

A Study on the Influence of Dramatic Narrative of Guilin's Anti-Japanese War Culture on Youth Cultural Identity

Junyi Wang

School of Marxism, Guangxi Normal University, Guilin, Guangxi, 5410061, China
13355546780@163.com

Keywords: Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture; drama; youth; cultural identity

Abstract: Guilin's anti-Japanese war dramas serve as a paradigmatic practice of the anti-Japanese national united front in the cultural field, and constitute an important approach to fostering the sense of community for the Chinese nation and cultivating youth cultural identity. This paper sorts out the evolutionary trajectory of dramatic narrative in Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture, from historical salvation practice to contemporary diversification. It analyzes the internal mechanism by which drama shapes youth cultural identity through activating cultural memory and arousing emotional resonance. Finally, it proposes pathways for young people to participate in narrative inheritance as *excavators*, *practitioners*, and *innovators*, and points out that in-depth participation is the key to transforming cultural identity from emotional resonance to value internalization. Taking Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture as an entry point and youth cultural identity as a perspective, this study explores how to use dramatic narrative to unite youth cultural consensus and cultivate youth cultural identity in the new era, so as to promote the inheritance of red genes.

1. Introduction

Culture is the lifeblood and soul of a country and a nation. Cultural identity is the driving source of national cohesion and state centripetal force[1], as well as the bond for intergenerational cultural inheritance. The Fourth Session of the 13th National People's Congress emphasized that cultural identity is the deepest-level identity, the root of national unity and the soul of ethnic harmony. In 2024, the state reiterated that ethnic regions should implement the fostering of a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation in the whole process and all aspects of development. As a typical practice of the anti-Japanese national united front in the cultural sector, dramas in Guilin during the anti-Japanese war period represent an important spiritual force and cultural support that carries local history, nourishes national culture, and fosters cultural identity. At present, the dramatic narrative of Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture is in a new stage of transformation from historical heritage to contemporary narration. As the main body of cultural inheritance and innovation, young people are highly vulnerable to the impact of diverse cultural trends in the new era. Their current status of cultural identity deserves attention, and the cultivation of their cultural identity needs emphasis.

Therefore, it is undoubtedly an important subject to explore the narrative form of drama—which integrates historical memory, contemporary expression, and immersive experience—and to unite youth cultural consensus, cultivate youth cultural identity, and advance the modernization of Guilin’s anti-Japanese war culture through dramatic narration in the new era.

Current academic research on Guilin’s cultural anti-Japanese war has achieved considerable accumulation, mainly focusing on three dimensions: historical context, contemporary value, and communication form. Historical research mainly examines theatrical activities in Guilin as a *Cultural City* during the war. Lu Yixia (2024)[2] discussed the performance forms and historical functions of small-scale dramas in Guilin during the anti-Japanese war. Liu Yan (2025)[3] systematically sorted out the publishing process of dramas in Guilin Cultural City during the war and studied the wartime role of Guilin-edited theatrical books and periodicals, laying a foundation for understanding the original form of these salvation-oriented dramas. Research also focuses on exploring their contemporary spiritual value. Liu Yang and Su Liangqian (2025)[4] highlighted the unique value of Guilin’s anti-Japanese war culture and elaborated on its epochal significance for enhancing the *Five Identities* in inheriting and carrying forward the spirit of Guilin’s anti-Japanese war culture on the new journey, providing certain guidance for innovatively integrating dramatic narrative and cultural identity in the new era. With the development of media technology, the communication mode and contemporary transformation of anti-Japanese war cultural narrative have become research hotspots. Huang Xiaoxing and Zhang Hong (2025)[5], taking the anti-Japanese war-themed TV series *Position* set in Guilin as an example, argued that cinematic and scene-based narrative can improve the communication effect of Guilin’s anti-Japanese war culture. Their research is closely linked with local communication practice in Guilin and bears strong practical significance. Generally speaking, Guilin, as a cultural city, has gathered numerous cultural symbols marked by the spirit of Guilin’s anti-Japanese war, yet stable cultural identity—especially youth cultural consensus—has not been formed, and insufficient attention has been paid to drama as a specific narrative form. On this basis, this paper attempts to start with the interactive relationship between *dramatic narrative* and *youth cultural identity*, conduct a preliminary exploration on the transformation path of youth cultural identity, and respond to the epochal task of uniting youth consensus and realizing cultural inheritance through narrative innovation.

2. Evolution of Dramatic Narrative in Guilin's Anti-Japanese War Culture

From October 1938 to September 1944, Guilin became one of the cultural centers in the rear area during the anti-Japanese war, known as the *Anti-Japanese War Cultural City*. A large number of cultural figures carried out cultural salvation movements here on an unprecedented scale[6]. Drama was the most active cultural activity in Guilin’s Anti-Japanese War Cultural City and one of the most direct and powerful mobilization weapons. After the full-scale outbreak of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, dramatists and theatrical troupes from all over China gathered in Guilin. Taking advantage of the easy-to-understand and highly infectious nature of dramatic narrative, they transformed the traditional idea that *everyone is responsible for the rise and fall of the country* into an art form accessible to the general public, creating a large number of literary and artistic works imbued with patriotism. Works of this period, including those by Xia Yan, Tian Han, Lao She and others, either exposed the atrocities of Japanese invaders and social darkness, or inspired people to unite in the war of resistance, arousing strong resonance inside and outside theaters. Tian Han’s *QiuFu Song*, *Jiangnan Fisherman’s Ballad*, *Shuangzhong Ji* and other plays were all written in Guilin. These works were close to the current situation, advocated resistance and patriotism, and were deeply loved by the audience[7]. Ouyang Yuqian’s adapted *Liang Hongyu* was based on historical heroes and conveyed the determination of national

resistance. Narrative forms such as street plays and living newspapers went deep into urban and rural areas, spreading the spark of resistance to grassroots audiences. Audiences at that time were immersed in a vivid cultural narrative, and personally experienced the true meaning of the anti-Japanese war spirit that transcended individuals, blood ties and regions through dance, movements and lines.

Today, the dramatic narrative of Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture interprets the wartime core of this southern Guangxi land in diversified forms. Through systematic inheritance and innovation, academic connotation excavation, and independent creative expression of young people, it revives the cultural blood of drama while pursuing a deep and sustainable *two-way journey* between history and youth. The re-creation of newly compiled historical dramas such as the Gui opera *Breaking the Battle Array* fully taps the narrative function of drama as a carrier and promotes the reform of Gui opera in scene switching, plot development, line tension and emotional rendering[8]. The immersive experience of the diversified three-dimensional narrative theater community built by the Guilin Art Festival[9], the transformation of youth roles in the *New Southwest Theater Exhibition*, and digital communication all reflect the lasting vitality of dramatic narrative in anti-Japanese war culture. The narrative theme has risen from specific anti-Japanese mobilization to the cultivation of national rejuvenation and cultural confidence in a broader sense. The narrative perspective has shifted from the holistic to the concrete, integrating local Guilin elements and diverse individual perspectives into localized and life-like narration. The Guilin dialect drama *Longyinju* carries the grand history of the anti-Japanese war from the perspective of ordinary people and strengthens the texture of localized narration with Guilin dialect. The narrative space has expanded to historical sites and real-scene venues, realizing narrative intertextuality between environment and plot. This developmental trend of parallel spiritual inheritance and narrative innovation not only broadens the ways of constructing historical memory, but also endows the cultivation of youth cultural identity with vivid, perceptible and participatory contemporary expression. Through artistic forms with emotional resonance and immersive narrative participation, young people's recognition and admiration for the profound heritage of Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture are awakened, thus inspiring them to undertake the mission of historical inheritance and development.

3. Two Ways Dramatic Narrative Influences Youth Cultural Identity

Before exploring this influence, it is necessary to define core concepts. According to the *Medium and Long-Term Youth Development Plan (2016–2025)*, youth refers to people aged 14 to 35. *Youth* in this paper refers to people in this specific physical, psychological and social development stage, whose mentality tends to mature, values are still forming, and who maintain high openness and sensitivity to diverse cultural information. They are the most active recipients, dialogists and potential creators of culture. *Cultural identity* is the confirmation of shared culture between individuals or between individuals and groups[10], as well as the essential content and core bond of national and state identity[11]. Therefore, youth cultural identity is the sense of belonging, acceptance and direction formed by young people in a specific cultural context through the recognition and internalization of shared historical memory, symbolic systems, values and lifestyles. Under the complex landscape of global cultural exchange, integration and confrontation, youth cultural identity presents unprecedented fluidity and constructivity. As a comprehensive cultural text integrating historical truth, artistic imagination and local memory, the dramatic narrative of Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture promotes the transformation of youth cultural identity from symbolic perception to value internalization through cultural coding and emotional invocation.

3.1 Activating Youth Cultural Memory through Cultural Symbols

Humans are symbolic animals, and symbols are created to convey certain meanings... The core of culture is the creation, communication, understanding and interpretation of meaning[12]. Memory is the deep structure of symbols, and symbols are the representational strategy of memory. Together, they form the clue for the dramatic narrative of anti-Japanese war culture to influence the construction of youth cultural identity[13]. Cultural symbols are carriers of collective memory and bonds of identity. Their core function is to transform abstract history and values into tangible or intangible carriers that can be perceived, understood and resonate with. Dramatic narrative excavates the cultural connotation and value contained in collective memory and symbolic traits by activating cultural symbols, providing a perceptible spiritual coordinate for young people to form shared cultural memory.

Specifically, the dramatic narrative of Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture transforms cultural symbols in Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture into distinctive local cultural symbols and re-creates them, laying a cognitive foundation for awakening localized cultural memory and forming youth cultural identity. Its contemporary transformation and innovation are mainly reflected in three types of cultural symbols. In terms of character cultural symbols, Guilin's anti-Japanese war dramas convey the anti-Japanese war spirit by shaping distinctive character symbols and spiritual idols, turning anti-Japanese heroes, ordinary people and even cultural figures themselves into vivid stage images. As one of Ouyang Yuqian's masterpieces, *The Peach Blossom Fan* expresses the aspirations of the people through the national integrity of ordinary people such as the courtesan Li Xiangjun and the musician Liu Jingting, skillfully integrating the essence of collective memory of national salvation. In addition, the deeds and spirits of cultural celebrities such as Tian Han and Ouyang Yuqian have become spiritual idols admired by young people through theatrical activities and modern adapted narratives, carrying the value of spiritual identity centered on patriotism and cultural responsibility. In terms of regional cultural symbols, historical buildings such as the Cultural City and the Guangxi Provincial Art Gallery in Guilin during the anti-Japanese war are weighty geographical cultural symbols. Contemporary theatrical activities consciously return to these original spaces, such as holding commemorative performances and exhibitions at the former site of the Guangxi Provincial Art Gallery, connecting the past and present through the physical space of narrative. Such regional symbols imbued with historical emotion and epochal value integrate grand national narrative with urban memory, effectively building young people's sense of belonging to local history. In terms of ritual cultural symbols, the historical *Southwest Theater Exhibition* is an iconic cultural ritual. Contemporary inheritance practices continue and innovate through periodic and thematic modern rituals. A series of activities commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Southwest Theater Exhibition held in 2024 attracted extensive participation of young dramatists and audiences through special performances, seminars and retrospective exhibitions, enabling young people to personally participate in the contemporary construction and inheritance of anti-Japanese war cultural memory in collective viewing, discussion and interaction.

3.2 Awakening Youth Emotional Resonance through Narrative Innovation

The essence of dramatic narrative lies in the communicative relationship between *performance* and *audience*, constructing a field where audiences can *enter* and dialogue through temporal-spatial reconstruction and emotional projection. This process is naturally closely linked to emotional resonance—only when audiences shift from passive *viewers* to active *perceivers* and *participants* can the emotional power of history be truly awakened. For contemporary young people, traditional, one-way historical narration appears alienated due to temporal-spatial separation. The core advantage of the dramatic narrative of Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture is that it actively embraces

contemporary narrative concepts, enabling young people to awaken shared concern for national destiny, deep admiration for predecessors' integrity, and emotional resonance as cultural inheritors through immersive and interactive innovative narrative experiences, and internalize the core values conveyed by anti-Japanese war culture. As a result, their cognition and identity of Guilin's anti-Japanese war history and even the spiritual culture of the Chinese nation will be deepened.

First, immersive narrative creates a *sense of historical presence* through multi-sensory integration and scene reproduction, which caters to young people who value sensory experience and authentic feelings. Modern theatrical creation no longer settles for the single narration of the proscenium stage, but transforms Guilin's unique historical and geographical space into narrative itself. Building mountain theaters, water theaters, cave theaters and other theater forms closely related to anti-Japanese war history or local characteristics, coexisting anti-Japanese war slogans with modern theatrical performances, this strong temporal-spatial overlap allows young people to intuitively feel the weight of history and the resilience of civilization, thus resonating with the power of national spirit. Moreover, new technologies such as multimedia and AIGC are used to reproduce historical scenes, creating strong visual and emotional immersion. The all-round sensory wrapping conforms to the media reception characteristics of the younger generation who are accustomed to high information density and strong sensory stimulation, and can more efficiently involve their emotions in historical situations. Second, interactive narrative breaks the boundary between performance and audience and empowers young people with initiative. Contemporary narrative innovation is prominently reflected in breaking the *fourth wall*. In the immersive drama *Destined in Guilin*, characters take the initiative to talk to the audience and draw them into the plot, breaking the traditional one-way communication mode. Young audiences change from *watching plays* to *being in the play*, stimulating a strong sense of identity substitution and responsibility as cultural inheritors, and promoting them to transform from emotional resonators into identifiers and conscious inheritors of spiritual culture.

4. Practical Paths for Youth Participation in Dramatic Narrative of Guilin's Anti-Japanese War Culture

When the dramatic narrative of Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture successfully arouses young people's emotional resonance and value identity, such identity no longer stays at the static cognitive level, but inevitably seeks transformation into dynamic and embodied practical actions. Young people transform emotional resonance into personal behavior and collective actions through active and diverse participation, realizing the role shift from *cultural recipients* to *main cultural inheritors*.

4.1 Youth as Excavators of Dramatic Narrative

To avoid the inheritance of dramatic narrative in Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture from becoming a mere formality and losing spiritual connotation, and to provide a solid content foundation and ideological guidance for its sustainable innovation and transformation, systematic sorting and research are needed at a deeper level. Young researchers are empowering the cultural transformation of Guilin's anti-Japanese war dramas with rigorous academic attitude, supporting sustainable and in-depth innovation based on long-term and stable academic foundations. Through systematic data sorting and theoretical analysis, they are committed to integrating scattered local memories, archives, documents and sites into narrative resources available for contemporary interpretation and application. As early as the 1980s, institutions such as the Guangxi Academy of Social Sciences compiled large-scale data collections such as *Southwest Theater Exhibition* and *Chronicle of Guilin Cultural City*, laying an academic foundation for subsequent research. These research accumulations have also been inherited through curriculum provision. In 1992, Guilin

Regional College of Education offered a specialized course *Guilin's Anti-Japanese War Literature* in the Chinese Department, enabling the systematic inheritance of the cultural heritage of dramatic narrative among young people. In recent years, the trend of in-depth research promoted by cooperation between local governments and universities has become more obvious. On December 17, 2025, the Institute of Cultural Anti-Japanese War (Guilin) was established at Guangxi Normal University, aiming to integrate young academic forces to make relevant research *shift from fragmentation to concentration and from academia to application*, providing detailed historical evidence and theoretical framework for contemporary narration. Meanwhile, more and more young researchers use current academic resources to participate in university-level and provincial-level research projects related to anti-Japanese war dramas, write master's and doctoral dissertations, and publish relevant academic achievements, further deepening the excavation and interpretation of the connotation and contemporary significance of dramatic narrative in Guilin's anti-Japanese war. Such youth practices turn dusty historical resources into a *narrative material library* understandable and re-creatable, laying an irreplaceable academic foundation for subsequent education, creation and communication.

4.2 Youth as *Practitioners* of Dramatic Narrative

Young people extend and embed the narrative of anti-Japanese war dramas into real physical spaces carrying historical memory by participating in and leading various themed study tours and cultural tourism activities, realizing the transformation from knowledge acceptance and emotional resonance to *physical practice*. On the one hand, local cultural and educational departments officially include important venues such as the Memorial Hall of the Eighth Route Army Guilin Office and the former site of the Guangxi Provincial Art Gallery into official study and cultural tourism routes through institutional arrangements, providing stable spaces for youth practice. On the other hand, young people show subjectivity and creativity in practice. First, in immersive theatrical performances such as *Destined in Guilin* and *Guilin Anti-Japanese War Real-scene Drama*, young actors and volunteers actively participate in performance assistance, on-site guidance and publicity, promoting the deep integration of dramatic narrative and cultural tourism scenes. Second, in-depth study activities further guide young people from spatial perception to meaning construction and value identity. Young teachers and students create a *Walking Red Drama Classroom*, leading students to visit anti-Japanese war sites such as Qixingyan and the Guangxi Provincial Art Gallery, interpret stories of anti-Japanese war dramatic narrative at historical sites, and organize small-scale theatrical performances and script-sharing sessions. Teachers and students discuss how theatrical groups cooperated with the Eighth Route Army Guilin Office and maintained dramatic narrative work in enemy-occupied areas, and trace the progress of specific events through original documents, enabling young people to deepen their understanding and identity of anti-Japanese war dramatic narrative in on-site exploration. A series of practical explorations promote young people to sublimate emotional touch on external spaces into in-depth understanding of the national spirit, cultural responsibility and social mobilization function carried in anti-Japanese war dramatic narrative, thus realizing an important transformation from practical participation to value internalization.

4.3 Youth as *Innovators* of Dramatic Narrative

When cultural identity deepens from emotional resonance to practical consciousness, the most dynamic manifestation is that young people transform from *excavators* and *practitioners* of narrative to *producers and innovators* of narrative. They carry out creative transformation and innovative development of the narrative core of Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture through direct

theatrical arrangement and artistic creation. First, youth theatrical practice is firstly reflected in the contemporary interpretation of classic anti-Japanese war dramas. As drama theorist Zhang Geng pointed out, dramatic narrative in Guilin during the anti-Japanese war period *was often not limited to the theatrical movement itself, but aimed at saving the country and enlightening the people*[14], and narrative forms tended to serve *blitz* creation for wartime propaganda. Today, the core of innovation lies in the contemporary transformation of narrative language. The New Southwest Theater Exhibition restages classic works such as Tian Han's *Qiuwu Song* and Ouyang Yuqian's *The Peach Blossom Blossom Fan*. After fully understanding historical texts and grasping their spiritual connotations, young creators renovate classic narrative methods with modern stage aesthetics, lighting design and language more in line with contemporary young people. During the rehearsal of the Gui opera *Breaking the Battle Array* directed by young student director Gao Qing, historical sense and modern aesthetics are carefully balanced in costumes and makeup, and some lines are appropriately popularized to make heavy historical narrative more approachable, so that the cross-temporal historical value gains new resonance in the interpretation of contemporary young people. Second, a deeper practice lies in youth's original narrative production beyond re-staging. They draw materials from the historical treasure trove of Guilin's anti-Japanese war to create new scripts and plays, and even develop cross-media narrative products such as short videos and cultural and creative products. Platform mechanisms provide key support. The Guilin Art Festival revives the form of *Ten-person Drama Critics Group*, building an environment that stimulates narrative creation and criticism, enabling young people to directly continue the narrative tradition of anti-Japanese war dramas—*using drama as a weapon and criticism to promote construction*—in creation and reflection. Some young directors' works nurtured therefrom have further entered international drama festivals such as Avignon and Edinburgh, marking that local historical narrative originating from Guilin, after creative refinement by young people, is gradually participating in global cultural dialogue as a Chinese story imbued with common human values.

5. Conclusion

Through the contemporary activation of historical symbols, emotional resonance of immersive experience, and creative actions of young people, the dramatic narrative of Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture constructs a clear path from awakening historical memory to internalizing cultural values and then to innovative inheritance. As *excavators, practitioners and innovators*, young people internalize external historical memory into their own value identity and conscious actions through academic research, on-site study tours, artistic creation and other ways in the process of narrative transformation. This vividly interprets that cultural identity is a vivid process rooted in history, manifested in contemporary practice and inherited by young people. Therefore, inheriting and carrying forward Guilin's anti-Japanese war culture must attach importance to the creative transformation of its narrative into youth cultural identity, guide young people to move from cultural self-knowledge to cultural self-consciousness, and from cultural self-consciousness to cultural self-confidence. We must make good use of red resources, carry forward red traditions, and inherit red genes[15], ultimately injecting sustained youthful momentum into the construction of a modern civilization of the Chinese nation.

References

- [1] Zhang Wenshu, Bao Huoyu. *On the Relationship between State Identity and Ethnic Identity from the Perspective of Cultural Identity*[J]. *Guizhou Ethnic Studies*, 2015(11).
- [2] Lu Yixia. *Street Openness of Small-scale Dramas During the Anti-Japanese War: Centered on Theatrical Activities in Guilin Cultural City*[J]. *Drama Literature*, 2024(7).
- [3] Liu Yan. *Historical Presence: Evolution and Influence of Drama Publishing in Guilin Cultural City During the*

- Anti-Japanese War*[J]. *China Publishing Journal*, 2025(3).
- [4] Liu Yang, Su Liangqian. *Fostering a Strong Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation with the Spirit of Guilin's Anti-Japanese War Culture*[J]. *Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2025(1).
- [5] Huang Xiaoxing, Zhang Hong. *Cinematic Narrative and Realistic Review of Guilin Anti-Japanese War Cultural City: Interpretation of Contemporary Value of the CPC's Cultural Anti-Japanese War*[J]. *Guangxi Social Sciences*, 2025(5).
- [6] Liu Shiwen, Gu Zhuoda. *Ouyang Yuqian's Imagination of Guilin in Anti-Japanese War Dramas and Its Significance*[J]. *Sichuan Theatre*, 2025(9).
- [7] Liu Tiejun. *Literati Staying in Guilin and Guilin's Anti-Japanese War Culture*[J]. *Guangxi Studies*, 2022(1).
- [8] Liu Tiejun. *On the Scriptwriting Art of Gui Opera Breaking the Battle Array*[J]. *Songhai*, 2018(6).
- [9] Lu Bo. *Writing a New Chapter in the Integration of Culture and Tourism Relying on the Guilin Art Festival*[J]. *Get-together Building*, 2026(2).
- [10] Cui Xinjian. *Cultural Identity and Its Roots*[J]. *Journal of Beijing Normal University (Social Sciences Edition)*, 2004(4).
- [11] Dong Li, Li Qing'an, Lin Chongde. *Cultural Identity in the Perspective of Psychology*[J]. *Journal of Beijing Normal University (Social Sciences Edition)*, 2014(1).
- [12] Zhou Xian. *Rugged Thoughts: Essays on Cultural Criticism*[M]. Hubei Education Press, 2000: 127.
- [13] Ma Weihua, Dao Yue, Zhang Yichi. *Memory Inheritance and Symbolic Practice: Constructing the Common Spiritual Home of the Chinese Nation from the Perspective of Cultural Heritage*[J]. *Journal of South-Central Minzu University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2026(4).
- [14] Zhang Geng. *Preface to Collected Essays on Drama by Ouyang Yuqian*[M]. Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1984: 2.
- [15] Yao Yaping. *Inheriting Red Genes and Nurturing the Spiritual Home*[J]. *People's Daily*, 2015-02-15.