

Boosting the “Belt and Road Initiative” and Cultivating “Silk Road Language and Art” Talents—An Analysis of the Ideas for Strengthening Aesthetic Education in Foreign Language Universities

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Against the backdrop of the “Belt and Road” Initiative, the demand for “Silk Road Language and Art” interdisciplinary talents who are proficient in both foreign languages and art & culture has been constantly growing. These talents serve as an important carrier for people-to-people and cultural exchanges among countries along the “Belt and Road”, and their cultivation also puts forward new requirements for the educational reform of foreign language universities. Taking Beijing International Studies University as an example, this paper further supplements that foreign language universities should give full play to their advantages in foreign language disciplines, deeply integrate aesthetic education into the talent training system, and continuously optimize the implementation paths such as curriculum setting, art popularization, and international exchange platforms. This not only helps to improve students’ humanistic literacy and cross-cultural communication capabilities but also enables foreign language universities to better assume the responsibility of serving the national “Belt and Road” development strategy and promoting the mutual learning of Chinese and foreign cultures.

Keywords: The “Belt and Road” Initiative, “Silk Road Language and Art” talents, foreign language universities, aesthetic education, interdisciplinary talent cultivation, cultural exchange

The Ministry of Education’s “Opinions on Effectively Strengthening Aesthetic Education in Institutions of Higher Learning in the New Era” (2019) clearly states that “aesthetic education in colleges and universities should take the initiative to integrate into national and regional development strategies and serve economic and social development”. As a higher education institution proposed by Premier Zhou Enlai to cultivate foreign language talents in fields such as foreign affairs and economy for the country, Beijing International Studies University has implemented the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, provided targeted services for China’s “Belt and Road Initiative” and the construction of Beijing as an international exchange center, vigorously promoted the reform of art education, and actively advanced the cultivation of interdisciplinary “foreign language + art and culture” talents, achieving remarkable results.

The Practical Significance of Supporting the “Belt and Road Initiative” and Cultivating Interdisciplinary Talents Proficient in Both Foreign Languages and Art & Culture

The “Belt and Road Initiative” is one of the most ambitious geographical development initiatives put forward by mankind at the beginning of the 21st century. It is another strategic measure to thoroughly implement the basic national policy of opening-up since China’s reform and opening-up drive began 40 years ago. In today’s context of economic globalization and political integration, the “Belt and Road Initiative” has not only exerted a profound impact on the economy and politics of regions along the routes but also promoted cultural and people-to-people exchanges and cultural learning among these regions. Since ancient times, the birth and prosperity of the Silk Road have been inseparable from the in-depth integration of diverse cultures. Wherever the “Belt and Road Initiative” extends, it becomes a hub of vibrant people-to-people and cultural exchanges. Cultural and artistic exchanges between countries along the routes have become more frequent, and art serves as a crucial carrier for dialogue and communication between cultures with distinct characteristics.

With the in-depth implementation of the “Belt and Road Initiative” in countries along the routes, there is an increasing shortage of interdisciplinary talents who are both proficient in foreign languages and possess artistic literacy, and the demand for such talents continues to grow. This not only places higher demands on foreign language-focused universities in terms of talent cultivation models, discipline system construction, and research direction planning but also endows their educational and teaching work with new responsibilities and missions. It requires us to keep pace with the development of the “Belt and Road Initiative”, seize the development opportunities it brings, and integrate foreign language training and art education into the talent cultivation system.

Against this backdrop, as foreign language institutions of higher learning, we must actively serve the construction of the “Belt and Road Initiative”, take the initiative to assume the historical responsibility of promoting the integration of Chinese and foreign cultural exchanges, and advance the comprehensive reform of education in a more in-depth and all-dimensional manner. We should build a closely connected and intercommunicated talent cultivation system, thereby shifting the focus of teaching from the single function of language communication to the more connotative function of cultural connectivity.

In recent years, Beijing International Studies University has focused on serving the national foreign affairs and diplomatic strategies, and strived to cultivate a new generation of international talents who are not only proficient in foreign languages and familiar with international rules but also well-versed in both traditional Chinese culture and the culture and art of countries where the target languages are spoken. Centering on this goal, we have continuously strengthened top-level design, made systematic plans, and coordinated efforts in talent cultivation, professional development, international exchanges, think tank construction, and scientific research innovation. We aim to make the “Belt and Road Initiative” a path for educational exchanges, cultural innovation, and talent cultivation, and enable Beijing International Studies University to provide targeted services for the “Belt and Road Initiative” to take root and bear fruit in more countries and regions along the routes.

The Implementation Path for the Organic Integration of Aesthetic Education and the Advantages of Foreign Language Disciplines

In the construction of the “Belt and Road Initiative”, language and cultural exchanges take precedence. It can be said that both foreign language education and Chinese and foreign art and culture education have ushered

in unprecedented development opportunities. Language and art culture are both keys to communication—keys that open the door to dialogue and exchanges with countries along the “Belt and Road”, and keys that unlock the door to spiritual communication with these countries. They help shorten the distance between hearts, enhance cultural identity, and better “introduce the world to China” and “introduce China to the world”. The advantages of foreign language disciplines and aesthetic education can be organically integrated and complement each other. Taking Beijing International Studies University’s explorations in recent years as an example, the following efforts have been made:

“Customized” Aesthetic Education Courses

Adhering to the core goal of cultivating aesthetic and humanistic literacy, we have scientifically defined the objectives of aesthetic education courses, attached importance to the learning of basic knowledge of aesthetic education, and formed a public art curriculum system centered on art history and theory, art appreciation, and art practice. We offer not only elective courses on traditional Chinese culture and art, such as Basic Music Theory, Appreciation and Practice of Traditional Chinese Painting Art, and Art Appreciation but also elective courses on foreign culture and art, including Appreciation of Masterpieces of Chinese and Foreign Drama, Appreciation of Chinese and Foreign Arts and Crafts, Appreciation of Chinese and Foreign Art Works, and Appreciation of Western Music. In addition to enriching the second classroom by organizing competitions and art performances in calligraphy, traditional Chinese painting, and crosstalk, we have also expanded the development of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) for art courses through online and offline platforms, and incorporated relevant courses of the university’s art troupe into the art elective courses.

“Internationalized” Popularization of Art

Through art elective courses in the first classroom, the university student art troupe in the second classroom, and club activities, we jointly promote the popularization of art education and enhance students’ aesthetic literacy, innovative spirit, and practical ability. Leveraging the advantages of foreign language disciplines and the rich resources of international students, we have actively introduced high-quality art from home and abroad to the campus. We have successively carried out performance exchanges with art groups such as the Choir of Utah Valley University (the United States), Polish musicians, the Hungarian National Art Troupe, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (the United Kingdom), the Moroccan Dance Troupe, the Ismailia Dance Troupe (Egypt), and the János Bihari Folk Dance Troupe (Hungary). Meanwhile, we have promoted the aesthetic concepts and cultural connotations embodied in traditional Chinese art to the world.

“Platform-Based” Foreign Exchanges

As an important base for cultivating talents in foreign exchanges, we have always been committed to “inheriting the civilizations of the East and the West and promoting Chinese and foreign exchanges”. Our university offers 31 foreign languages and has six Confucius Institutes overseas. We are also in the process of establishing multiple Confucius Institutes in countries along the “Belt and Road”. With their own resources and language advantages, our students introduce Chinese culture and tell Chinese stories, serving as young envoys on the “Belt and Road”—a road of civilization. The smiles of our volunteers have become the “most beautiful Chinese business card” in more than 100 international volunteer programs, including the Olympic Games, the Winter Olympic Games, the G20 Summit, the APEC Leaders’ Meeting Week, the IAAF World Athletics Championships, the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, and the Astana Expo. In

2018, the Choir and the Traditional Chinese Music Troupe of the University Student Art Troupe went to Germany to participate in the “Encounter China” cultural and people-to-people exchange activity commemorating the 200th anniversary of Marx’s birth, demonstrating the exquisite performance skills and vibrant spirit of the art troupe members.

“Branded” Campus Culture

We adhere to taking rich and colorful campus cultural activities as a carrier to further integrate aesthetic education resources. Currently, the university student art troupe consists of nine sub-troupes: the Western Music Troupe, the Traditional Chinese Music Troupe, the Choir, the Recitation and Hosting Troupe, the Ballroom Dance Troupe, the Chinese Dance Troupe, the Drama Troupe, the Percussion Troupe, and the Peking Opera Troupe. Every year, we hold the “Gathering of Clubs, Dream of Teams, Youth Voyage” Club Culture Festival and organize special performances with global styles. We have explored and created forms of art practice activities that reflect the characteristics of the times, the campus, the students, and education, driving the vigorous development of campus cultural activities. Since 2021, our university student art troupe has won 10 first prizes, five second prizes, and 13 third prizes in the Beijing University Student Art Performance and the National Peking Opera Cup Student Opera Competition with their passionate performances and exquisite skills, demonstrating the achievements of our university in cultural and art education.

Insights on Supporting the “Belt and Road Initiative” and Cultivating Interdisciplinary Talents Proficient in Both Foreign Languages and Art & Culture

Aesthetic education in colleges and universities undertakes the crucial mission of nurturing people’s moral character and shaping their souls. Its core lies in enhancing students’ aesthetic ability and humanistic literacy. Therefore, comprehensively strengthening and optimizing aesthetic education has become an important task for higher education at present and in the period to come. When it comes to serving the “Belt and Road Initiative”, foreign language universities can draw the following insights on cultivating interdisciplinary talents proficient in both foreign languages and art & culture:

We Must Clarify the Promoting Role of Art Education in the Talent Cultivation Goals of Foreign Language Majors and Form a Goal Orientation of Mutual Integration and Promotion

Unlike conventional knowledge imparting, ideological guidance, and skill training, art education focuses more on the cultivation of basic literacy centered on human development. Its fundamental goal is to shape a sound personality and elevate the spiritual realm, belonging to quality education at the spiritual level. The learning and application of foreign languages, in a narrow sense, fall under skill education. The goal of art education is not to train students into professional artists; its core significance lies more in guiding students to pay attention to art, enhance their understanding of art, and deepen their personal experience of art. We must adhere to the educational concept of combining skill education with art education, actively advocate and encourage students majoring in foreign languages to receive art education, and cultivate well-rounded students through interdisciplinary learning. Our educational goal is not to produce mere “language workers”. The various abilities and qualities cultivated by art education are not only core and basic components of an individual’s quality system but also provide necessary support for college students to develop a harmonious and sound personality and achieve all-round physical and mental development.

We Must Integrate Art Education With the Teaching of Various Foreign Language Disciplines to Promote the Collaborative Innovation of Aesthetic Education

As a professional foreign language university, we should offer various art courses and courses integrated with foreign language disciplines in accordance with the characteristics of talent cultivation and the requirements for professional competence and quality of different majors. We should not only offer public art courses that focus on the inheritance and development of fine traditional Chinese culture and the education of art classics but also provide elective courses that reflect the cultural characteristics of the countries where the target languages are spoken for different foreign language schools.

In addition to mastering the languages of countries along the “Belt and Road”, we should guide students to learn and understand the culture and art of these countries through aesthetic education courses. Such cultural and artistic edification is conducive to the learning, application, and foreign exchange of languages. For example, in line with the teaching needs of different languages, we can offer practical courses on the national art of the regions where the languages are used, requiring students to learn some music knowledge or art programs of those countries. Students learning Italian can learn to sing more Italian folk songs, which makes it easier for them to master the pronunciation and intonation of the language. Students learning Russian should have a deep understanding of Russian national art. If our students can sing “Moscow Nights” and “Katyusha”, and play the accordion or dombra, they will find it easier to integrate into the local Russian culture and conduct in-depth communication with Russian people. In addition to offering music appreciation courses, we can provide elective courses on playing national musical instruments and singing folk songs, which is beneficial for enhancing students’ musical perception, improving their aesthetic ability, and strengthening their ability in foreign exchanges.

We Must Focus on the “Going Global” of Chinese Culture and Give Play to the Irreplaceable Role of Foreign Language Universities

China has a history of 5,000 years, and relying on its profound cultural heritage, traditional Chinese culture can only achieve continuous enrichment and development through “going global”. Cultural exchange involves both mutual influence and mutual collision. Amid the cultural exchanges and collisions brought about by the “Belt and Road Initiative”, we should accelerate the pace of traditional Chinese culture “going global”.

Foreign language universities can offer bilingual art elective courses that teach various types of traditional Chinese art, with international students on campus as the main target group. The purpose is to publicize and promote the traditional art of our nation.

We Must Strengthen Art Practice Activities and the Construction of Clubs to Create Effective Carriers for Aesthetic Education

To meet the expectations of young students for high-quality and rich aesthetic education resources, we should actively create conditions, carry out a variety of art practice activities in light of the actual situation of the university, and continuously promote the activity of “bringing high-quality art to campus” to strive for a campus culture that is elegant in style, rich in aesthetic appeal, and full of vitality.

We should strengthen the construction of school art clubs, adhere to opening up the resources of the university student art troupe, form a long-term education mechanism for the joint construction of departments and the university student art troupe, and strive to build a club system that integrates socialist core values, humanistic quality education, cultural and art education, and international perspective.

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of the deepening advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the growing frequency of people-to-people and cultural exchanges, aesthetic education in foreign language universities is no longer a mere supplementary component of literacy development, but a key underpinning for serving national strategies and nurturing interdisciplinary talents. The explorations conducted by Beijing International Studies University (BISU) around the “foreign language + art and culture” talent cultivation path have not only verified the feasibility of integrating aesthetic education with foreign language disciplines, but also provided a replicable and promotable practical model for similar institutions.

From the construction of “customized” aesthetic education courses to build a diverse knowledge system, to the “internationalization” of art popularization for bridging cross-cultural dialogue; from the “platformization” of international exchanges to send young envoys abroad, to the “branding” of campus culture to shape an educational atmosphere—these series of measures have broken down the barriers between foreign language education and aesthetic education. They have enabled language proficiency and artistic literacy to resonate in harmony during talent cultivation, laying a solid foundation for the growth of “Silk Road Language and Art Talents”.

Looking ahead, aesthetic education in foreign language universities still needs to continue exploring through deeper integration. It is necessary to further tap into the cultural and artistic resources corresponding to different languages, to achieve more precise alignment between aesthetic education courses and language teaching; to leverage platforms such as Confucius Institutes and international exchange programs to facilitate the more effective “going global” of traditional Chinese art with the support of foreign language advantages; and to innovate forms of artistic practice based on students’ needs, integrating aesthetic education into daily life and nourishing the soul. Only by always grounding itself in national strategic demands and adhering to the original aspiration of “inheriting Eastern and Western civilizations and promoting China-foreign exchanges” can foreign language universities continue to cultivate more “Silk Road Language and Art Talents” with language proficiency, artistic literacy, and international perspectives. In this way, the flowers of aesthetic education will bloom more brilliantly on the path of cultural mutual learning under the BRI, contributing the wisdom and strength of universities to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

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