

Comparative Study of Community Art Education between China and Thailand: Based on the Concept of Community-based Art Education

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Abstract: This paper compares community art education in China and Thailand, exploring their development backgrounds, conceptual goals, practices, and challenges. China focuses on government-led initiatives to enhance citizens' artistic literacy, while Thailand emphasizes the preservation of local culture and community involvement. Both countries face issues such as uneven resource distribution and low social awareness. The study suggests learning from each other's successful experiences to improve the quality and societal impact of community art education.

Keywords: Community Art Education, China-Thailand Comparison, Cultural Heritage, Educational Practice

1. Introduction

As In the context of globalization and urbanization, community art education plays a significant role in cultural heritage preservation, enhancing residents' literacy, and strengthening community cohesion. Especially under the Belt and Road Initiative, it is crucial to strengthen cooperation between China and Southeast Asian countries like Thailand in this field. In the face of the challenges of cultural homogenization, community art education effectively maintains cultural diversity. By comparing the community art education models of China and Thailand, this study aims to analyze their strengths and weaknesses, draw on successful experiences, optimize policies, promote in-depth cooperation between the two countries, and facilitate cultural exchange and integration.

2. The Theory of Community-based Art Education

2.1. On Community

The term "community" is often narrowly understood as street communities, the smallest administrative unit. In fact, the concept of "community" was translated from the English term "Community" by scholars such as Fei Xiaotong and Wu Wenzao. It refers not only to social living communities residing in specific geographic areas but also encompasses spiritual meaning, referring to groups of people who are interconnected. These individuals may have lived in the same region, belong to the same ethnicity, or share similar values and social norms.

2.1.1. Locality

Locality: The locality of a community is reflected in specific geographic and environmental elements, including its current state, cultural history, and heritage.

2.1.2. Organizational Nature

Organizational Nature: A community is not just a geographical concept but also an organizational structure that connects members of different economic incomes, political statuses, and educational levels, fostering relationships and understanding among them.

2.1.3. Spirituality

Spirituality: Communities possess a spirituality that transcends geographical boundaries, serving as carriers of cultural and social values. For example, guild halls in traditional Chinese society and

Chinatowns abroad embody this spirituality.

2.2. Community-based Art Education

"Community-based Art Education" was proposed by Luo Ning and Liu Zhongyan in 2021^[1]. The background of this educational concept stems from the pre-industrial methods of art and craft transmission, such as the intergenerational transmission of folk art and the apprenticeship system during the Renaissance. The "Village Improvement Movement" (1853) and the "City Beautiful Movement" (1899) in the United States promoted the integration of art into communities as part of social reform. In the early 20th century, social reconstructionist education advocated for art education to serve community needs. By the mid-20th century, community art education gradually became institutionalized, with rural craft schools and urban museum schools providing systematic art learning for residents, marking its maturity.

Community-based art education is an educational concept that involves art learning and creation within community contexts, emphasizing the multiple relationships between individuals and their communities. It stresses cultural understanding and awareness to achieve social change and community participation. This educational model tightly integrates art learning with students' lives and cultural environments, helping them understand and express community culture while promoting cultural heritage and innovation.

2.3. Core Concerns of the Theory of Community-based Art Education

Based on the locality, organizational nature, and spirituality of communities, community-based art education focuses on the following three core aspects:

Local Culture and Knowledge Transmission: Through artistic activities, it promotes the transmission of local knowledge and skills, ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage across generations.

Social Inclusion and Cross-cultural Communication: It encourages members from different backgrounds to engage in intergenerational and cross-cultural interactions through art projects, fostering community integration and cohesion.

Community Identity and Sense of Belonging: Art education helps community members understand historical and current issues, enhancing collective identity and responsibility, thereby becoming a force for promoting community unity and cultural identity.

3. Development Differences in Community Art Education between China and Thailand

3.1. On Community Background and Development of Community Art Education in China

Community art education in China gradually formed under government promotion, starting from reliance on local culture and community activities and evolving into the construction of national community learning centers. In 1986, Zhenru Middle School in Shanghai established the "Community Education Committee" in collaboration with multiple organizations, marking the beginning of community education^[2]. In 1997, the first community school for all residents, Jing'an Temple Street Community School, was founded in Shanghai, initiating the independent development of community education.

In 2004, the central government issued policies to explicitly advance community education. By 2016, the Ministry of Education and eight other departments released opinions to integrate community education into the national education system^[3]. In August 2023, the Ministry of Education published the "Key Tasks for Building a Learning Society," proposing to comprehensively advance the construction of county-level community learning centers by 2023 and achieve full coverage of urban and rural community learning centers by 2025. Currently, there are over 16,800 street (township) community schools and 364,000 community (village) learning points nationwide^[4].

Additionally, in 2017, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on Implementing the Project for the Inheritance and Development of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture," identifying "cultural awareness" as one of the core goals of current cultural construction. This aligns with the theory of community-based art education, promoting the integration of community art education with local culture.

In April 2024, the Ministry of Education issued a notice recommending 100 exemplary county-level community learning centers and 300 community education brand courses, of which 91 were art-related, highlighting the importance of community art education in cultural heritage and innovation. China's community art education aims to enhance citizens' artistic literacy and cultural cultivation and has become an essential force in national cultural construction^[4].

3.2. Background and Development of Community Art Education in Thailand

In Thailand, community art education does not have an independent name, nor is its concept as clear and widespread as in China. Instead, it developed gradually alongside community education. The origins of community education in Thailand can be traced back to the need for national modernization and development. During 1940-1947 and 1971-1982, Thailand conducted literacy campaigns, and the Non-Formal Education Office of the Ministry of Education launched community (village) reading center projects. According to official statistics, Thailand has established 8,605 community learning centers^[5]. However, these early community education projects were often simplified versions of formal school systems, lacking features tailored to specific community environments, thereby failing to fully realize their potential.

In the 1980s, as globalization and capitalism increasingly influenced Thai culture, the alternative education movement emerged, driving the evolution and development of community education. The diversification of alternative education provided new momentum for community art education, which gradually became a critical means of preserving and revitalizing local culture. With the increasing diversity of Thai culture, community education has shifted toward community-centered development, emphasizing cultural preservation and the understanding of multiculturalism^[5].

Phaetlakfa (2016) noted that art education plays a crucial role in maintaining cultural traditions, particularly in fostering community members' identification with and transmission of local culture^[7]. Thai art education focuses not only on cultural identity preservation but also on closely integrating with community practices, inspiring residents' recognition of local culture through art education. This trend is widely reflected in community art education projects across Thailand. For example, the Creative Youth Movement in the South, the I-San Wisdom Academy in the Northeast, and the Chamorn Environment Group in the Central region demonstrate the thriving development of community-based educational activities. These projects have promoted community members' attention to and participation in local culture, attracted broad social attention, and served as models for other regions to learn from and emulate. Overall, community art education in Thailand has evolved from basic literacy to cultural preservation and innovation, becoming a vital force in promoting local cultural revival and community identity.

3.3. Development Differences in Community Art Education between China and Thailand

China primarily relies on government leadership, supported by policies and funding, to popularize education through community cultural centers and public art projects. In contrast, Thailand's development is based on community self-organization and grassroots efforts, particularly in remote areas, where local communities and the government collaborate to drive progress. Thailand places greater emphasis on protecting local culture, promoting multicultural understanding, and enhancing community members' cultural identity and social cohesion. These differences reflect the distinct cultural backgrounds, societal needs, and policy orientations of the two countries.

4. Practical Analysis of Community Art Education in China and Thailand

4.1. The Shunde Model: Leading the Inheritance and Innovation of Local Culture

The community art education in Shunde District has been actively promoted by the government. In 2008, Shunde Vocational and Technical College established the Shunde District Community College to integrate educational resources and promote the inheritance and innovation of local culture. Through policy support and financial investment, the government ensured the smooth implementation of the project, while the community stimulated residents' sense of identity with local culture by integrating it into daily education^[6].

In terms of course content, Shunde's community art education focuses on combining traditional local culture with modern educational concepts. For example, integrating Cantonese opera into the curriculum not only preserves traditional culture but also enhances residents' artistic literacy. Moreover, Shunde

adopts interactive and experiential learning methods, allowing participants to perceive and inherit culture through practice.

The Shunde model has achieved positive outcomes in promoting local culture inheritance, with many younger generations gaining exposure to and developing a sense of identity with traditional culture. However, challenges remain, such as unequal distribution of art education resources, particularly in remote areas, and the need for more systematic and long-term planning in curriculum design.

4.2. Lanna Wisdom School: Thailand's "Community-based" Educational Practice

Lanna Wisdom School is a model of community art education in Thailand, emphasizing the "community-based" educational philosophy and integrating local culture into the education system. Founded in 1996 with just 30 teachers and 120 students, the school has expanded to 30 community learning centers, involving 100 teachers and 2,000 students. By closely connecting education with residents' daily lives through multiple learning centers, the school has greatly promoted cultural heritage^[8].

The school not only inherits traditional Lanna music and crafts but also combines modern art with traditional culture, offering integrated projects that provide students with a broader artistic perspective. Its success is attributed to the involvement of social forces, collaborating with local cultural institutions and craft associations to form an extensive cultural heritage network.

Through education, Lanna Wisdom School has enhanced students' artistic literacy and cultural identity while also contributing to the community's cultural revitalization. However, it needs more exploration especially in combination of traditional arts and modern education because of limited resources and insufficient innovation.

4.3. Differences in Practice Methods

4.3.1. Educational Organization Forms

China's community art education is government-led, focusing on implementation through public cultural services and policy support. Government-organized cultural activities and art lectures are crucial for popularization, emphasizing standardized curricula and collective activities. In contrast, Thailand relies more on community self-organization, emphasizing the close integration of educational activities with community life. Education projects are often led by local communities and NGOs, offering higher flexibility and adaptability^[5].

4.3.2. Participation Levels

Participants in China are mainly involved through government channels, which may limit residents' autonomy and creativity. In contrast, Thailand's art education emphasizes active resident participation, with community members directly engaging in the educational process through local cultural festivals, enhancing cultural identity.

4.3.3. Cultural Adaptability

China's community art education ensures cultural heritage's standardization through uniform art education curricula, potentially weakening local characteristics. Thailand, however, focuses more on protecting local culture, encouraging art education to combine with local traditions and customs to counter the challenges posed by globalization.

4.3.4. Comparison of Cultural Backgrounds and Social Impact

Community art education in China and Thailand shows significant differences in cultural backgrounds and social impact. In terms of cultural background, China, influenced by socialist cultural construction and traditional cultural heritage, emphasizes collectivism and cultural sharing, promoting social harmony by enhancing citizens' artistic literacy. Thailand focuses on local culture protection and diversity, aiming to preserve cultural identity and promote national cultural heritage. Regarding social impact, China improves citizens' cultural literacy and drives social development through government-led projects, while Thailand emphasizes spontaneous resident participation, using community art projects to enhance cultural identity and reduce cultural conflicts in a multicultural context, thus promoting social harmony.

Overall, China focuses on a government-led public cultural service system to enhance citizens' artistic

literacy and cultural identity, while Thailand emphasizes local culture protection, relying on community spontaneous participation to drive cultural heritage and innovation. The cultural backgrounds and societal needs of both countries profoundly influence the formation and development of their educational models.

5. Problems and Challenges Faced by Community Art Education in China and Thailand

First, the issue of uneven resource distribution is prominent, with significant disparities between urban and rural areas in China and among different communities in Thailand. The lack of art education resources in rural areas particularly affects the coverage and quality of education. Second, problems with curriculum design and teaching staff are evident. Education lacks systematic and targeted approaches, making it difficult to meet the diverse needs of communities. Additionally, weak teacher resources and inadequate professional training limit the effectiveness of instruction. Third, insufficient social awareness and participation hinder community art education. It has not gained widespread support and recognition, with limited policy promotion and social involvement affecting the promotion and sustainable development of projects. Lastly, in the context of globalization, balancing cultural heritage and modernization poses a challenge. Both countries need to preserve local culture in education while maintaining cultural identity. How to integrate traditional and modern educational concepts to promote the sustainable development of community art education remains a critical issue.

6. Conclusions

Community art education in China and Thailand each has its own characteristics: China relies on government leadership and policy support, focusing on resource integration and the promotion of collective activities; Thailand emphasizes cultural preservation and national identity, stressing spontaneous community participation. While both countries recognize the importance of community art education for cultural heritage and social development, they also face common issues such as uneven resource distribution, inadequate curriculum design, and weak teaching staff.

It is recommended to strengthen policy support and social awareness, balance resource allocation, and encourage the participation of social forces. Establishing diversified educational models is essential. China can learn from Thailand's experience in cultural preservation to strengthen the transmission of local culture, while Thailand can adopt China's policy support and resource integration model to enhance the systematization and sustainability of education. Additionally, through international cooperation and cultural exchange, new ideas and methods can be introduced to drive innovation and development in community art education. Based on these foundations, both countries should leverage their respective advantages and characteristics to improve their education systems, promote the comprehensive development of community art education, and enhance cultural identity and social cohesion.

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