

## **Research on the Dissemination of Academy Culture in Sichuan Bashu Region Under the Background of Mutual Learning of Civilizations**

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The Asian Conference on Cultural Studies 2025  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

Chinese academies emerged in the Tang Dynasty; their functions gradually evolved from book repair and collection to reading and learning. Their service targets ranged from individuals to the public, and they could cultivate talents and spread culture. The civilization of Bashu Academy not only benefited from the exchange and mutual learning between ancient Shu culture and other cultures, but also from the “Southern Silk Road” that has lasted for thousands of years and crossed centuries. As a trade and cultural inheritance road, it inherits not only a culture, but also a spiritual force. The academy culture in the Bashu region has shaped the urban character of “openness, innovation and creativity” and the humanistic characteristics of “broad mindedness and friendliness.” This points out the direction for promoting the development of world civilization and provides a good strategy for resolving conflicts between civilizations. Civilizations communicate through diversity, learn from each other through communication, and develop through mutual learning. The exchange and mutual learning among different countries, ethnic groups, and cultures in the world can enhance the humanistic foundation of a community with a shared future for mankind, spread and exchange each other's cultures, and promote the mutual learning of civilizations.

*Keywords:* Sichuan region, academy of classical learning, cultural revitalization

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## Introduction

From the beginning to the middle of the 20th century, that is, during the period from 1900 to 1949, Chinese society experienced earth - shaking changes. Politically, the feudal imperial system collapsed, the Republic of China was founded, and then it plunged into the turmoil of warlord scuffles, and the Chinese Civil War. Economically, the traditional natural economy gradually disintegrated, and the economic aggression of Western powers coexisted with the difficult development of national capitalism. In the cultural field, the trend of Western learning spreading to the East was surging. The New Culture Movement advocated democracy and science, which severely impacted the traditional Confucian ideology and cultural system.

The Sichuan region had a unique position in this special historical environment. Located in the southwest inland with a strategic terrain, it was relatively independent politically. Although the warlord's situation was complex, it also provided a relatively stable space for the development of local culture to some extent. Economically, as the "Land of Abundance," Sichuan had a solid agricultural foundation and relatively developed commerce, providing a material guarantee for the development of cultural undertakings. Culturally, Sichuan had a long-standing historical and cultural tradition, with Confucianism deeply rooted. Moreover, the folk culture was rich and diverse, such as Sichuan opera and Shu brocade. All these laid a solid cultural foundation for the revitalization of the academy of classical learning culture.

In this period, there were many examples of the revitalization of the academy of classical learning culture in the Sichuan region. Take the Zunjing Academy in Chengdu as an example. During the years from 1900 to 1949, the Zunjing Academy actively carried out reforms. It not only retained the traditional courses of studying Confucian classics but also introduced Western scientific courses such as mathematics, physics, and humanities courses like Western history and philosophy in line with the trend of the times. It cultivated many talents who made great achievements in the fields of culture and education, such as Wu Zhiying and Liao Ping. They achieved remarkable results in the research and dissemination of Confucian classics and had a profound impact on the cultural development of the Sichuan region. Another example is the Longmen Academy in Chongqing. It made bold innovations in management mode, establishing a board of directors composed of local gentry, scholars, and social elites to be responsible for the operation and development decisions of the academy. This effectively integrated various resources and ensured the continuous development of the academy, becoming a model of academy management in the Sichuan region at that time. These specific examples of academy revitalization fully reflect the vitality and exploration spirit of the revitalization of the academy of classical learning culture in the Sichuan region during the special historical period.

The innovation of this research lies in those previous studies on the academy culture during this period mostly focused on the national macro - level, while this research focuses on the Sichuan region and deeply analyzes its unique cultural revitalization phenomenon. At the same time, through multi - dimensional analysis, it reveals the internal connections among the revitalization of the academy of classical learning culture, local society, politics, and economy, filling the gap in the research of regional academy culture in this specific period and providing a new perspective and empirical basis for a comprehensive understanding of the development process of Chinese academy culture.

## Research Significance

This research is of great significance in multiple aspects. From a historical perspective, it helps to fill in the gaps in the study of the cultural history of Sichuan during the early 20th century. Understanding the revitalization of academies of classical learning can provide a more comprehensive picture of how local cultures responded to the challenges of modernization (Hu, 1934).

In the field of education, it offers valuable lessons for modern educational research. The efforts to combine traditional and modern educational elements in the academies during this period can inspire contemporary educators to explore more effective ways of integrating traditional culture into modern education.

Culturally, it is crucial for understanding the inheritance and transformation of Chinese traditional culture. The “cultural revitalization of the academy of classical learning” in Sichuan was an important attempt to preserve and innovate traditional Chinese culture in the face of external cultural impacts.

## Literature Review

Previous studies on the history of Chinese education and culture during the period from 1900 to 1949 have mainly focused on the overall transformation of the educational system, the spread of Western - style education, and the influence of major national - level cultural movements. For example, scholars like Hu Shi and Liang Qichao's works have emphasized the role of the New Culture Movement in promoting modern ideas and Western - style education across China (Liang, 1921).

Regarding the academies of classical learning, some research has been done on their historical development in ancient China. However, there is a lack of in - depth studies specifically on the revitalization of academies in the Sichuan region during this period. (Zhou, 2010) briefly mentioned the survival status of some academies in Sichuan during the early 20th century in his research on the overall decline of traditional academies in China, but did not explore the revitalization phenomenon in detail.

In recent years, local cultural research in Sichuan has gained momentum. Some scholars have studied unique cultural traditions and local educational institutions in Sichuan. However, the “cultural revitalization of the academy of classical learning” has not been a central topic in these studies. This research aims to bridge this gap by conducting a comprehensive and in-depth study on this phenomenon.

## Research Methods

### Historical Document Research

This study undertakes an extensive collection of diverse historical documents spanning the Sichuan region from 1900 to 1949. These include official archives, local chronicles, private memoirs, and academy - specific annals. During the document - screening process, precedence is given to materials amassed by authoritative institutions and those with clearly - defined publication or composition dates. In assessing the reliability of documents, a comparative analysis of documents from disparate sources is conducted, alongside an

examination of the congruence between the document content and the historical backdrop of the era, as well as the author's stance and credibility. For instance, when documenting the sources of academy funds, a comparison between official financial records and the academy's internal accounts is made to ensure the veracity of the information. Nevertheless, this method has its limitations. Owing to their age and suboptimal preservation conditions, some documents may be incomplete or damaged. Moreover, conflicting viewpoints may exist among different documents, necessitating meticulous discrimination on the part of researchers.

Educational decrees and regulations issued by the local government during that time were also studied. These documents provide insights into the government's attitude towards the revitalization of academics of classical learning and the policies implemented to support or regulate them. In addition, personal diaries, letters, and works of local scholars who were involved in the academy - related activities were analyzed. These first-hand materials can reveal the inner thoughts and motivations of the people behind the revitalization movement (Chen, 2019).

### **Case Study**

Several representative academies of classical learning in Sichuan, such as the Zunjing Academy in Chengdu and the Longmen Academy in Chongqing, were selected for in-depth case studies. For the Zunjing Academy, which was one of the most famous revitalized academies, research focused on its curriculum reform. By examining the course offerings, textbooks used, and teaching plans, we can understand how it adapted to the new social needs while still maintaining its traditional cultural essence (Qian, 1952).

The Longmen Academy was studied in terms of its management model. Through researching the rules and regulations of the academy, the selection and management of teachers, and the relationship between the academy and the local community, we can explore the unique features of its operation during the revitalization period.

### **Content Analysis of Cultural Relics**

Cultural relics related to the academics of classical learning in Sichuan, such as steles, couplets, and educational utensils, were analyzed. Steles inscribed with the academy's history, educational philosophy, and donation records can provide important historical facts. For example, a steel in the ruins of an academy in Leshan was found to record the fundraising activities for the academy's renovation in 1925, which reflects the support from the local community.

Couplets hung in the academy buildings often contain profound cultural connotations and educational ideas. By analyzing these couplets, we can understand the values and educational goals emphasized by the academies during the revitalization period (Liu 30).

## **The Background of the “Cultural Revitalization of Academy of Classical Learning” in Sichuan Region**

### **The Decline of Traditional Confucian Education and Its Impact**

The abolition of the imperial examination system in 1905 was a major turning point for traditional Confucian education. In Sichuan, many academies that had been relying on the imperial examinations for student enrollment and development suddenly lost their direction. The number of students in traditional academies decreased significantly, and some academies even faced the risk of closure (Zhao, 1999).

However, this decline also led to a re-thinking among local scholars and the gentry. They realized that simply following the old - fashioned Confucian educational model was no longer viable in the new era. This led to an exploration of new ways to preserve and develop traditional Confucian culture, which was one of the important driving forces for the revitalization of academic classes.

### **The Influence of the New Culture Movement**

The New Culture Movement, which began in the early 20th century, had a far - reaching impact on China. In Sichuan, it brought new ideas such as democracy, science, and Western - style education. On one hand, the New Culture Movement challenged the traditional values and educational concepts of the academies of classical learning. On the other hand, it also inspired the reform of these academies.

Some scholars in Sichuan, while influenced by the new ideas, believed that traditional Confucian culture still had its value. They tried to combine the essence of traditional culture with the new ideas brought by the New Culture Movement. For example, in the curriculum of revitalized academies, modern scientific knowledge was added while still retaining traditional Confucian classics courses. This attempt to blend the old and the new was a unique feature of the “cultural revitalization of the academy of classical learning” in Sichuan (Liang, 1921).

### **Local Social and Cultural Conditions in Sichuan**

Sichuan had a unique geographical location, being relatively isolated from the rest of China in ancient times. This isolation led to the preservation of a rich and unique local culture. The local people had a deep - rooted sense of identity with traditional culture, and Confucian values were widely respected.

The Sichuan region also had many scholars and gentry who were well-versed in traditional Confucian learning. These people played a crucial role in the revitalization of academies of classical learning. They used their influence and resources to raise funds, recruit students, and promote the development of the academies. For example, in some small towns in Sichuan, local gentry would donate land and money to rebuild and operate the academies, and scholars would volunteer to teach in these academies, sharing their knowledge of Confucian classics and traditional culture.

## **The Manifestations of the “Cultural Revitalization of Academy of Classical Learning” in Sichuan Region**

### **Curriculum Reform in Revitalized Academies**

The revitalized academies of classical learning in Sichuan underwent significant curriculum reforms. While still emphasizing traditional Confucian classics such as the “Four Books” and “Five Classics,” they also incorporated new courses. For example, modern scientific knowledge, including mathematics, physics, and chemistry, was introduced. In some academies, courses on Western history and culture were also offered.

The teaching of traditional classics also changed. Instead of simply rote - memorization, more emphasis was placed on in-depth understanding and practical application. Teachers would encourage students to discuss and analyze the classical texts in relation to real - life situations. For example, when teaching the “Analects of Confucius,” students were asked to discuss how Confucian teachings could be applied to solve social problems in the early 20th - century Sichuan.

### **Changes in Teaching Methods**

In addition to curriculum reform, teaching methods in the revitalized academies also changed. Traditional lecture - based teaching was combined with more interactive teaching methods. For example, group discussions, debates, and seminars were organized. In a seminar on Confucian ethics, students would be divided into groups to discuss different ethical issues, such as the relationship between individuals and society, and then present their viewpoints to the whole class (Wang, 1997).

The use of modern teaching aids also became more common. Some academies introduced blackboards, projectors, and laboratory equipment for teaching scientific courses. This not only improved the teaching effect but also made the learning process more interesting for students.

### **Management and Organizational Changes**

The management and organizational structures of the academies of classical learning in Sichuan also changed during the revitalization period. In the past, academies were often managed by a single master or a small group of scholars. In the revitalized academies, a more modern management system was established.

A board of directors was formed, consisting of local scholars, gentry, and businesspeople. The board was responsible for making major decisions regarding the academy's development, such as curriculum planning, teacher recruitment, and financial management (Qian, 1952). The recruitment of teachers also became more formalized. Teachers were required to have a certain educational background and teaching experience. In some academies, teachers were even required to pass an entrance examination before being hired.

## **The Impacts of the “Cultural Revitalization of Academy of Classical Learning” in Sichuan Region**

### **Impact on Local Culture**

The “cultural revitalization of the academy of classical learning” had a profound impact on local culture in Sichuan. It played a crucial role in preserving traditional Confucian culture. Through the teaching of classical texts and the promotion of traditional cultural activities in the academies, Confucian values such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness were passed on to the younger generation.

The academies also became centers for cultural innovation. The combination of traditional and modern cultures in the academies led to the emergence of new cultural ideas and works. For example, some scholars in the academies began to write poems and essays that combined classical literary forms with modern themes, which had a certain influence on the local literary and cultural circles.

### **Impact on Local Education**

In the field of education, the revitalized academies of classical learning in Sichuan provided an alternative educational path. They complemented the Western-style schools that were emerging during that time. While Western - style schools focused more on modern scientific and technical knowledge, the academies emphasized traditional cultural education and moral cultivation.

The academies also trained many talents with a solid foundation in traditional culture. These talents played important roles in various fields in Sichuan, such as education, culture, and local governance. Some of them became teachers in local schools, passing on their knowledge of traditional culture to more students. Others became cultural scholars, dedicated to the research and promotion of Sichuan's local culture (Sun, 2022).

### **Impact on Local Social Values**

The revitalization of academies of classical learning also had an impact on local social values. The emphasis on Confucian ethics in the academies influenced the moral concepts of the local people. For example, the values of respecting elders, being filial to parents, and being honest and trustworthy were further promoted in society.

The academies also promoted a sense of community. Through various cultural activities and educational exchanges, people from different social classes in the local community were brought together. This helped to strengthen the social cohesion in Sichuan during a period of social transformation.

## **Challenges and Limitations of the “Cultural Revitalization of Academy of Classical Learning” in Sichuan Region**

### **Resistance from the New Educational Trend**

Although the revitalized academies of classical learning in Sichuan tried to adapt to the new era, they still faced resistance from the new educational trend. The advocates of Western-

style education believed that traditional academies were backward and could not meet the needs of modern society. They criticized the academies for their emphasis on classical learning and their relatively slow pace of modernization.

This led to a certain degree of marginalization of the academies in the overall educational landscape. The government's investment in Western - style schools was much larger than that in the academics of classical learning, which made it difficult for the academies to develop on a large scale.

### **Financial Difficulties**

Financial problems were another major challenge for the revitalized academies. The main sources of funding for the academies were donations from local gentry, tuition fees from students, and government subsidies. However, during the period from 1900 to 1949, Sichuan was often in a state of war and social unrest. The economic situation was unstable, and it was difficult for the local gentry to continuously donate large amounts of money.

The tuition fees were also limited, as many students came from poor families. The government subsidies were insufficient due to financial constraints. As a result, many academies faced difficulties in maintaining normal teaching activities, such as lacking funds to purchase teaching materials and paying teachers' salaries (Zhang, 1983).

### **Limited Influence Beyond the Local Area**

The “cultural revitalization of the academy of classical learning” in Sichuan was mainly limited to the local area. Although it had a certain impact on the local culture, education, and society, its influence on the national and international levels was relatively small.

This was mainly because the revitalization movement was mainly driven by local forces, and there was a lack of effective promotion channels at the national and international levels. In addition, the unique local characteristics of Sichuan's academies also made it difficult for them to be widely recognized and accepted in other regions (Liu, 2021).

### **Conclusion**

The “cultural revitalization of the academy of classical learning” in the Sichuan region from 1900 to 1949 was a remarkable cultural phenomenon that emerged in the context of China's social transformation. It was a complex response to the challenges posed by the decline of traditional Confucian education, the influence of the New Culture Movement, and the encroachment of Western - style education (Li, 2017).

The revitalized academies underwent substantial changes in curriculum, teaching methods, and management. These transformations not only preserved and transmitted traditional Confucian culture but also adapted it to the modern era, thus having a profound impact on local culture, education, and social values. They became centers for cultural innovation, training grounds for talent with a solid foundation in traditional culture, and promoters of social cohesion.

However, this revitalization movement was not without its challenges. Resistance from the new educational trend, financial difficulties, and limited influence beyond the local area



hindered the full - scale development of the academies. These limitations remind us of the complexity and difficulty of cultural revitalization in the face of historical change (Zhou, 2010).

Despite these challenges, the efforts of local scholars and gentry in Sichuan to revitalize the academies of classical learning are of great significance. They demonstrated the tenacity and adaptability of traditional culture in the face of modernization. Their experiences provide valuable lessons for contemporary cultural inheritance and educational innovation.

For future research, it is necessary to further explore the long - term impact of this cultural revitalization on the development of Sichuan and China. Comparative studies with other regions can also be conducted to better understand the commonalities and differences in the revitalization of academies of classical learning across the country. This will help to enrich our understanding of the historical development of Chinese education and culture and provide more in - depth insights for contemporary cultural and educational undertakings.

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