



The Development and Role of Art Communities in Urban Villages

A Case of Shenzhen's Handshake 302 Project

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Abstract. The relationship and connection between art and community is a hot topic of discussion at the moment. Community art intervenes in villages, towns, communities, and other public spaces that are closely related to the daily life of the public using art, and is a relatively popular form of contemporary art practice. Since the 21st century, China has developed rapidly urbanization, and residents in different regions have different forms of life organization. As a new form of public space, how can the community be combined with the social and political needs of the public to meet the needs of the public's life and culture? The form of intervention to create community spirit has become a contemporary exploration of the further development of Chinese community art practice. The multicultural backgrounds and differences of many urban community residents diminish the community cohesion established by community identity. The rise of community arts offers critical thinking and bottom-up alternatives to social development and stimulates and expands the potential of arts as a driver of cultural change. Therefore, this research aims to explore the current community art practice in urban villages, the interaction between art intervention and community culture, and to sort out and present the organization, characteristics, and results of the practice.

Keywords: Community art · Urbanization · Community identity · Public space

1 Introduction

Despite the fact that art evolves and exists in a way that is, at least in part, independent of society, individuals have started to actively consider how it may better give back to and aid the growth of society in recent years. Community art is an artistic endeavor to advance human rights, claims Matarasso (2019) [1]. The artistic community was created as a result. By fostering a sense of community via their work, artists strive to break down barriers and increase accessibility to art for a broader spectrum of individuals. Because it is a dynamic and adaptive force, art has the capacity to significantly improve a community's vitality. A sort of architectural aesthetics that is anchored in a specific location and views that location as the soil on which it develops is the art community. Many academics have indicated interest in this pairing, especially those who are thinking about how to advance the arts education in a way that is sensitive to community needs.

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Chinese community art practice is now being developed through the use of interventions to foster a sense of community (Wu, 2020) [2]. For instance, take a look at the “Symbiosis - On the Road 2019 Chinese Young Artists Exhibition,” a yearly project that brings together and displays exemplary Chinese community-intervention art from the last two decades. The annual youth-focused art project “Symbiosis,” now in its 21st year, examines the various opportunities for artistic expression available to young people today, presents representative examples of community-intervention art from China over the past 20 years, and examines how art interventions interact with urban culture. There are undoubtedly many symbiotic relationships between artists and communities, community art, and the art ecology in the current art ecology. As a result of their interactions, the structural relationship and development of the current art ecology have been subtly influenced by changes in these relationships. Each of China’s four divisions is named after a different region of the nation. To give just a few instances, these include North/Central China, South/Eastern China, Southwest China, and Northwest China. Shenzhen’s Handshake 302 project, which I have chosen to highlight in this essay, is one of the show’s elements that will be the subject of this study.

2 The Distinction of the “Community” Concept

Prior to analyzing Chinese art community practice as a specific branch of the art community and researching its organization, characteristics, and effects, it is essential to identify and examine specific concepts. Let’s begin by examining the definition of “community” offered by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies [3] in the early 20th century. His work “Community and Society” provides theoretical underpinning and acts as a foundation for our future research. The purpose of his concept of “community” is to study the influence of values, morals, customs, and other binding forces on people involved in social relationships in the community, in order to study the impact and function on the operation of the social system within this series of “conventional” frameworks.” When examining ‘communities’ in different countries and regions, it is important to incorporate the actual country; therefore, while we will use Tonnies’ theory as a foundation, we will also develop a definition of community that incorporates China’s national features. The 1930s introduced community to China. China added “community service” to its language in 1986. 1991 saw a similar idea. Population shifts from farm and industry to cities have altered community structure and function and increased their size. Within populations, functional biases vary. Chinese urban societies differ from “classical theory.” Interests are linked and conflicts are more likely in modern China due to its high population density and limited geographical space. The high mobility of community residents, especially in large and medium-sized cities, weakens community belonging. The community’s diverse residents bond over their different heritages. Thus, unlike rural communities, domestic urban communities have few cultural practices to govern conduct. The town lacks common ground and traditional local relationships. Even members of the “same community, same building, and same floor” rarely interact and are unfamiliar with each other.

Chen Yi [4], a Chinese academic, outlined the following features of Chinese communities in light of the country’s current conditions: Primarily, it is a regional residential

area that serves as the fundamental living environment and living conditions for community members. Second, it reflects the features of “diversity” in contemporary society, including the origins of residents, occupational composition, financial inequality, as well as residents’ values and behaviors, which is distinct from the conventional “community” with “strong homogeneity”. The modern Chinese community differs from the “conceptual community” (i.e., the community of the Tonnie era) as well as the traditional Chinese rural community and the foreign community, as seen by the preceding discussion.

3 The Background of Shenzhen’s Handshake 302 Project

The Shenzhen Handshake 302 Art Center’s mission is to use art to explore the potential of urban space and to bring cultural life to parts of the city where public cultural resources are difficult to reach. Building vitality and community quality will be stimulated by the natural combination of space change, creative creativity, and social interaction (Wu, 2021) [5]. In Shenzhen, China, there is a place called the Handshake 302 Art Center. The facility, which was founded in 2009 and is situated in Shenzhen, China, provides a range of services. The building at No. 302, Block 49 of the Second Square in Upper Baishi Village is a rental property that is located in Baishi Zhou. There are a total of 10 rooms like this on one level at the location they selected, which is unusual given the great density of structures in urban villages; these villagers’ self-built dwellings for rental purposes are jokingly referred to as “handshake buildings.” In order to set the project apart from others, it was given the name “Handshake 302” [6].

Although this is an independent art space with a core staff of five people in charge of planning and day-to-day management, anyone is welcome to take part in the artistic process and offer input in a public environment. Between 2013 and the present, this location has reportedly hosted about 100 events. As specified in this project plan, interested artists and research academics will be transported to Baishi Zhou, the largest urban hamlet situated in the center of Shenzhen, in order to experience and explore the village. Room 302, a one-room rental house in an urban hamlet, will be put back to its original purpose, and the artist will be required to use the entire Baishi Zhou as a gallery. The visiting artists will be staying in Baishi Zhou for one to three months while on tour as an added advantage of their participation in the sharing salon.

Urban villages are unique to China. Farmland lost to urbanization is said to have created several urban communities. Since they self-govern, they are regarded backward in the city environment. Urban villages are communities with housing. Urban villages exist because urbanization hasn’t destroyed rural settlements’ residential and social systems. If residential and social structures are preserved, urban villages can survive. Urban villages nevertheless face many challenges. In rapid urbanization, villages are considered urban building land. Others believe urban villages are chaotic architectural ensembles that arose in rural areas during urbanization. These theories only partially describe urban villages as residential and social forms. They lack these features. This skewed view also affects urban village development.

Urban villages form for many reasons. Institutionally, urban villages need community land ownership and homestead rules. Collective land ownership and homestead

regulations create a land-based community that is hard to break up. Land-private states matter. China's rural clans and geographical ideas are strong, shifting the land socio-logically. The rapid population growth has made private housing leasing a profitable industry, which is the social condition for urban village development. Government priorities are: (1) Poor understanding and late planning and regulation. Urban villages were underestimated by the government, which delayed planning and restoration. Resettlement is expensive. The rapid urbanization process has caused the original rural residents to embrace urbanization and maximize the use of the differential land rent formed by urbanization, which makes the resettlement cost very high, and the government cannot afford it for a while, so it avoids it and lets it develop. (3) Unable to resolve farmers' urbanization issues like job reorganization, social security, and livelihood.

Urban villages are unique because they have two distinct groups of people who live differently. Despite being close, their lifestyles and cultures may be thousands of miles apart. Urban village residents are "the other" of city dwellers. They've lived the same way for generations despite living in a wealthy neighborhood. Thus, kids struggle to get art supplies. Thus, even if they are close, artists will want to be in the city as much as possible to grow, further separating them.

The site selection shows that the Handshake 302 project emphasizes using art to reduce the huge lifestyle gap between urban and urban village residents and infuse urban village residents' lives with artistic feeling. The implementer uses a typical urban village resident's house as a "symbol" of the village. "Anyone can engage in the affairs and discussions of the room at any time" shows an open approach. When they invited the artists, they made it clear that they wanted them to create artwork with the village as a backdrop as part of their residency, not just in the Handshake 302 studio. They hope this encourages open communication anytime, anywhere. They also wanted to attend weekly informational sessions and integrate as much as possible during their brief stay. This shows that some artists try to address social issues artistically and collectively.

4 The Power of "Handshake"

The phrase "urban village" first and foremost refers to the main idea behind this initiative. Urban villages are towns that are surrounded by cities. Rural communities that have urbanized due to the expropriation of all or most of their agricultural land are referred to as urban villages. As a result, the peasants turned their fields into neighborhoods, however some people continue to live in their old villages amidst the urban sprawl. Urban villages are a general term for residential communities that lag behind the pace of modern urban growth, are cut off from contemporary urban administration, and have poor living circumstances while rapid urban development is taking place.

Urban villages have become the principal residences for a sizable number of people who have been uprooted from their houses due to their advantageous geographic location and inexpensive cost of living. Because of this, urban villages are established on the foundation of internal and external residents renting houses, local residents renting houses to obtain money, and non-local residents renting houses to acquire temporary accommodation. Transitional communities situated between urban and rural areas are mostly service-oriented. It has developed into a virtual island within the city because it

differs greatly from metropolitan settlements in terms of the architectural environment, population makeup, economic characteristics, administrative management, and style of life. It is a rare occurrence in the growth of urbanization in mainland China since it is a traditional hamlet that has endured in the city.

The urban village is a potentially dangerous, polluted, and dirty special area when seen as a component of the bigger city's complex structure, but it also has the energy that the same dull city does not. As a result, it more closely resembles the artist's general working method and style than it did previously. Way, as well as creativity in Baishizhou, Shenzhen, an urban district of the Chinese city of Shenzhen, is where you'll find the Shenzhen Handshake 302 Art Center. The north and the south make up the two halves of Baishizhou. The majority of Shenzhen's foreign residents reside in the Baishizhou neighborhood. The five cities that comprise the region are Tangtou, Xintang, Baishizhou, Shangbaishi, and Xiabaishi. A total of 50,473 rooms (sets), 2,527 rental homes, and roughly 2,310 shops are located inside the 73.45 hectares of land that make up Baishizhou. The entire population of this airtight handshake building is around 100,000, with the vast majority (90%) being a floating population. Baishizhou was forced to change into what is currently known as Baishizhou City as a result of the subsequent planning for the "urban renewal" project that Baishizhou was doing in Shenzhen. As a result, in order to save money, the 302 project finally moved to Xiasha Village, which is a different metropolitan region than Baishizhou.

Over the course of more than six years of artistic activity, the Handshake 302 artistic collective has planned hundreds of series of events around more than 10 distinct themes. Workshops, lectures, dance, theatre, discussions, experimentation, and experience have all been a part of these events. We will next go into more detail about some of the 302 projects' artistic practices in this special artistic community. The art practice provided by 302 aims to engage in an interactive discussion with the public in order to build relationships with them by letting them learn about, experience, and discuss subjects related to urban villages and the larger social scene. The whole public is welcome to participate in these sessions, and Handshake 302 is in charge of covering the associated costs. Because it is most like daily life, the "Single Meal" series is the most realistic of the Handshake 302 practical exercises. Additionally, it is an activity that attracts a lot of interest and participation. Four to six people will be requested to participate in each session of this thought experiment on family meals. The chef led a discussion about his experiences settling in Shenzhen throughout the lunch. "Single Rice" handles modern urban living by "creating relationships," and its typical artistic aim is to feel a sense of "being together." Teenagers and young adults who have started to think about their own sense of self in Shenzhen make up the majority of individuals who attend solitary meal. They will gain a new perspective on Shenzhen and themselves as people as a result of the fusion of these concepts.

The Shenzhen Cultural Geography Association is hosting a series of events and workshops titled "Searching for the Flesh of the City: Rediscovery of Shenzhen's Cultural Geography." Through "participation," "experience," "telling," and other techniques, this activity seeks to challenge participants' preconceived notions of the city by starting with six representative urban spaces in Shenzhen. Participants are encouraged to think about and learn about the appeal of various urban spaces as well as to look into the relationship

between urban space and personal experience. In “Baishizhou Sound Search,” participants are led through Baishizhou to hear sounds that are typically ignored in daily life. They want the participants to rediscover the city they live in by using their physical senses. Participants will have the chance to use recording equipment during the operation. Record the sounds that attract you, then edit the tape to produce a creative piece. By allowing the public to participate in the game, “Breaking into Shenzhen” enables the public to better understand Shenzhen’s history as well as the benefits and potential of the city. This enhances their comprehension of the ecological status of the city.

It was conducted in the manner of a “Paper Crane Tea Party” discussion. Paper cranes, which stand for optimism, were used to embellish Room 302, which had a surface area of 12.5 square meters. A cup of hot, transparent tea rests on the room’s little coffee table. People from all backgrounds and viewpoints can come together in the Urban Hamlet of Art to talk about life and the future in this urban artistic community. Handshake 302 is more interested in the next generation, which is the future of the city, than the world of adults. They play activities and interact with one another as well as the kids from the urban community in both indoor and outdoor settings. Fantastic Love in Baishizhou, “Baishizhou Children’s Drama Workshop,” and “Fantastic Love in Baishizhou” were all performed. Additionally, they held children’s arithmetic competitions and concerts where they taught groups of kids how to add and subtract. The family needed money to pay their rent and other living expenses, so an exhibition of “Baishizhou Superheroes” was put on, and the kids were asked to make “Baishizhou Interesting Pictures” to contribute to the cause. Handshake 302 has been stationed in Baishizhou for seven years, during which time they have offered art to the community in a number of different ways. Additionally, they have given migrant children excellent art training, helping them to develop a vivid imagination and a crucial creative vision.

5 Conclusion

This demonstrates that the idea of a 302 is grasped clearly. They start with a certain collection of urban towns, pay great attention to the floaters there, are supported by artists, and are totally organized by artists on their own time and effort. The artist collective is in charge of paying all costs. The majority of the issues of art practice include “floating population,” caring for the homeless in today’s increasingly urbanizing society, helping people form relationships, and establishing a utopia that may be inhabited. And change the focus to children, so that youngsters in urban settings with parents who are primarily employed can receive fundamental art education and humanistic care. Additionally, this is one of the fundamental meanings connected to the current art scene.

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