

Designing Cross-Level Aesthetic Education through Original Theatre: A Practice-Based Case from Shaoxing - Centred on the Development and Production of *The Road of Mr. Lu*



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Abstract: Drawing on the author's original theatrical work grounded in Shaoxing's local culture, this article takes the short play *The Road of Mr. Lu* as its principal case and incorporates the production model developed through parallel rehearsals of the adult and school-age versions of the campus musical *Mulan*. It proposes a pathway for aesthetic education comprising six interlinked stages: interpreting local culture; developing an original script; adapting it for different educational levels; coordinating rehearsal across primary, secondary, and higher education; facilitating post-performance dialogue; and feeding reflection back into subsequent practice. In the project, artificial intelligence (AI) is used to identify questions for historical verification, stress-test the causal logic of character action and plot, synthesise rehearsal problems, and support teacher and student debriefing. No AI-generated material is incorporated into the script or teaching until it has undergone source-based verification, team deliberation, and ethical and value-based review. At the same time, the play uses conflicts such as whether technology can reproduce human emotion and the affective warmth of civilisation to prompt students to examine the risks of alienation associated with AI and related technologies. The article proposes a cyclical model of AI-assisted creation, testing through live rehearsal, consolidation through educational reflection, and further creative refinement. Its differentiated tasks, process-oriented reflection, and multidimensional assessment indicators offer local universities an implementable, assessable, and sustainable framework for integrating ideological and political education with aesthetic education through original theatre across educational levels.

Keywords: Shaoxing local culture, original theatre, integration across primary secondary and higher education, aesthetic education, ideological and political education, artificial intelligence

1. Framing the Problem

Aesthetic education in schools in the new era takes the fostering of virtue through education as its fundamental task and embeds aesthetic, moral, and affective development throughout the entire process of educating students (General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee & General Office of the State Council, 2020). The Ministry of Education's School Aesthetic Education Immersion Initiative further calls for aesthetic education to permeate the experiences of students, teachers, and schools, shifting arts practice from a specialist activity for a small minority to an educational process open to all students (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2024). In parallel, China's comprehensive ideological and political education initiative requires classroom teaching to be connected with the wider social world and seeks to mobilise the educational resources of local cultural venues, arts organisations,

university-based professional teams, and primary and secondary schools (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China et al., 2022). These policies provide a clear rationale for local universities to develop and stage original theatre grounded in local culture, while also setting a higher standard: a project cannot merely "tell a story"; it must specify what students are intended to learn, how learning occurs through the process, how different educational levels are connected, and what developmental outcomes are ultimately achieved.

In practice, three recurring problems arise when local culture is introduced into school education. First, students may be able to recount a story without understanding its historical circumstances or ethical significance. Second, school theatre is often treated primarily as a culminating performance. A small number of lead performers benefit substantially, while many participants remain confined to mechanical execution; consequently, the educational potential of script analysis, value deliberation,

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emotional experience, and collective work remains underdeveloped. Third, activities at different educational levels are frequently organised in isolation. Without progressively deepened objectives and shared curriculum planning around a common cultural theme, so-called integration easily degenerates into the simple transfer of the same play and lines to younger learners.

The introduction of AI creates a further, twofold challenge. On the one hand, generative AI can rapidly suggest research leads, plot options, and alternative formulations, thereby supporting historical verification, logical testing, and rehearsal review in original theatre-making. On the other hand, it can fabricate historical information, amplify existing biases, homogenise creative work, and even weaken students' independent judgement and sense of responsibility. While the Outline of the Plan for Building a Leading Country in Education (2024–2035) calls for AI to support educational transformation, it also emphasises data, algorithmic, and ethical security (Communist Party of China Central Committee & State Council, 2025). AI use in this project therefore cannot be reduced to “improving writing efficiency”; tool use, factual verification, human accountability, and education in technological ethics must be addressed as an integrated whole.

Against this background, the article draws principally on the project proposal for *The Road of Mr. Lu*, developed by the author's team, and uses the integrated rehearsal mechanism of the *Mulan* project as a practical point of reference. It addresses four questions: (1) How can Shaoxing's local culture be transformed into experiential educational content through theatre? (2) How can primary schools, secondary schools, and universities develop differentiated yet progressively connected creative and production tasks around a shared theme? (3) How can AI be embedded in historical scrutiny, logical testing, and practice-based reflection to form a closed feedback loop? (4) How can a project move beyond the completion of a performance towards the substantive development of students?

2. Case Context and Practice-Based Method

2.1 Case context

This study is set across a collaborative network in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province, involving Shaoxing University, local primary and secondary schools, and cultural sites such as Shen Garden. The initiative was conducted from 2024 to 2025, marked by the public staging of *The Road of Mr. Lu* at Shaoxing University's Drama Night in 2025. Across this cycle, approximately 120 university undergraduates (specialising in theatre, vocal music, and education) and over 180 primary/secondary pupils participated in script analysis, rehearsal, and production, guided by university researchers, schoolteachers, and guest arts experts. An expert panel—comprising a National Class-II Director from the National Theatre of China, the Head of Vocal Music, and a Full Professor of AI

at Shaoxing University—evaluated the performance, offering authoritative feedback on artistic quality, pedagogy, and technology integration. To ensure participant protection and institutional confidentiality, specific personal identifiers and school names are anonymised.

2.2 Practice-based method

The study adopts a Practice-Based Research (PBR) methodology integrated with iterative Action Research cycles (Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect). The creative workflow progressed through six stages: cultural research, script development, age-differentiated adaptation, collaborative rehearsal with cross-level mentoring, public performance, and reflection. Generative AI was deployed during scriptwriting as an exploratory tool to stress-test character motivations, scenario logic, and historical queries.

Empirical data were systematically compiled into a comprehensive material repository, including: (1) sequential script versions and promptbooks; (2) structured rehearsal logs and observational notes; (3) student reflective journals and debriefing records across all educational levels; and (4) qualitative audience feedback alongside semi-structured interview transcripts from the expert panel, teachers, and students. Data analysis followed a qualitative thematic coding approach. All text-based materials were anonymised and aggregated to compare participant responses across rehearsal cycles. Records and journals were coded under core themes: cultural comprehension, aesthetic perception, emotional empathy, collaborative problem-solving, and technological ethics. AI served strictly as an auxiliary tool to cluster recurring performance diagnostics, while all axial coding, interpretive synthesis, and value-based judgements were executed directly by the research team.

Ethical standards were strictly enforced. Written informed consent was obtained from all adult participants, while parental consent and minor assent were secured prior to data collection. All personal details were anonymised, and video/audio documentation of minors was restricted to internal pedagogical analysis. Regarding AI ethics, no AI-generated text or historical assertion was incorporated without source verification against primary historical sources and team deliberation. All datasets were securely stored on encrypted university servers to safeguard data privacy.

3. From Producing a Work to Educating through the Entire Process: The Underlying Logic

3.1 Fostering identification with values through aesthetic experience

Ideological and political education and aesthetic education are not parallel endeavours that proceed independently. Original theatre has the advantage of being a composite art form: students must enter a character's circumstances, understand the emotional motives beneath the lines, and create meaning through coordinated rhythm, space, and action with

their peers. Values are therefore not appended as slogans after the curtain falls; they emerge gradually through character choices, dramatic conflict, and shared creative labour.

The Road of Mr. Lu places Lu You's commitment to his country, memories of love, and existential struggles under the reflective gaze of a future technological civilisation. Students are asked to do more than remember that Lu You was a patriotic poet. They must consider whether people who have lost the capacity for authentic emotional experience can still understand poetry; whether technology can simulate a heartbeat yet reproduce compassion, loyalty, and sacrifice; and why a person continues to accept responsibility when private suffering conflicts with obligations to the nation. Such aesthetic experience connects conceptual understanding, emotional resonance, and value judgement, offering ideological and political education a subtle yet profound point of entry.

3.2 Building relatable frames of reference through place-based culture

The educational strength of place-based culture lies in its capacity to anchor the broad traditions of

Chinese culture in concrete spaces that students can walk through, observe, and investigate in their everyday surroundings. Shen Garden is not merely an abstract "scenic site" but a historical location in which poetry, memory, and urban life overlap. Shaoxing rice wine is more than a local product: the temporality of slow fermentation can prompt reflection on accelerated and algorithmically organised contemporary life. The poem *Phoenix Hairpin* is not simply a text to be memorised but an entry point into personal fate, social conventions, and the ethics of emotion.

Local elements, however, become educationally meaningful only when they are narrativised and turned into questions. Students need to be guided from recognising a symbol to interpreting it, and from interpreting it to expressing it creatively. This progression is also consistent with the call for the creative transformation and innovative development of China's fine traditional culture (General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee & General Office of the State Council, 2017). The Shaoxing elements in this project can be translated into educational practice as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Dramaturgical Transformation and Educational Purposes of Local Cultural Elements in *The Road of Mr. Lu*

Local cultural element	Dramaturgical transformation	Central educational question	Potential learning outputs
Shen Garden and the memory of its wall inscriptions	Used as the central space for encounters across time and characters' retrospective reflection	How can a local place preserve both individual memory and a shared culture?	Site-inquiry records; spatial narrative map; blocking plan
Lu You's poetry and <i>Phoenix Hairpin</i>	Used as a 'code' through which characters recognise one another and communicate affectively across time	Why can poetry travel across time and connect different forms of lived experience?	Performed recitation; character biography; interpretive commentary on dialogue
Shaoxing rice wine	Transformed from an everyday prop into a medium of time, homesickness, and lived experience	What can 'slow fermentation' teach us about the accelerated pace of contemporary life?	Prop-design statement; record of thematic discussion; situational performance
Straw rope and concentric knot	Transformed from an image of despair into an affective token and symbol of civilisational continuity	How can people rediscover relationship, responsibility, and hope amid suffering?	Diagram of symbolic transformation; stage-action design; reflective journal
Song-dynasty aesthetics and future technology	Warm-hued historical aesthetics contrasted with cold-toned science fiction through lighting and sound	What relationship should technological progress establish with the humanistic spirit?	Lighting and sound design; debate on technological ethics; revised script

3.3 Sustaining educational continuity through a cross-level learning community

The Ministry of Education's guidance on ideological and political education in primary and secondary schools explicitly stresses articulation across educational levels and coordination among school classrooms, wider social settings, and online learning environments (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022). Original theatre can serve as a shared task across these levels.

University students undertake research, script development, and mentoring; secondary students focus on value deliberation, character construction, and collaborative rehearsal; and primary pupils engage with stories, poetic rhythm, embodied expression, and cultural curiosity. All three groups share the central theme of *The Road of Mr. Lu*, while approaching it in ways suited to their ages and stages of development.

Educational drama is highly compatible with

everyday school life because it treats lived experience as dramatic material, the classroom as a stage, and teachers and students as participants in meaning-making. When embedded in practice, it can support students' cognitive, social, and aesthetic development (Fu, 2018).

The *Mulan* proposal incorporates the parallel development of adult and school-age versions, rotation through understudy roles, curricular alignment, small-scale touring, and student-led teaching. These features offer transferable organisational experience for implementing *The Road of Mr. Lu* across educational levels (Du, 2016). The aim is not to reproduce the content of *Mulan*, but to adapt an established organisational mechanism to an original work rooted in Shaoxing. In this way, the professional resources of the university can genuinely reach primary and secondary schools, while university students deepen their sense of responsibility through mentoring, communication, and service.

3.4 Placing human agency at the centre of AI use

In this project, AI can function only as a cognitive scaffold and a reflective mirror; it cannot serve as the arbiter of values or historical truth, nor can it bear responsibility for creative decisions. Teachers and students must decide which questions to ask, which evidence to accept, which artistic choices to retain, and must remain accountable for the final work. Historical information suggested by AI must be cross-checked against authoritative biographies, local gazetteers, primary literary sources, and scholarly research. Plot suggestions must undergo a threefold review of character motivation, theatrical feasibility, and educational value. Likewise, AI-based synthesis of rehearsal problems must remain grounded in participants' lived experience rather than replacing teacher–student dialogue with machine-generated summaries.

More importantly, AI has a dual identity in the project: it is both a tool for supporting creation and review and a question about civilisation that the play itself must examine. *The Road of Mr. Lu* invites students to discuss the limits of technology through such devices as a cybernetic human attempting to simulate “heartache”, a civilisational crisis precipitated by nuclear war, and life experiences that cannot be technologically reproduced. The discussion should not be reduced to a simple rejection of technology. Instead, it should lead towards a more mature judgement: technological innovation must be governed by respect for human dignity, the public good, cultural diversity, and an ethics of responsibility (UNESCO, 2021).

4. Reconstructing Educational Content around *The Road of Mr. Lu*

4.1 Creating a dialogue between civilisations through three spatiotemporal planes

The original stage play *The Road of Mr. Lu* interweaves three spatiotemporal planes: a future civilisation on Mars, Shen Garden in Southern Song

Shaoxing, and scenes from the youthful memories of Lu You and Tang Wan. The futuristic “Mr. Lu” possesses a highly technologised body but struggles to understand genuine emotion and the meaning of life. The historical Lu You endures the compound pain of lost love, national crisis, and personal frustration, while the scenes of the young Lu You and Tang Wan preserve emotional warmth within their relationship. The value of these three planes lies not merely in producing novel stage effects, but in enabling students to look back at tradition from the future, examine technology through tradition, and understand civilisational continuity through personal feeling.

The creative process should further strengthen three causal arcs. The first is the character arc: why must Mr. Lu travel through time, why does he move from observation to empathy, and why does he ultimately agree to carry tokens of civilisation back to the future? The second is the emotional arc: how does Lu You's pain expand from personal misfortune into a broader understanding of country and life, rather than being reduced to pathos alone? The third is the value arc: why do the straw rope, rice wine, poetry, and the concentric knot gradually transform Mr. Lu, instead of appearing in succession as disconnected local symbols? Only when these three arcs support one another can cultural elements become internal forces that drive character action and the formation of values.

4.2 Developing cultural meaning through the progression from object to affect to principle

Teaching and rehearsal can be organised around a three-tiered progression: material perception, affective activation, and critical reflection on values. Students first encounter such “objects” as Shen Garden, rice wine, wall-inscribed poetry, and the concentric knot through site visits, visual observation, poetry recitation, and prop-making. Through character relationships and stage action, they then experience such emotions as loss, longing, shame, loyalty, compassion, and hope. Finally, they examine the underlying principles of individual life, responsibility to the nation, technological ethics, and cultural inheritance. This structure prevents ideological and political content from becoming abstract and formulaic, while also ensuring that aesthetic activity does not remain at the level of sensory stimulation.

In the adult or university version, for example, the straw rope may undergo a sequence of semantic transformations—from an image of despair, to an object recognised by another living being, to a token fashioned by hand, and finally to an artefact carried into the future. The primary and secondary versions, however, require age-appropriate treatment. Secondary students may discuss the character's predicament under teacher guidance, but disturbing actions should be moderated and suffering should not be romanticised. Age-appropriateness does not dilute the intellectual substance of the work; it aligns the expression of values with learners' cognitive

development and psychological safety.

4.3 Enhancing the credibility of cultural representation through historical verification

Creative work based on local culture permits artistic invention, but it must also treat historical facts with respect. Dates, ages, sources of quoted poems, historical events, and technological terminology in the project materials should be classified using a three-level scheme: fact, inference, and fiction. When a historical chronology is altered to serve the dramatic structure, the principle governing the fictional adaptation should be stated in the production notes. Original poetic texts, biographical information, and local historical details should be checked against authoritative sources, which the team should document and retain.

Verification is itself an educational process. University students can construct historical fact-checking sheets; secondary students can compare the reliability of different sources; and primary pupils can learn to distinguish among historical figures, legends, and artistic imagination. AI can help identify doubtful points, generate search terms, and detect plot contradictions, but it cannot serve as a historical source. Through this process, the activities are designed to support habits of verification, media literacy, and academic integrity alongside their theatrical practice.

5. An Implementation Mechanism for Integrated Creation and Production across Educational Levels

5.1 A shared theme, differentiated objectives, and

Table 2. Differentiated Tasks for Integrated Theatre-Making across Educational Levels

Educational level	Core tasks	Principal roles	Representative outputs	Educational priorities
University	Local-cultural inquiry; historical verification; script development and adaptation; directing and overall stage coordination; paired mentoring for schools	Playwright; director; actor; composer; set designer; lighting designer; publicist; teaching assistant	Annotated script; source repository; full production; guidance manual; reflective report	Cultural interpretation; artistic innovation; project management; social responsibility; AI literacy
Secondary school	Character study; discussion of technological ethics; adaptation of key scenes; group rehearsal and peer feedback	Actor; script supervisor; props; sound; facilitator of thematic discussion	20–30-minute school version; character biography; rehearsal log; record of thematic debate	Value judgement; emotional expression; teamwork; critical thinking
Primary school	Introduction to Lu You and Shen Garden; exploration of poetic rhythm; movement and voice games; making props such as concentric knots	Narrator; reciter-performer; rhythm group; props group	10–15-minute experiential version; poetry performance; craftwork; illustrated journal	Cultural curiosity; aesthetic perception; positive expression; collaborative habits
Cross-level activities	Joint fieldwork; paired rehearsal; shared performance; post-performance dialogue; co-evaluation	Mixed teacher–student groups; family, school, and community supporters	Joint performance; cultural map; audience feedback; developmental portfolio	Intergenerational communication; sense of community; service to local culture

multiple script versions

Integrated production should follow the principle of “one cultural motif, differentiated depths of learning, and mutual visibility and exchange”. The shared motif of *The Road of Mr. Lu* can be defined as “the warmth of civilisation across time and space”, with a common value question: how can technological development safeguard human emotion, responsibility, and cultural memory? On this basis, the university version retains the more complete three-plane structure and conflict over technological ethics, with an emphasis on inquiry, originality, and comprehensive stage practice. The secondary-school version may select the central sequence in which Mr. Lu and Lu You move from conflict to mutual understanding, foregrounding character motivation, value deliberation, and collaborative expression. The primary-school version may combine poetry, storytelling, rhythm, and prop-making in a 10–15-minute vignette, with an emphasis on cultural curiosity, aesthetic perception, and positive affect.

To directly address how local cultural resources were transformed into differentiated tasks across educational tiers (RQ1), the project aligned Shaoxing’s heritage with age-appropriate learning objectives, creative roles, and task complexities. While university students undertook cultural research, scriptwriting, and mentoring, secondary students focused on value deliberation and character construction, and primary pupils engaged through poetic rhythm, storytelling, and hands-on prop-making (as detailed in Table 2).

5.2 Linking six stages: research, write, rehearse, perform, evaluate, and revise

The first stage, research, involves reading and site-based inquiry concerning Lu You, Shen Garden, the cultural aesthetics of the Song dynasty, and Shaoxing's urban memory. University teachers and students first assemble a core resource pack and then transform it into illustrated texts, audio materials, and task sheets suited to younger learners. The second stage, writing, involves artistic conception within the boundaries of historical fact and the differentiated adaptation of university, secondary-school, and primary-school experiential versions. The third stage, rehearsal, uses task rotation and an understudy system so that students gain varied experience in performance, props, stage operations, documentation, and publicity. The fourth stage, performance, takes place in schools, communities, or cultural spaces such as Shen Garden through separate or joint productions, turning the stage into a public classroom for local culture. The feasibility and educational impact of this model were demonstrated in the live public performance of *The Road of Mr. Lu* at Shaoxing University's Drama Night in 2025. The performance was attended by a distinguished panel of experts, including a National Class-II Director from the National Theatre of China, the Head of the Vocal Music Teaching and Research Section at Shaoxing University, and a Full Professor of Artificial Intelligence from the same institution. These experts provided valuable evaluative feedback on both the pedagogical design and stage performance. Furthermore, the production received overwhelming acclaim from the student audience. Post-performance debriefings revealed that the live embodiment of the character significantly deepened students' understanding of the historical realities and profound emotional subtexts of Lu You's poetry, moving beyond rote memorisation to a more visceral, place-based cultural resonance. The fifth stage, evaluation, brings together student self-assessment, peer assessment, teacher evaluation, and audience feedback to make learning visible. The sixth stage, revision, returns production problems, audience misunderstandings, and student reflections to the script and teaching design, thereby initiating the next cycle of iteration.

Evaluation and revision are particularly important. Many arts projects end when the curtain falls; their educational experience is not documented, and problems in the script are not carried forward as learning. This project treats every production as a teaching experiment. Lines that students do not understand, plot points that fail to motivate character action, local cultural symbols that are misread, and obstacles to collaboration in particular production roles should all be recorded in a traceable form. The outcome then becomes more than a single performance: it develops into a continually evolving set of resources for place-based aesthetic education.

5.3 University leadership, inter-school collaboration, and support from community

cultural settings

University teams possess professional expertise in playwriting, acting, music, directing, and stage production and should therefore lead content development, teacher training, resource construction, and quality assurance. Primary and secondary teachers understand the developmental characteristics of their students and should participate in version adaptation, classroom organisation, and psychological-safety review. Local cultural institutions and relevant specialists can support historical verification, place-based experience, and public performance. Collaborative lesson planning among these three parties is more likely to secure educational quality than the one-way delivery of a ready-made production to a school.

6. From Creative Assistance to Practice-Informed Revision: A Closed Loop for AI Use

6.1 At the pre-creation stage: raising questions rather than replacing research

The team can use AI to generate a list of questions requiring verification, including a character's age in a given year, the date on which a poem was written, historical events associated with Shen Garden, forms of address in the Song dynasty, and objects used in everyday life. Students then consult authoritative biographies, primary literary texts, local gazetteers, and reliable scholarship, recording their sources and conclusions. AI output serves only as a search lead and is not transferred directly into the script. Uncertain or contested material should be identified in the creative notes, while explicitly science-fictional inventions should be accompanied by an account of their artistic function. Historical fact, scientific knowledge, and artistic imagination must not be conflated.

6.2 During script development: conducting a logical stress test

Once character relationships, scene structure, and dramatic conflict have taken shape, AI can be prompted to raise objections from the perspectives of different characters. Why does a character change at this particular moment? Does a key prop genuinely drive action? Do temporal and spatial transitions disrupt comprehension? Does the theme of technological ethics overwhelm the characters' emotional lives? Are the local elements merely a decorative inventory? The team then compares these challenges with evidence from table reads, directorial analysis, and actors' improvisations. Only suggestions judged by the creators and demonstrated to work on stage are incorporated into a revised draft. The purpose of AI use is not to produce an automatically generated "standard script", but to expose problems that the creators may have overlooked.

6.3 After rehearsal: synthesising practical problems and supporting educational reflection

Teachers and students can document practical problems in structured rehearsal logs, covering plot comprehension, character motivation, emotional

expression, rhythmic continuity, role coordination, age appropriateness, and audience feedback. Once the records have been anonymised, AI can assist in clustering recurring problems, comparing revisions across rehearsal cycles, and generating prompts for debriefing. Teachers then guide students in

distinguishing performance-technique problems from problems of script logic, insufficient cultural understanding, or team communication. The resulting reflections feed into the next version of the script, rehearsal task sheets, and the teacher guidance manual.

Table 3. Task Boundaries for AI within the Theatre-Making Cycle

Stage	AI-supported tasks	Core judgements reserved for humans	Process outputs
Historical preparation	Generate questions, search terms, and dimensions for comparing sources	Consult authoritative sources; determine accuracy; distinguish fact from fiction	Historical fact-checking sheet; reference repository
Script testing	Examine character motivation, causal chains, temporal and spatial transitions, and repetitive dialogue	Determine the theme, character values, artistic style, and final text	Problem list; revision notes; version comparison
Differentiated adaptation	Flag lexical difficulty, plot density, and possible age-related risks	Determine age-appropriate content, psychological safety, and objectives for each level	University, secondary-school, and primary-school experiential versions
Rehearsal review	Categorise anonymised logs and feedback; generate discussion prompts	Interpret specific situations; assess student development; address relational issues	Rehearsal diagnostic sheet; teacher and student reflections
Resource consolidation	Organise case tags; draft lesson plans; create an index of frequently encountered problems	Review accuracy, copyright, privacy, and value orientation	Teaching case repository; guidance manual; plan for the next cycle

6.4 Embedding reflection on technological ethics in the characters' fates

Education in AI ethics should not appear only in project-management protocols; it should also become a value conflict within the play. The strongest potential of *The Road of Mr. Lu* for ideological and political education lies in its representation of a technologically advanced yet emotionally impoverished person from the future learning from a historical figure what it means to be human. The script must, however, avoid simplistic technological pessimism. Mr. Lu does not lose his humanity simply because he possesses a technologically enhanced body. Rather, the problem lies in a civilisation that has placed efficiency, control, and survival above authentic relationships. His transformation does not entail the rejection of technology, but the rediscovery that technology must serve life and civilisation. In rehearsing this transformation, students can examine war, immersive virtual environments, algorithmic control, simulated emotion, and the attribution of responsibility, developing a value position that combines technological understanding, critical attention to risk, and a commitment to technology for the common good.

7. Educational Outcomes and Assessment Oriented towards Genuine Student Growth

7.1 Constructing multidimensional and interrelated educational objectives

At its core, aesthetic education is an education of sensibility: it protects and enriches sensuous capacities in coordination with reason and thereby

supports holistic human development. This understanding expresses the modern character of aesthetic education. By cultivating sensibility, aesthetic education contributes to the healthy formation of the whole person (Du, 2016). The educational value of this project is manifest in at least five domains. First, with respect to cultural literacy, students move beyond recognising symbols to understanding continuities in Chinese culture through Shaoxing's local figures, spaces, and material culture. Second, in aesthetic literacy, they learn to perceive and create meaningful relationships among language, music, bodily movement, lighting, and props. Third, in socio-emotional competence, they learn to identify, express, and regulate emotion and to enter different characters' circumstances with empathy. Fourth, in collaborative competence, they develop communication, punctuality, mutual support, and responsibility through rehearsal protocols, role rotation, and cross-level partnerships. Fifth, in practical innovation, they transform findings from local inquiry into scripts, theatrical designs, or forms of public communication.

7.2 Replacing generalised claims of impact with observable evidence

The project cannot establish its educational impact solely through the number of performances, audience size, awards, or volume of media coverage. Such indicators demonstrate reach, but they do not directly show how students have changed. A more appropriate approach aligns objectives, tasks, performances, and evidence, while giving due weight

to developmental processes and students' own interpretations.

Table 4. Assessment Framework for Integrated Aesthetic Education through Original Theatre

Assessment dimension	Observable student performance	Primary evidence	Assessors
Cultural understanding and value identification	Explains the historical context and dramatic function of Shaoxing elements; relates country, responsibility, and civilisation to contemporary life	Site inquiry; character biography; thematic interview; post-performance reflection	Students; teachers; local cultural advisers
Aesthetic perception and artistic expression	Explains how sound, movement, space, colour, and props work together to express the theme, and creates work on that basis	Rehearsal video; stage plan; production portfolio; version comparison	Arts teachers; peers; audience members
Emotional expression and empathy	Identifies complex emotions, expresses them appropriately, and respects peers' differing responses	Performance-observation form; character journal; peer feedback	Students; class teachers; performance coaches
Teamwork and responsibility	Completes assigned tasks, responds to others, manages disagreement, and understands different roles through rotation	Attendance and task records; understudy rotation sheet; team debrief	Peers; project teachers; stage managers
Innovative practice and public communication	Transforms research materials into age-appropriate scripts or public-facing content and explains the work to audiences of different ages	Adapted script; workshop lesson plan; audience guide; record of public-interest performance	University and school teachers; community partners

Assessment combines initial diagnosis, formative feedback, and final presentation to support reflection throughout the process. Initial assessment identifies students' prior understandings of Lu You, Shen Garden, theatrical expression, and AI. During the project, table reads, rehearsal observation, and peer feedback inform timely adjustments. At the final stage, performance, process portfolios, and student reflections are considered together, with attention to each student's growth from their own starting point. Assessment of primary and secondary pupils should be principally descriptive and should not label students on the basis of differences in aesthetic ability. If the project later generates empirical research, questionnaires, interviews, learning portfolios, and observational data may be collected with informed consent and anonymisation, allowing triangulation across multiple sources of evidence.

8. Conclusion

For aesthetic education projects with an ideological and political dimension, completing an original production is not the endpoint. The central concern is how students come to understand culture, express emotion, assume responsibility, and form value judgements through creation, rehearsal, collaboration, performance, and reflection. Rooted in Shaoxing's local culture and using imagined future technologies as a critical mirror, *The Road of Mr. Lu* has the potential to connect China's fine traditional

culture, local identity, life education, and technological ethics. The mechanisms demonstrated in the *Mulan* project—multiple script versions, role rotation, and collaboration among universities, secondary schools, and primary schools—provide an organisational basis for translating this potential into an educational process.

The project should therefore establish two interlocking cycles. The first is an aesthetic-education cycle of interpreting local culture, developing the script, staging differentiated productions, presenting the work publicly, and using assessment to improve subsequent practice. The second is a technology-use cycle in which AI proposes leads and options, human participants verify evidence and exercise judgement, live rehearsal tests creative decisions, teachers and students reflect on the results, and those reflections inform further creation. Both cycles must ultimately return to human development. Only by retaining teacher leadership, student agency, culture as the foundation, aesthetic experience as the pathway, and practice as the arena can the project fulfil its educational purpose and transform Shaoxing culture from a local resource into a living curriculum for ideological and political education in which primary, secondary, and university students participate together.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest in this work.

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