materials and backgrounds for the construction of hypothetical *dramatis personae*.

#### 1) Fictional elements and symbols in different cultures

Different cultural contexts have given rise to a rich variety of unique fictional elements and symbols, which play a key role in dramatic characterization and profoundly influence the construction of assumptions.

In Chinese culture, myths and legends are often introduced into drama as an important source of fictional elements. For example, in the story of "Chang'e Runs to the Moon", Chang'e becomes a symbol of beauty, loneliness and the persistent pursuit of love. In the drama, the character modeled after Chang'e may be endowed with the character traits of being transcendent, dreamy but lonely. As a symbol of the Chinese nation, the dragon is often used in drama to represent imperial power, strength and mystery. When a character is associated with the image of a dragon, it may imply that he or she has extraordinary status or powerful abilities (Liu Yanjun, Liao Ben, 2022).

Fictional elements of Japanese culture are often associated with the spirit of bushido and demonic legends. Samurai are often portrayed in drama as loyal, brave, and with a strong sense of honor, and their actions and decisions are often driven by the spirit of this fictional culture. Demons, such as tengu and hokage, serve as symbols that add mystery and fantasy to the drama. When a character crosses paths with a demon, it may signal an impending supernatural challenge or the acquisition of mystical powers (Wang Linqing, 2022). In Indian culture, gods and god-beasts from religious mythology are common fictional elements. Lord Shiva symbolizes destruction and rebirth, and by incorporating this symbol into dramatic characters, characters may be portrayed as having transformative power and undergoing major transitions. Whereas elephants serve as sacred symbols, characters associated with elephants may be imbued with qualities of wisdom, steadiness, and good fortune (Kang Kyung-kyu, 2017).

Fictional elements in Western culture are often drawn from Greco-Roman mythology. For example, the image of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, is often used to portray female characters who are smart, brave and strategic. Cupid's love arrow, on the other hand, is a symbol of love, and when a character is hit by Cupid's arrow, it means that he or she will fall into love entanglements (Zhou Ning, 2021). These fictional elements and symbols from different cultures provide rich materials for dramatic characterization, making the construction of assumptions more culturally distinctive and deeper, and bringing a unique aesthetic experience to the audience.

## 2) Culturally specific plot settings and character fantasies

The cultural context not only gives different fictional elements and symbols, but also influences specific plot settings and character fantasies in the drama, which further affects the characterization of the drama. In traditional Chinese culture, episodes such as the golden list and the wedding ceremony

often appear in dramas, reflecting people's aspirations for success and good marriages. In some costume dramas, a poor scholar achieves a reversal of fortune by studying hard and eventually becoming the top scholar in high school. Such a plot reflects the Chinese culture's strong belief in knowledge as a means to change one's destiny and the expectation of social class mobility. In addition, martial arts culture, such as the plot settings of the Jianghu feud and the hero saving the beauty, has created many images of heroes who are chivalrous and strong in martial arts, which fulfills people's fantasies of justice and power.

In Japanese culture, the "sorrow of things" is often reflected in dramas. For example, the scene of cherry blossoms falling is often accompanied by the characters' sadness of parting or the feeling of the impermanence of fate, and this kind of sorrow for the fleeting but beautiful things reflects the unique perception of the impermanence of life in Japanese culture. At the same time, the dramas adapted from Japanese anime often feature characters who fantasize about possessing superpowers or entering mysterious other worlds in order to escape from the pressures and dilemmas of reality (Wang, Linqing, 2022).

Religious episodes in Indian culture occupy an important place in the theater. Concepts such as reincarnation and karma often permeate the plot, influencing the fate and behavioral choices of the characters. Characters may suffer trials and tribulations in this life due to karmic obstacles in their past lives, or they may look forward to a better afterlife by accumulating virtues and doing good deeds (Kang Kyung-kyu, 2017). The episodes of the struggle between gods and demons in Hindu mythology also add a grand narrative backdrop to the drama, creating characters with divine missions or evil desires.

In Western culture, the pursuit of individualism and the spirit of adventure are more prominent in the plot setting. In order to pursue freedom

and dreams, the protagonist leaves the familiar environment to explore the unknown world, and this kind of plot reflects western culture's emphasis on individual value and free will. Meanwhile, characters in science fiction-themed dramas often fantasize about being able to travel through time and space and explore the mysteries of the universe, demonstrating Western culture's infinite longing for technology and the future (2021).

To summarize, these specific plot settings and character fantasies in different cultures provide rich and varied backgrounds for the growth and psychological motivations of the dramatic characters, which make the characters more fleshed out and charismatic.

## 1.2 The Influence of Cultural Context on Authenticity in Dramatic Characterization

### 1) Culturally Based Emotional Truth and Logical Reasoning

Emotional authenticity based on culture is crucial in characterization in theatrical performances. Different cultures give emotions different expressions and connotations. In Chinese culture, emotions are often expressed in a subtler and introverted way. In family relationships, parents' love for their children may be more reflected in silent giving and caring rather than direct verbal expression. Therefore, when portraying dramatic characters in Chinese culture, their emotions may be expressed through subtle movements, glances or indirect behaviors to convey deep emotions. This implicit expression of emotion is considered authentic and moving in a specific cultural context (Hu, Xingliang, 2018). The expression of emotions is usually more direct and passionate in Western cultural contexts. The expression of love may be passionate confessions and intimate physical contact. In dramas set in Western culture, characters may not hesitate to speak aloud their inner feelings when confronted with love, and this direct emotional outpouring is in line with the emotional truth in Western culture.

Logical plausibility is also constructed on the basis of cultural context. In some traditional cultures, the concepts of family honor and social hierarchy may have a decisive influence on the characters' behavior and decisions. For example, in Japanese samurai culture, a samurai may make the choice to sacrifice his or her self in order to preserve the honor of the family, an action that is reasonable and respectable in its cultural logic. In modern Western culture, individual freedom and self-realization are often given a high priority. Therefore, dramatic characters disregard the views of others or the constraints of tradition in order to pursue their personal dreams, and such behavior is logical in its cultural context (Li Xiaogang, 2018).

## 2) Culturally appropriate character behavior and motivation

Cultural context profoundly influences the behavior and motivation of dramatic characters. Under the influence of Chinese Confucianism, a character's behavior may be driven by values such as "benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom and trust". A character who is a gentleman may be motivated to maintain social harmony, follow moral norms, or fulfill his responsibilities to his family and society. For example, when faced with a conflict of interest, he may choose to give up profit for righteousness because "righteousness" is highly valued in Confucian culture (Xiao Baojiang, 2006). In Hindu culture, the concepts of reincarnation and karma are deeply rooted. A dramatic character's behavior and motivation may be influenced by the pursuit of good fortune in the afterlife or the atonement of karmic obstacles in previous lives. A character may expect to improve his or her fate in the afterlife by performing good deeds or willingly suffer in the present life because of a belief in his or her past-life sins.

Being in, for example, an African tribal cultural context, collective solidarity and reverence for nature are important cultural elements. Characters may act to protect the interests of the tribe and follow the laws of nature. For example, in the face of natural disasters, they may perform specific rituals to



pray for divine blessings, motivated by reverence for the forces of nature and to safeguard the survival of the tribe. In modern Western business culture, on the other hand, the motives for a character's behavior may be more related to the pursuit of financial gain, personal achievement, and social status. A character portrayed as an entrepreneur may constantly take risks and compete in order to expand his business territory and increase his wealth, and this behavioral motivation reflects the definition and pursuit of success in Western business culture.

To sum up, the cultural background provides a rich variety and depth of roots for the behaviors and motives of the dramatic characters, making the characters more realistic, three-dimensional and culturally specific.

2. To explore the ways in which theater arts can be adapted and enriched by adjusting the balance between assumptions and authenticity in different cultural contexts.

### 2.1 Balancing Adjustment Strategies in Acculturation

#### 1) Trade-offs and innovations in cross-cultural adaptation

In today's era of globalization, cross-cultural adaptations are becoming increasingly common in the field of theatre. When a theatrical work is transplanted from one cultural background to another, it needs to be carefully weighed and innovated. The first trade-off is between retaining and discarding the core values and cultural characteristics of the original work. For example, if a work originating from a traditional Japanese Noh play is to be adapted for the Western stage, the Noh play's pursuit of quietness and subtle beauty is a unique cultural trait, but this trait may be difficult to be directly understood and accepted in Western culture. At this point, the adaptor needs to weigh how much of the original aesthetic style should be retained in order to avoid completely losing the flavor of the original work, while at the same time considering how to adapt it to the aesthetic habits of the Western audience.

Innovation lies in finding new ways to integrate elements of the two cultures. On the basis of retaining the story framework of the original work, we can introduce common expressive techniques used in Western theater, such as stronger body language and more direct expression of emotions. Or the themes of the original work can be reinterpreted to give them contemporary significance in a new cultural context. For example, a story originally about the loyalty of the Japanese samurai is adapted into a theme about an individual's adherence to his or her beliefs in modern society.

Cross-cultural adaptation also needs to take into account the acceptance of different cultures for theater forms and performance styles. For example, when adapting Chinese opera to Western musicals, it is necessary to innovate the singing and costumes so that it cannot only reflect the charm of Chinese culture, but also meet the performance form of Western musicals and the audience's appreciation needs.

## 2) Creative techniques under multicultural fusion

With the deepening of world cultural exchanges, multicultural integration has become an important trend in theater creation. In this context, creators need to explore new and effective creative techniques, and the researchers state three of the main creative techniques as follows:

(1) Collage of elements. Organic collage of theater elements from different cultures, such as plot sequences, character types, and performance techniques. For example, in one work, the body performance of Chinese Peking Opera, the movement elements of Western modern dance, and the rhythmic characteristics of African tribal dance can appear at the same time. But this collage is not a simple pile, but through skillful choreography, so that they echo each other, set each other off, and jointly serve the theme and emotional expression of the work.

(2) Cultural Metaphor Use. Using elements from one culture as a metaphor for phenomena or emotions in another culture. For example, the

Great Wall of China is used as a metaphor for the spirit of perseverance, which is used to express the indomitable spirit of western characters in the face of difficulties. Through this kind of metaphor, it can not only enrich the connotation of the work, but also trigger the resonance of the audience from different cultural backgrounds.

(3) Contextualization techniques. Placing stories or plots from one culture in the context of another culture for reinterpretation. For example, the love story in Indian mythology is moved to the background of modern city, so that the ancient concept of love and the values of modern society collide and intermingle.

## 2.2 Examples of practices that enrich expression

1) Theatrical productions that successfully integrate elements of multiple cultures Under the extensive scope of research in the field of theater, there are a number of productions that have successfully blended elements of various cultures to show their unique charm. The classic Broadway musical "The Lion King", which is based on African folklore, is presented in the form of an American Broadway musical. The show incorporates African music and dance elements, such as strong drum rhythms and body movements full of power, while using modernized stage special effects and exquisite costume styling to perfectly combine the primitive culture of Africa with modern stage art.

The Royal Shakespeare Company's adaptation of The Merchant of Venice incorporates actors from different cultural backgrounds and diverse acting styles while retaining Shakespeare's original text. The portrayal of Shylock, the Jewish merchant in the play, draws on Jewish culture, while the performances of the other characters reflect the elegance and dignity of traditional British theater, while incorporating modern interpretations and expressions.

The performance of Turandot on the Chinese Peking Opera stage is also a typical example, which integrates the Italian opera Turandot with the performance form of Chinese Peking Opera. The flavor of Peking Opera is retained in the singing, while elements of Western opera are borrowed in the plot and characterization, creating a brand new artistic experience (Ma Guojun, 2016).

2) Stage presentations that are widely recognized for being well balanced

Some theater productions have been praised for the delicate balance they strike between different cultural elements. Take the classic drama *Crush on Peach Blossom Garden* as an example, this production combines a traditional Chinese love story with the absurd elements of modern society. In the stage set, there is both the elegance of a classical Chinese garden and the messiness of a modern city; in the acting style, the actors show the subtlety and introspection of traditional emotions, but also appropriately incorporate the anxiety and confusion of the modern society, making the whole stage present a unique tension. The French drama "*Notre Dame de Paris*" balances traditional French romantic melodies with modern rock elements in its music, creating an aural effect that is both emotional and impactful. In terms of characterization, it embodies the deep insight into human nature in French culture, and also incorporates the universal thinking of different cultures on beauty and ugliness, good and evil, making the work have a wide resonance.

## Discussion

The conclusions drawn in this study regarding the interplay between cultural context and theater creation resonate with and extend existing research in the field. Previous studies have largely concentrated on the analysis of drama within specific cultural contexts, emphasizing how localized cultural

elements influence theatrical expressions (Benedict, 2018; Chen, 2020). In contrast, this study shifts the focus to a comparative analysis, highlighting the interaction and dialogue between different cultures in the realm of theater. This broader perspective not only enriches our understanding of cultural exchange but also underscores the fluidity of theatrical forms as they adapt and evolve.

The findings of this research complement and deepen earlier theories by challenging the notion of culture as a static influence on drama. While previous studies have primarily highlighted the direct impacts of cultural contexts on theatrical content and form, this study posits that drama can serve as a site of innovation and development. By navigating the balance between cultural assumptions and authenticity, theater can thrive in dynamic environments characterized by cultural exchange (Smith, 2019). This nuanced understanding is crucial for appreciating how cross-cultural interactions can lead to transformative artistic practices.

Moreover, this study identifies a gap in current research regarding the specific strategies employed in balancing cultural influences during theater creation. Although there has been recognition of the importance of cross-cultural dynamics, existing literature often lacks detailed examinations of practical strategies and their effects in theatrical contexts (Nguyen, 2021). In addressing this gap, this study presents relevant strategies and successful case studies that exemplify how theater practitioners can effectively navigate cultural integration. These insights not only contribute to academic discourse but also offer valuable references for practitioners seeking to implement cross-cultural approaches in their work.

In conclusion, this study enhances our understanding of the relationship between cultural context and theater creation by emphasizing the importance of interaction and adaptation across cultural boundaries. By articulating specific

strategies for balancing cultural influences, it provides a foundation for future research and practice in cross-cultural theater, highlighting the potential for innovation within the rich tapestry of global theatrical traditions.

## Conclusion

Through this paper, the researchers have deeply explored the adaptation and innovation strategies of dramatic art in different cultural contexts, revealing the importance of cross-cultural adaptation and multicultural integration in dramatic creation. The findings show that through trade-offs and innovations, theater works can adapt to new cultural environments while retaining their original cultural characteristics, thus enriching their forms of expression. The strategy of trade-offs and innovation in cross-cultural adaptation requires creators to consider the aesthetic habits of the target cultural audience while retaining the core values and cultural qualities of the original work. Through skillful adaptation and innovation, theater works can be revitalized in new cultural contexts. Creative techniques under multicultural integration provide new possibilities for theater creation. Innovative methods such as element collage, cultural metaphor and contextual change make it possible for theater works to organically integrate elements from different cultures and create works of art with unique charms.

Successful integration of multi-cultural elements and a well-balanced and widely recognized stage presentation provide practical examples of cross-cultural development of theatrical art. To sum up, this study reveals the adaptation and innovation strategies of theater art in different cultural contexts, which provides useful references for theater creators. Through cross-cultural adaptation and multicultural integration, theatrical works can not only enrich their forms of expression, but also promote communication and understanding between different cultures, injecting new vitality into the development of global theatrical art.

## Recommendations

- (1) Encourage theater creators to conduct in-depth research on different cultural contexts and enhance cross-cultural creative skills.
- (2) Strengthening the cultivation of cultural pluralism in theater education and fostering the audience's intercultural aesthetic literacy.

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