

A Model of Cultural Appropriation Through The Indonesian Cultural Festival in Guilin, China

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Abstract

The Indonesian Cultural Festival (FKI) is an annual activity organised by Indonesian students in Guilin, China. This annual event features various forms of Indonesian cultural performance, including dance, music, drama, traditional games, and culinary arts. The festival not only showcases Indonesian art and tradition, but also creates a space for interaction that facilitates cultural exchange. This study examines the model of cultural appropriation through the Indonesian Cultural Festival in Guilin, China. The theoretical framework draws on Richard Schechner's Performance Theory and Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space," or the space in-between. This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to international students who had attended or watched the event. The sampling technique used was convenience sampling, selected on the basis of respondent availability. The results of the study show that the festival has a considerable influence in fostering curiosity, understanding, and appreciation for Indonesian culture. Furthermore, this activity also strengthens relationships and interactions among international students, and opens a broader space for cross-cultural communication.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalisation, intercultural interaction is becoming increasingly common, especially in international educational environments (Bakay, 2023; Enny et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025; Zalli, 2024). The university, as a cross-border meeting space, is not only a place for knowledge transfer, but also an arena for the exchange of values, identities, and cultural practices. Students from various countries not only interact in the classroom, but also build social and cultural relationships through various cultural activities that bring together diverse traditions, customs, and cultures (Appadurai, 1996; Kim, 2017). The experience of cultural interaction in an international educational environment makes an important contribution to the development of intercultural competence, which includes openness, cultural empathy, and the ability to understand cultural differences (Deardorff, 2015). Cultural interaction is also related to the process of cultural representation in public spaces. According to Stuart Hall (1997), cultural representation is the process of producing and exchanging meaning through symbols, language, and cultural practices displayed in society.

One of the tangible forms of the intercultural interaction process is the Indonesian Cultural Festival in Guilin, centred at Guangxi Normal University (Che & Fatah, 2024; Hoon & Yeremia, 2024; Kusmayadi et al., 2025). This cultural festival is an annual event that has been held since 2011. Initially, this activity was called "Indonesian Culture Day," initiated by Indonesian students at Guangxi Normal University with the aim of preserving the cultural identity of Indonesian students studying in China. Over time, the Indonesian Cultural Festival developed not only as an internal activity of Indonesian students, but also as part of the broader

cultural programming within the Guangxi Normal University campus (Jie & Yong, 2025; Wu & Teng, 2026; Yan, 2023).

A significant development occurred in 2025 with the opening of the Indonesian Cultural House, the result of a collaboration between Brawijaya University and Guangxi Normal University. The presence of the Indonesian Cultural House further strengthens the position of the Indonesian Cultural Festival as a recurring activity in promoting Indonesian culture through performances, workshops, and educational dialogues. Thus, the Indonesian Cultural Festival is not only an entertainment event, but also a strategic space for cultural education. In the international context, cultural promotion activities function as soft power capable of enhancing a country's attractiveness in international relations (Nye, 2004).

Cultural performances in the Indonesian Cultural Festival can be understood through the Performance Theory advanced by Richard Schechner. In his view, performance is understood as restored behavior — a behavior that is learned, arranged, and re-staged in a specific social context, carrying meaning that is never neutral (Schechner, 1988). In other words, cultural performances are not merely cultural activities, but a form of communication that conveys the messages, values, and identity of a group. The Indonesian Cultural Festival features various performances such as dance, music, drama, traditional games, culinary exhibitions, and traditional dress. Indonesian students re-stage inherited cultural behaviour for international audiences, using performance as a medium to convey cultural meaning in forms that are accessible without losing their original identity.

In the Indonesian Cultural Festival, Indonesian students not only perform, but also act as cultural representatives who must adapt their presentations to be understood by foreign audiences. This adaptation process opens up the possibility of cultural appropriation. The concept of appropriation can be understood through Bhabha's space in-between — a meeting space between the culture of origin and the recipient culture (Bhabha, 1994). The Indonesian Cultural Festival in Guilin, China, constitutes a space for interaction between Indonesian and Chinese cultures in the midst of globalisation, when culture is often simplified and misinterpreted by outside audiences (Said, 2003). Therefore, it is important to view the Indonesian Cultural Festival not only as a cultural celebration, but also as an active and dynamic space for cultural appropriation.

The novelty of this research lies in several key aspects. First, this study provides the first systematic analysis of the Indonesian Cultural Festival in Guilin as a case study of cultural appropriation in the context of Indonesia–China educational exchange. Second, this research integrates two complementary theoretical frameworks — Schechner's Performance Theory and Bhabha's space in-between — to analyse how cultural appropriation operates through festival performances. Third, this study empirically examines the perceptions of international student attendees, providing primary data on how cross-cultural audiences receive and interpret Indonesian cultural presentations. Fourth, this research identifies specific strategies — participatory activities, thematic programming, and collaborative performances — that facilitate ethical and productive cultural appropriation.

This study aims to identify the model of cultural appropriation through the Indonesian Cultural Festival in Guilin, China, by highlighting the role of performance as a negotiation tool within the space in-between. This research is expected to contribute to cultural studies, particularly in understanding how culture functions as a meeting space and a means of fostering cross-cultural understanding.

The study of the Indonesian Cultural Festival (FKI) in Guilin, China, cannot be separated from the concept of performance advanced by Richard Schechner. Schechner argued that performance is not merely an artistic act, but a cultural act that carries specific values, symbols, identities, and social messages. In his theory, Schechner introduced the concept of

restored behavior — cultural behaviour that is inherited, learned, and then re-staged in a different social context.

This concept is relevant to the implementation of the Indonesian Cultural Festival, in which various performances such as traditional dances, folk dramas, regional music, and traditional games represent forms of culture re-presented by Indonesian students to international audiences. Cultural performances in FKI not only function as entertainment, but also as a medium of cultural communication that introduces Indonesian identity to the international community.

This study also draws on the space in-between theory from Homi K. Bhabha to explain the process of cultural appropriation that occurs in the Indonesian Cultural Festival. According to Bhabha, the space in-between is a meeting space between the culture of origin and the recipient culture that allows for the negotiation of cultural meaning.

In this space, culture is understood not as something static, but as dynamic — undergoing processes of adjustment and the formation of new meanings. From this process emerges the concept of hybridity, or cultural hybridity, which is a combination of cultural elements that produces new cultural forms without losing the identity of the culture of origin.

In the implementation of the Indonesian Cultural Festival in Guilin, Indonesian students adapt the form of their performances so that they can be understood by an international audience. For example, the use of modern elements in traditional dramas, or the arrangement of Chinese songs using traditional Indonesian musical instruments such as the *angklung*, demonstrates a process of cultural adaptation. These adjustments are made so that the message of Indonesian culture is more readily received by the international community without losing the essence of the original culture.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which is a research method that aims to understand and describe social phenomena in depth through the interpretation of non-numerical data (Creswell, 2014; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). This approach was chosen because the research focuses on the presentation of the characteristics, perceptions, and responses of international students to the Indonesian Cultural Festival in Guilin comprehensively, without testing the cause-and-effect relationship between variables, but to understand the meaning and experiences experienced by the participants.

The subjects in this study are international students who have participated directly in or watched the Indonesian Cultural Festival in Guilin. The sampling technique used is convenience sampling, which is a sample determination technique based on the ease of access by researchers to respondents (Sekaran, 2013). This technique was chosen because respondents came from campus environments and international student communities that could be directly reached by researchers.

Through this technique, this study succeeded in collecting data from 50 respondents, which were considered to have met the data needs to describe the perception of international students' perception of the cultural festivals studied. The data in this study was collected using questionnaires as the main research instrument. The questionnaire was organized in the form of 10 questions, which aimed to measure the responses of the respondents related to:





1. Understanding of Indonesian culture after watching or following festival.
2. The attraction of the cultural performance displayed.
3. Clarity of cultural messages conveyed through performance.
4. Perception of cultural adjustment.
5. Respondents' interest in Indonesian culture after the festival activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Performance as a Forum for Cultural Recovery and Negotiation

The performance at the Indonesian Cultural Festival succeeded in restoring the essence of Indonesian culture while adjusting the form so that it is easily understood by the international public. Cultural appropriation not only observes performance but also understands the essence of Indonesian culture in it. This is supported by the results of the questionnaire, where the majority of respondents feel that performance elements such as drama, dance, and music are considered to represent the essence of Indonesian culture. Respondents, especially foreign students, felt that the performance provided a deeper understanding of the traditions, stories, and emotions contained in Indonesian culture

Table 1. Drama and Dance Performance Pictures

Examples of Activities	Remarks	Comments
 <p data-bbox="193 992 392 1021">Drama Jaka Tarub</p>	<p data-bbox="592 701 1023 790">This scene when the angel figure cries because his scarf is lost and stolen by Jaka Tarub.</p>	<p data-bbox="1031 701 1394 819">Shows strong emotional conflict scenes this affirms the boundary between the human world and the heavens.</p>
 <p data-bbox="193 1312 539 1341">Jayaprana and Layonsari Drama</p>	<p data-bbox="592 1059 1023 1149">This scene shows the presence of a Meituan courier delivering food to the king.</p>	<p data-bbox="1031 1059 1394 1178">The use of the Meituan application in this scene shows a form of adaptation of traditional stories to modern reality.</p>
 <p data-bbox="193 1659 331 1688">Kecak Dance</p>	<p data-bbox="592 1373 1023 1491">Featuring battles between good and evil characters from the Ramayana story and accompanied by the sound of "cak" in groups.</p>	<p data-bbox="1031 1373 1394 1462">This dance depicts the dramatic elements and moral values of the battle between good and evil.</p>
	<p data-bbox="592 1731 1023 1821">Display Position End in Dance which symbolizes diversity and unity of Indonesian Culture.</p>	<p data-bbox="1031 1731 1394 1821">This dance affirms the message of unity in Indonesia's cultural diversity.</p>

Examples of Activities	Remarks	Comments
Nusantara Dance		

Based on the results of the discussion supported by the visual data of cultural performances in table 1 and respondents, the performance in the Indonesian Cultural Festival (FKI) in Guilin, China functions as a medium for the recovery and negotiation of Indonesian culture in a cross-cultural context. Referring to Richard Schechner's performance theory, especially the concept of Restored Behavior, the drama and dance displayed in FKI are cultural behaviors that have been inherited, studied, and then re-displayed in a social context different from the original context. This process shows that Indonesian culture is not represented statically, but is consciously reconstructed so that it can be understood by international audiences.

This is clearly seen in the performances of the drama *Legenda Jaka Tarub* and *Jayaprana Layonsari*, where the traditional storyline is maintained, but repackaged through the simplification of dialogue, the affirmation of emotional conflicts, and the insertion of modern elements such as the Meituan app courier. These adjustments show that cultural appropriation that occurs is adaptive and communicative, not the loss of cultural meaning. The moral values and main message of the story are still conveyed, while the form of presentation is adapted to the social and cultural context of the foreign audience. This process is in line with Rogers' (2006) view that cultural appropriation can take place productively when culture is reworked for a new context without losing its basic essence.

Similarly, in the *Kecak Dance* and the *Nusantara Dance*, the distinctive movements, group formations, and symbols of unity and diversity are still maintained even though they are displayed in the international space. Thus, performance in FKI functions as a cultural communication medium that restores the essence of Indonesian culture while negotiating the form of delivery so that it is relevant and can be understood by cross-cultural audiences.

Performance as a Global Cultural Community Builder

Schechner's (1985) theory of performativity and community is optimally realized through a combination of performance art and interactive activities at the Indonesian Cultural Festival. These two elements complement each other to create a space where the boundaries of the country, language, and culture are hlang, so that foreign audiences feel emotionally connected to Indonesian culture. This is supported by the results of a questionnaire that shows that direct involvement in activities such as batik workshops and traditional games provides a more memorable experience than just watching performances.

Table 2. Images of traditional gaming activities, batik workshops, and collaborations

Examples of Activities	Remarks	Comments
	<p>A musician from Indonesia who is currently living in Beijing, China plays a Chinese song titled "月亮代表我的心".</p>	<p>Using traditional Indonesian instruments for the interpretation of Chinese songs represents cultural symbiotic adaptation.</p>
<p>Squirt</p>	<p>International students of Guangxi Normal University carry out the process of making batik.</p>	<p>International students' involvement in batik practice expands accessibility Indonesian Culture.</p>
	<p>The Slamming Process</p>	<p>A group of small children from China are playing a traditional Indonesian game, namely eating crackers.</p>
	<p>Eat Crackers</p>	<p>This activity illustrates the value of traditional Indonesian togetherness in the cracker competition.</p>

The results of the discussion supported by visual data of interactive activities and respondents showed that the performance in the Indonesian Cultural Festival not only functioned as a cultural representation, but also as an interaction space that formed a global cultural community. In line with Schechner's thinking on performativity and community, the integration of art performances and participatory activities allows international audiences to actively engage, both emotionally and socially, in the Indonesian cultural experience.

This phenomenon can be seen in the collaboration of angklung music that performs Mandarin songs "月亮代表我的心", where traditional Indonesian instruments are used to interpret songs from Chinese culture. This practice represents the concept of hybridity in theory space in between, which is the meeting of two cultures that produce new meanings without negates the identity of each culture. The performance not only serves as entertainment, but also as a symbol of dialogue and the mutual relationship between Indonesian culture and the recipient culture.




In addition, the involvement of international students in batik workshops and the traditional game of eating crackers shows that cultural appropriation is strengthened through hands-on experience. This activity allows foreign participants to touch, try, and experience Indonesian cultural practices in a concrete way. This is in line with Deardorff's (2015) concept

of intercultural competence, which emphasizes that cross-cultural understanding develops through direct interaction, active engagement, and shared experience. Thus, performance in FKI functions as a space in between that builds social closeness and strengthens the formation of cross-border cultural communities.

Key Factors for the Success of Cultural Appropriation Models

The Indonesian Cultural Festival is an implementation of Schchner's (1985) theory of Performance in the formation of a global community, where the combination of performance art and interactive activities removes country, language, and cultural boundaries to establish an emotional connection of foreign audiences with Indonesian culture. This is supported by the results of a questionnaire that shows that the use of annual themes such as "The Secret Of Java" and "The Enchanted Land" helps foreign audiences understand that Indonesia has a wide cultural diversity and is not limited to just one region.

Table 3. Group Photo Images and Theme of Indonesian Cultural Festival

Examples of Activities	Remarks	Comments
 <p data-bbox="204 1048 596 1104">Theme of the 2024 Indonesian Cultural Festival</p>	<p data-bbox="620 779 999 869">Theme of the 2024 Indonesian Cultural Festival "The Secret Of Java"</p>	<p data-bbox="1018 779 1436 869">The theme of FKI 2024 highlights the unique culture of the island of Java which is full of mysteries.</p>
 <p data-bbox="204 1429 596 1485">Theme of the 2025 Indonesian Cultural Festival</p>	<p data-bbox="620 1137 999 1227">The theme of the 2025 Indonesian Cultural Festival is "The Enchanted Land"</p>	<p data-bbox="1018 1137 1436 1261">Theme FKI 2025 depicts that Indonesia is not only Java, but Bali is a part of Indonesia with a land with cultural beauty.</p>
 <p data-bbox="204 1753 596 1809">Photos of the 2024 Indonesian Cultural Festival</p>	<p data-bbox="620 1518 999 1608">Photo with all students from various countries during the 2024 Indonesian Cultural Festival</p>	<p data-bbox="1018 1518 1436 1641">Photo moments with participants from various countries when FKI 2024 takes place, reflecting cross-cultural togetherness.</p>

Examples of Activities	Remarks	Comments
 <p data-bbox="204 548 523 604">Photo of the 2025 Indonesian Cultural Festival</p>	<p data-bbox="619 264 994 353">Photo with all students from various countries during the 2025 Indonesian Cultural Festival</p>	<p data-bbox="1026 264 1433 387">Photo moments with participants from various countries during FKI 2025 Show that Participants enthusiastically enlivened the festival.</p>

Based on the visual data analysis relating to activity documentation, festival themes, and respondent responses, the success of the Indonesian Cultural Festival as a model of cultural appropriation is determined by two principal factors: the emphasis on active audience participation and the strategy of cultural delivery organised around provincial themes. The group photograph of cross-country participants at the FKI shows that this festival does not position culture as an exhibition object alone, but as a collective experience involving participants from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The active participation of international audiences through involvement in workshops, traditional games, and direct interaction with cultural performers allows Indonesian culture to be understood more deeply. Culture is no longer positioned as something foreign and distant, but as a personal experience that can be accessed and lived. This approach is consistent with the concept of participatory culture (Bishop, 2006), which emphasises that direct involvement plays an important role in building cultural understanding and appreciation. Additionally, the use of annual themes such as "The Secret of Java" (2024) and "The Enchanted Land" (2025) serves as a directed cultural communication strategy. These themes help foreign audiences understand Indonesia's cultural diversity more specifically and avoid cultural generalisation. This strategy is consistent with Said's (1979; 2003) critique of cultural stereotypes in cross-cultural representation, and likewise supports Rogers' (2006) theory of cultural diffusion, which emphasises the importance of selective and gradual cultural delivery. Thus, FKI functions as an effective space in-between, where cultural appropriation takes place ethically, educationally, and sustainably.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Indonesian Cultural Festival (FKI) in Guilin, China, has succeeded in becoming an effective model of cultural appropriation in the context of globalisation. FKI not only serves as a venue for Indonesian art and traditional performance, but also succeeds in creating a dynamic space for interaction, facilitating meaningful cultural exchanges between Indonesian students and international students from various countries. The results of the study show that FKI has a significant influence in fostering curiosity, deep understanding, and sincere appreciation of Indonesia's cultural richness among international participants.

FKI utilises performance — drawing on Richard Schechner's theory of restored behavior — as a forum through which the essence of Indonesian culture is restored and negotiated. In this context, Indonesian students not only perform as artists displaying art and tradition, but also act as cultural representatives who must adapt the form of their presentations so that cultural messages can be clearly understood by foreign audiences. This process of adaptation is consistent with Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the space in-between, which

describes the meeting space between the culture of origin and the recipient culture, where dynamic cultural exchange and adaptation occur. Through a combination of compelling performance art and interactive activities that involve participants directly, FKI has succeeded in strengthening relationships and interactions among international students, as well as opening a space for cross-cultural communication that is more open, inclusive, and meaningful.

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