

A Study on the Confirmation of Identity of University Matriculation Ceremony

Tingting Huan

¹Sichuan Provincial Department of Education, Training and Research Center for University Ideological and Political Work Teams, (Southwest Jiaotong University), Chengdu 610000, China

²Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu 610000, China

Abstract

This study explores the role of university matriculation ceremonies in confirming the identity of new students. University matriculation ceremonies are pivotal transitional events that mark the beginning of a student's higher education journey, serving not only as formal introductions to academic life but also as significant rites of passage that solidify students' identities within the university community. Through qualitative research methods, including surveys and interviews with students, this study examines the specific elements of these ceremonies that contribute to identity formation and the sense of belonging among students. Key components such as the symbolic wearing of university badges and inspirational speeches are analyzed to understand their impact on students' perceptions of their new roles. The findings highlight the importance of these rituals in fostering a cohesive university identity, enhancing students' commitment to their academic and social responsibilities, and promoting a sense of pride and unity within the institution. This study underscores the need for universities to thoughtfully design and implement matriculation ceremonies that effectively support students' identity confirmation and integration into the university culture.

Keywords

Matriculation Ceremonies, Identity, Citizenship.

1. Introduction

As a unique cultural phenomenon inherent to humanity, rituals possess an irreplaceable function of moral and cultural education, which play a crucial role in nurturing the new generation. Promoting the effective utilization of the ideological and political education functions of rituals in colleges and universities is of significant theoretical and practical importance. It enhances the effectiveness of ideological and political education in higher education and fulfills the fundamental task of fostering virtue and character. As China's higher education system continues to develop and expand, the government's emphasis on ritual education is increasingly evident in various policy documents. For instance, *Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Education for College Students* (2004) mandates schools to "skillfully combine traditional festivals, major events, opening ceremonies, graduation ceremonies, etc., to carry out distinctive and highly appealing themed education activities," aiming to "enhance the effectiveness and appeal of ideological and political education." In subsequent years, the requirements for university rituals have become more specific. *Ideological and Political Courses are Key to Implementing the Fundamental Task of Moral Education* (2020) further emphasizes the role of university rituals, stating "University opening and graduation ceremonies are now very active, and school leaders give speeches that attract considerable social attention. These speeches reflect the direction of education and the

orientation of talent cultivation, and should clearly embody the Party's educational policies, actively spread Marxist scientific theory, and promote core socialist values."

There is a conciseness that ritual education is crucial for the development of the state, schools, and students as a practice field of ideological and political education in China. Overall, Chinese universities generally focus on following aspects in ritual education: emphasis on guiding people's values from the national and societal level and emphasis on nurturing students development and the actual experiential effects. However, the reactions of students in rituals are not merely sensory perceptions but experiences with significant value implications formed through interactions with multiple entities. The interaction between students, the state, and schools reinforces the value transmission of symbolic elements within university rituals. Additionally, the interaction among students fosters students' identity related to the ritual's content. Therefore, this study will explore the reaction of students in rituals to get a better understanding of ritual education through case study.

Organization of the Text

2. Literature review

The section headings are in boldface capital and lowercase letters. Second level headings are typed as part of the succeed Sociologist Émile Durkheim (1973) believed that rituals are the material forms and behavior patterns of beliefs, serving as spontaneous norms of social emotions or collective consciousness. Without a certain degree of sanctity, they cannot exist. Folklorist Arnold van Gennep (1934) viewed rituals as processes of spatial, social, and situational change from a folklorist perspective. Geert Hofstede (2010), the father of cross-cultural research, considered rituals as collective activities essential to society, forming the core of culture. Most scholars agree that rituals are carriers of human cultural symbols and a unique cultural phenomenon in human society.

As for the rituals in universities, previous studies have done a lot of work through different perspectives. Charles Haskins (2017), in "The Rise of Universities," mentioned that the essence of university rituals lies in the sacred and spiritual elements they carry. These elements, referred to as the 'university spirit,' inject vitality into universities, making them more than just cold architectural complexes or talent hubs, but representatives of people, ideas, values, rational thinking, innovation, wisdom, and broad-mindedness. In defining university rituals, some scholars categorize them based on their forms and contexts. For instance, Zhang et al. (2016) considered them a series of standardized ritual activities with educational significance within the specific context of a school. Other than defining university rituals, many studies in the context of China focus on the ideological and political education functions of rituals. Hu (2009) believes that university rituals have the functions of consolidating educational content, enhancing educational effectiveness, integrating educational resources, and achieving educational goals by the lens of case study. Zhou (2021) regards university rituals as an important medium for inheriting the essence of university spirit. Other studies try to find out the influences of existing rituals for improvement. Ge (2018) pointed out that the shortcomings in the function of university transition rituals are mainly reflected in the disparity between content and form, and the lack of emphasis on ritual education by both teachers and students. Lian (2021) highlighted several obstacles to their realization, such as the lack of experiential engagement by participants, the insufficient importance placed on transition rituals, and the tendency to prioritize form over substance in the ritual process.

Scholars have done tremendous works and made a consensus that whether university rituals are symbolic or infectious, their ultimate goal is to help participants understand the cultural connotations of the rituals, fostering a collective consciousness, and enhancing social identity and social responsibility, thereby achieving educational goals. Therefore, the educational

nature of university rituals is the most core characteristic. In the study of emotional generation in ritual education, scholars focus on the implicit emotional significance of certain elements in ritual education and the analysis of the emotional generation process of ritual participants. However, research on the identity confirmation in university rituals is limited, with even fewer studies specifically analyzing university rituals. This study will employ case study to get more understandings of university rituals.

3. Methodology

With the aim of get better understanding of the reactions of students in rituals, this study is conducted by the following research questions:

how do university rituals convey these values?

What reactions do students have in response?

What identities are confirmed through rituals?

Furthermore, both in terms of the breadth of promotion and dissemination and the personal experiences of students, the most significant university rituals with evident identity transition implications are the matriculation and graduation ceremonies. This study will conduct a case study of one university to address these questions. Specifically, with the guidance of research aims, this is a qualitative approach that allows the researchers to “develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2016, p.206) and “construct reality in interaction with their social worlds” (Merriam, 2002, p. 22). For the data collection, a variety of methods were adopted in this study to ensure the richness and validity of the data. this study followed the qualitative research paradigm and employed participatory observation and semi-structured interviews to collect data.

4. Findings

There are different details of matriculation ceremony for different universities but with the same procedures in general as following:

Introduction of leaders and distinguished guests in attendance.

All participants stand as the national flag is raised and the national anthem is played.

Address by the university principal.

New students are presented with and wear their university badges.

Sequential speeches by the dean, faculty representative, new student representative, current student representative, and alumni representative.

The ceremony formally ends.

The university matriculation ceremony serves multiple purposes with these procedures. It is a formal introduction to university life, marking the transition from high school to higher education. This ceremony is not only a welcoming event but also a crucial platform for imparting the institution's values, expectations, and academic culture to new students, which can be summarized as follows:

4.1. Strengthening the Identity of Citizenship

As institutions of the state, universities utilize various symbols and content representing the presence of the nation in their ceremonies to convey their political stance and values, thereby educating students on citizenship. Among these symbols, the national flag in the flag-raising ceremony is the most prevalent representation of such values.

The flag-raising ceremony, a central component of university rituals, serves as a powerful tool for reinforcing citizenship among students. This ceremony, which involves the collective participation of students, faculty, and staff, symbolizes national pride and unity. As the national

flag is raised and the anthem is played, participants stand in solidarity, reflecting on their shared identity and collective responsibility as citizens. The act of raising the national flag in a university setting not only fosters a sense of belonging to the nation but also instills a sense of duty and civic responsibility. It serves as a poignant reminder of the values and principles upon which the nation is founded, encouraging students to embody these ideals in their daily lives. This ritualistic practice helps to cultivate a deeper appreciation for the country's heritage and a commitment to contributing positively to society. Furthermore, the flag-raising ceremony provides an opportunity for the university to emphasize the importance of civic engagement and social responsibility. By incorporating messages about citizenship, community service, and ethical conduct into the ceremony, universities can inspire students to take an active role in their communities. This reinforcement of citizenship through the flag-raising ceremony not only enhances students' sense of national identity but also prepares them to be conscientious and engaged members of society. In essence, the flag-raising ceremony at universities acts as a microcosm of the broader societal values, bridging the gap between academic life and civic duty. It is a moment of reflection and inspiration, reinforcing the significance of citizenship and the role each individual plays in upholding the ideals of their nation. Through this ceremonial practice, universities contribute to the development of informed, responsible, and active citizens who are prepared to make meaningful contributions to their country and the world.

4.2. Confirming the Identity of university students

During university transition ceremonies, student participants, filled with anticipation for the new environment, typically immerse themselves in the event with a strong sense of growing-up to be a university student. In this way, university rituals are instrumental in affirming and shaping the identity of students as they grow and mature within the academic environment. These rituals, which include matriculation ceremonies, graduation ceremonies, and other transitional events, mark significant milestones in students' academic journeys, reinforcing their development and progression. The matriculation ceremony, for instance, is not just a welcoming event but a rite of passage that signifies the students' entry into a new phase of life. It provides a formal acknowledgment of their new status as university students, setting the stage for their academic and personal growth. Through the ceremonial acts of wearing university badges, taking oaths, and listening to speeches by university leaders, students are made to feel a part of a larger academic tradition and community. This helps them internalize their identity as university students and recognize the responsibilities that come with it. As students advance through their university years, other rituals, such as mid-year celebrations, award ceremonies, and ultimately, graduation, serve to further confirm their identity and growth. Graduation, in particular, is a powerful ritual that encapsulates the culmination of years of hard work, learning, and personal development. It is a moment of pride and achievement, where students are publicly recognized for their accomplishments and officially transition from students to graduates.

4.3. Reinforce the Belongings for this university

In rituals at universities, many institutions require students to wear school badges or uniforms to symbolize their identity as students. While this may seem like a minor aspect, it is a significant way for the school to confer identity upon the students. The school badge, in this case, symbolizes the abstract spirit of the university, encapsulating the essence of the institution. For new students, wearing the school badge directly signifies their acceptance by the university and their identity as a member of University X.

In this way, university rituals play a pivotal role in confirming and solidifying the identity of university students. During this ceremony, the university's leaders, faculty, and current students come together to acknowledge and celebrate the arrival of the new cohort. This public acknowledgment helps new students to internalize their new identity as members of the

university community. Wearing the university badge is a significant ritual that reinforces student identity. The badge serves as a tangible symbol of belonging, representing the values, traditions, and spirit of the institution. When new students don the badge for the first time, it signifies their entry into a long-standing academic tradition and their commitment to uphold the standards and ideals of the university. Additionally, speeches delivered by the university's principal, faculty members, and student representatives during these ceremonies often emphasize the responsibilities and expectations that come with being a university student. These addresses serve to inspire and motivate students, encouraging them to embrace their new roles with enthusiasm and a sense of purpose. Moreover, the collective experience of participating in these rituals fosters a sense of unity and camaraderie among students. As they share these significant moments with their peers, students begin to form bonds and develop a sense of community, which is crucial for their social and academic integration into university life.

During the ceremony, students may feel an emotional resonance with the positive affirmation from the school about their chosen major, gradually accepting it and identifying themselves as members of the faculty. Acceptance is a direct expression of identity, emphasizing the emotional experience of perceiving oneself as an insider within the organization. In transition ceremonies, symbols of identity such as the school emblem, attire, tassels, alumni cards, degree certificates, and decorations, along with the resulting physical interactions, significantly enhance the sense of being accepted by the school and society as insiders. This feeling continues to influence them to varying degrees even after the ceremony ends.

5. Conclusions

In essence, university rituals are integral to the process of confirming student identity. They provide a structured and meaningful way for students to transition into their new roles, fostering a sense of belonging and commitment to the academic community. Through these rituals, students are not only welcomed into the university but are also encouraged to embrace their identity as citizens, grown-ups, and active participants in the university's mission and values.

Acknowledgements

Funding by Sichuan Provincial Department of Education, Training and Research Center for University Ideological and Political Work Teams (Southwest Jiaotong University) in 2022, "Research on Improving the effectiveness of Ideological and Political Education through Ceremonial Culture in Universities",CJSFZ22-39.

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