Reshaping Space: Informal Arts Engagement as Social Practice

Ying Chen
Southern Methodist University, sophie@smu.edu

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RESHAPING SPACE:

INFORMAL ARTS ENGAGEMENT AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

Approved by:

Prof. Nicolay Tsarevsky
Professor of Chemistry

Prof. M. Carmen Smith
Professor of Art History

Prof. Robert Hunt
Professor of Christian Mission and Interreligious Relations
RESHAPING SPACE:

INFORMAL ARTS ENGAGEMENT AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the Simmons School of Education and Human Development Southern Methodist University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Liberal Arts with a Major in Liberal Arts and Science by Ying Chen

March 26, 2022
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Reshaping Space: Informal Arts Engagement as Socially Practice

Advisor: Dr. Carmen Smith, Dr. Nicolay Tsarevsky

Independent Advisor: Dr. Robert Hunt

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Abstract

This study shows that in times of crisis and rapid changes of the social environment, ordinary people, by creating informal public art discover their capacity to maintain social relations through creating new social spaces for new modes of social interactions in their communities and beyond. By adopting an expanded definition of public art, this study specifically focuses on collective informal creative activity outside the institutional art sites. Based on Henri Lefebvre’s space theory and Jacques Ranciere’s aesthetic theory, this paper offers a theoretical framework for understanding people’s need and ability to co-create shared informal art spaces in everyday life; to engage in informal public art, this theoretical framework is used to analyze the two case studies of Asian groups engaged in informal public art creation: the CCCFC Badminton Fellowship (a field site case) and the 227 Conflict (an online case) by using interview, participant observation, and survey methods. These cases demonstrate that people continue the process of creating new relations in alternative virtual spaces when the original physical (e.g., the church) or virtual (e.g., the AO3 platform) ones were not available. The study finds that ordinary people have the capacity to engage in the process of
simultaneously creating new spaces and new forms of social relations that are the manifestations of informal public art. They are engaged in informal public art as the process of both creating social relations and the product of new social spaces and aesthetic practices.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Informal public art refers to the process in which ordinary people co-create new social relations in ordinary settings, usually outside of the designated art sectors, such as museums and galleries, to improve their quality of life and build community. This understanding of informal public art is drawn from the work of Lefebvre, Ranciere, and other theorists, who show the co-creation of social relations is a form of art. This research exclusively examines informal public art projects which were unofficially initiated and sustained. These informal public art projects are neither documented nationally nor widely included in regional policies. Yet, informal arts engagement may be as or more significant to the existence of people, social cohesion, and community building than formal art arrangement. The growing body of literature on public art significantly contributes to the understanding of identifying efforts made by art practitioners, yet this exclusive focus on artists and art administrators belies the complexity of the grassroots engagement’s ethos. Average people’s capacity to engage in creating new spaces and new forms of social relations in their everyday lives has not yet been sufficiently explored.

This study consists of seven chapters.

Chapter I begins with an introduction incorporating the common understanding of public art, presenting informal arts engagement as an essential yet under-examined domain in which the consideration of ordinary people is a crucial approach of social investigations. Chapter II relates the participants’ informal arts engagement with the broad intellectual milieu of public art theories.
and social anthropology theories, particularly Henri Lefebvre’s sociological engagement of everyday life and the politics of space.¹ Chapter III explicates informal public art projects as social practices that are deeply rooted in community relations by elucidating how the engagement of grassroots participants interweave new forms of aesthetics into the tapestry of their daily routine. Chapter IV explains the methodological approaches used in this study encompassing qualitative analysis from ethnographic and sociological perspectives. Chapter V investigates and analyzes two case studies of informal public art projects, respectively relating back to Henri Lefebvre and Jacques Ranciere’s new social-aesthetic engagement and philosophical complexity elaborated upon in the first three chapters.

Chapter VI reiterates the significant role played by informal public arts engagers to foster community connection and demonstrates the practical applications of sociological theories. This section discusses key findings to disclose how crucial informal arts engagements make way for constructing social space toward the sustainable development goals of community building. From ethnographic and sociological perspectives, this study reveals a productive strength embedded in the process of both individual and collective identity-exploration on the part of participants. Creative expressions and collaborative experiences represented by the informal arts engagers in this exploratory study prove to be the crucial driving forces to unite disparate individuals and communities.

¹ Jacques Ranciere, Aesthetics and Its Discontents, translated by Steven Corcoran (Cambridge, Malden, Massachusetts, 2009), 24. “Politics, indeed, is not the exercise of, or struggle for, power. It is the reconfiguration of a specific space, the framing of a specific sphere of experience, of objects posited as common and as pertaining to a common decision, of subjects recognized as capable of designating these objects and putting forward arguments about them.”
The concluding chapter VII completes the discussion set out in the title—*reshaping space: informal arts engagement as social practice*—reiterating the salient role played by ordinary people. They create new social relations and reconfigure new social spaces by collectively engaging with their daily activities to maintain and expand social connections in the times of pandemic crisis. In terms of contemporary discourse regarding restoring community connections, the study identifies informal public arts’ centripetal and centrifugal forces on both axes of social relations:

consolidating members of the chosen group and building relationships with a wider outside world. They are engaged in informal public art as both a process of persistently creating new social spaces and a product of highlighting their aesthetic practices.

1.1 What is Public Art?

Public art can take countless forms, styles, and media of expression, reflecting the different ways people engage with arts according to culture and place.

This introductory section will discuss the definition of public art and then explore the question of for whom public art should be made. This will illuminate the understanding of an expanded territory of socially engaged public art practice today.

Grounded in the varied understandings of the term “public,” scholars have expanded public art’s definition since the first public art program of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1967.2 One definition of public art is “art placed in public places and spaces” that is “open to everyone to use and enjoy.”3 Although the placement of art in various urban sites helps validate the exposure and accessibility of public art, considering the commissioning process controlled by a


network encompassing art professionals (as well as the patrons and sponsors) and bureaucratic authorities, this definition fails to clarify a “new public” as a diversified audience or participants for each work in a particular place and to whom the multiple messages of art may be conveyed.  

Official public art in the United States, in forms of early monuments, memorials, and murals, involved governmental endeavors in the pursuit of defining national values. However, this approach of “art as public spaces” did not “automatically make that art public” because the placement, funding, and content of art designed and implemented by the federal organizations did not necessarily represent the concerns of the public. Whether due to the awareness of public support for the arts or in a search for national identity, researchers have recognized that official public art is insufficient to fulfill the function of public art as extending arts’ “emotional and intellectual access” to members of the public. A shared awareness of public art is that public art should ideally be for all regardless of social barriers. Yet, “public” decoded as “public interest” is not automatically guaranteed due to the differentiated values of people concerning time, places, and

---


10 Knight, Public Art, 23.
cultures.\textsuperscript{11-12} Elaborating how people define and negotiate their relationships with the arts has become the key to understand the term “public” as “the genesis and subject for analysis.”\textsuperscript{13}

To date, a scholarly definition of public art may include art that can take any form: finished objects, activities, and ideas, and happen anywhere, and is mentally or physically accessible to the individuals or communities who participate in communications with the arts.\textsuperscript{14} Yet, this definition does not cover all parameters of public art; the critical consideration of “public” for the people experiencing the art may bring to light an understanding of the discourse of public art as a socially engaged practice. A broadened area of socially engaged public art practice includes, yet is not limited to, permanent and temporary works, various activisms, and virtually mediated art practices. These forms of public art are “based on engagement” of the participatory audience as a broad and diversified whole by way of their sensory, attentional, cognitive, emotional, and physical experiences.\textsuperscript{15}

In 1995, American artist and educator Suzanne Lacy coined the term “new genre public art” in an attempt to reconceptualize a relationship between people and the environment through arts engagement.\textsuperscript{16} Lacy’s advocacy for linking public arts engagement to the issues directly relevant to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Arlene Raven, ed., \textit{Art in the Public Interest} (New York, New York: Da Capo Press, 1989).
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
the audience’s lives hits the heart of survival of the ordinary.\textsuperscript{17} Although Lacy’s discussion of public engagement remains in the visual art world with specific emphasis on art activism, performance art, and site-specified art, the public art phenomenon has proved her pronouncement reasonable even beyond her exploration. Since Lacy casts light upon socially engaged practice in the field of public art, the research of community-based, collaborative and participatory arts engagement has increased throughout social and cultural contribution, from the realm of the formal arts (i.e., going to an art museum or an opera theater) to the informal arts realm (i.e., folk art, community-based activities, or watching and sharing performances online).

Even formal arts engagement can move to informal settings. With the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic outbreak worldwide, the traditional and official frameworks of public art institutions have transferred to people’s own homes. Global lockdown and social distancing measures have changed and will continue to change people’s real-life cultural activities. Theaters, opera houses, and museums have their shows, performances, and artworks shifted online.\textsuperscript{18} For the audience at home, the informal responsive approach brings opportunities for appreciating great public art production around the world, also paves the way for the audience to showcase their everyday creativity to benefit the world.

For example, a couple living in Singapore created a website for strangers to share the view from their windows somewhere in the world to encourage people to live a revitalized life during

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} For example, \url{https://www.marquee.tv/} accessed on September 20, 2020, \url{https://www.digitaltheatre.com/consumer} accessed on September 20, 2020, \url{http://ntlive.nationaltheatre.org.uk/} accessed on September 20, 2020, and \url{https://www.metopera.org/} accessed on September 20, 2020, etc., one can find examples amongst many live theaters that can be viewed digitally for a wider audience globally.
these difficult times. A balcony, as both a part of one’s home and a visible stage to the public from a safe distance, can also exhibit arts such as singing, cheering, and playing music. These informal arts engagements demonstrated by diversified participants expose diverse interests through their creative endeavors to actively construct rich and colorful cultural identity, emphasizing collaborations and community orientation.

Building on identified directions within public art practice, this paper adopts an expanded definition of public art with a specific focus on grassroots community engagement. While the term engagement can refer to the different levels of involvement shared by artists and their audiences, this research broadens the examination of arts engagement into those often neglected communities in which informal arts effectively become social strategies in everyday life. In the public art dialogue over decades, scholars have concentrated on both the form and intention of art professionals and municipal organizations regarding exploring the dimensions of public in relation to the social, economic, and political processes. In this discussion, the term intention refers to purposes that gear the artistic and administrative egos to produce, design, and implement public art

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for intervention in local or global scenarios. However, this focus on the impact and effect of art fails to consider two points. First, there are insufficient studies of how and why the grassroots respond to the arts in particular places. Second, there prove to be inadequate evaluations of what constitutes informal art in a daily setting.

In light of the lack of empirical evidence about the participants’ perspective and the everyday practices in the public-arts world, this paper aims to focus on informal arts engagement, which usually features differentiated funding, ownership, and commissioning processes.

Informed by existing research, this paper focuses on public art as art outside of institutional sites and architectures which fits one of the four categories as follows:

1) Creative activities represented in places and spaces freely accessible to all
2) Activities are pertinent to individual participants or community orientation
3) Activities are carried out by individual participants or community
4) Activities are funded by the public

These four recognized categories address public places, public purpose, public performance, and public sources of funding, all of which are related to the notion of “public.” Public art, thus, can incorporate a wide range of permanent artworks, temporary works, site-specific works, social activism, interventions, performance, social services, spatial practice, virtual arts sharing, and

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25 For further information about the definition, see Cameron Cartiere and Shelly Wills, “Coming in from the Cold,” in *The Practice of Public Art*, edited by Cameron Cartiere and Shelly Wills (New York, New York: Routledge, 2008), 7-17; and this definition is also indebted to Cameron Cartiere and Martin Zebracki, Introduction, in *The Everyday Practice of Public Art: Art, Space and Social Inclusion* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2016), 1-10.

26 In both texts of *The Practice of Public Art* and *The Everyday Practice of Public Art*, the writers state that a working definition needs to meet at least one of the categories.
virtually participatory practice, among many others. These arts activities can be anywhere in urban areas, rural villages, suburban regions, and people’s homes. Under the umbrella of public art, public arts engagement can be seen as ubiquitous and multifaceted practice in society, existing in both the public and personal spheres, and physical space and cyberspace. Existing research focuses primarily on the passive audience. This research, however, will offer a more focused examination of the participatory possibilities for public art and explore the ways in which active participants audiences find meaning through their engagement.

1.2 Who, Where, Why, and How: Aspects of Public Arts Engagement as Central Research Questions

Four questions will guide this study on informal public art:

1) Who are the participants engaging in the arts?

2) Where do people engage in the arts?

3) Why do people engage in a certain kind of arts in a specific place?

4) How do people engage in the arts by making, practicing, and sharing arts?

In the 1990s, scholars highlighted public art as participatory in order to acknowledge public issues and purposefully address the audience within art production.\(^{27}\)\(^{28}\) Advocacy of audience-centered studies has shifted the dominant intellectual interests from art for public spaces to art for the audience. Later, research pushed the shifting focus further by examining public art projects from human geographic and ethnographic perspectives. Some scholars acknowledge the insufficient analysis of selected locations where the public artwork was positioned, from which the perception


\(^{28}\) Ibid, 54.
of public art primarily originates. Others acknowledge the people who engage with the intended space to shape the environment and promote social change within the domain of public art. Still others call for systematic attention to the process of people’s interaction with public art, particularly emphasizing the role of non-artists as co-creators of public art.

Although these approaches are not enough to fully uncover the rich dynamism of arts engagement employed by the participants, the attempt to provide answers to the fundamental questions is worthwhile to the discipline of public art. This research will explore how ordinary people engage with the arts relevant to what keenly concerns them in life, rather than merely how they respond to the arts. Building on methodologies based on observation, interviews, and surveys, this research differs considerably from the conventional focus upon intentions and impacts of artists, planners, and policymakers. It throws light on an understudied social group by straddling the divide between the contexts of artistic practice and the traditional audience.

From the listed four measures of public arts engagement, this study examines ordinary participants’ informal arts practices within their daily routine. Based on multiple sociological methodologies—such as survey, field research, and secondary data analysis—this research seeks to draw out the interrelations among public-art participatory beholders, public space, and community-based arts projects from the participants’ perspectives. A brief deconstruction of “public”


establishes the foundation for discussions of people’s participation in the arts in subsequent chapters.

1.3 Understanding “Public”

The definitional hurdle recognized by scholars is critically relevant to grasping the true meaning of the term “public” in the literature of public art. As many scholars have acknowledged, an un-problematic oversimplification of notions of “public” hinders a more in-depth exploration of the real situation of a “participatory society.” In this research, human relations are fundamental to decode “public” in public art theories.

Two general considerations are significant to this research:

1) people (as audiences and participants)

2) locations (as the constructed spaces where the arts are represented)

The first consideration is relevant to the public as engaged in art. “Elitist art,” on the other hand, visualizes a wider population only against the small proportion of the advantaged.

The second consideration relates to the sites of public art, which are open and easily accessible to all.

For the second consideration, there are two layers of meaning: publicly accessible as opposed to privately and financially accessible as opposed to financially privileged.

33 Cornwell, Democracy and the Arts, 5. As Cornwell stated, he coined this term to examine the interrelationship between democracy and the arts by exploring participatory democracy theories. This term was derived from a book of Carole Pateman, see Carole Pateman, Participation and Democratic Theory (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 108.


36 Grant Kester, Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2004), 27.
them are based on arts engagement as a shared concern where participants, their arts projects, and communities are positioned within sociological and financially accessible locales.

The reason for bringing out the two realms is to show they are inherent in the goal of truly public art: to serve a wider group of participants. Simultaneously, these considerations are a reaction to the traditional art world and the critical discourse of public art, which has marginalized people’s arts engagement by weighing artistic professionals and administrative decision-makers more heavily than the involved members of the given communities. Recognizing the intellectual and empirical gap between artists and audiences in the mainstream literature, this research targets *informal* arts—whose content, approaches, and values are defined wholly by the members of communities—as the area to investigate. 37 This research explores arts experiences of those marginalized outside the dominant paradigm and without artists' formal presence to gain unique access to people’s ability to express, collaborate, and make meanings. These identified considerations of “public” set a foundation for further examining public art as socially engaged art in the following chapters.

1.3.1 People

First and foremost, in order to tackle the meanings of “public” in the dialogue of public art, we must define who gets involved in setting up, participating in, and interacting with the informal arts. This research focuses on neither art professionals nor institutional planners, but the diversified citizens who create, promote, and sustain the community-oriented arts engagement. These groups of people should be understood as actors whose collaborative, creative, and negotiable processes

of engaging with the arts have long been neglected. This research suggests that a fundamental purpose of public art is for the public—“the people”—to build a community as a whole within which people define and redefine themselves through art creation.\textsuperscript{38}

This research examines public art as the process of socio-spatial practice—within which the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the “universal and anonymous subject”—grassroots participants—integrate space and place to express the content of their daily existence.\textsuperscript{39-40} Some may regard audiences as people who “perceive the arts” yet usually without enough insights into the art, implying a condescending, Western, and “high art” context that assumes only the elite can understand and appreciate art.\textsuperscript{41-42} This research focuses on the grassroots participants’ arts engagements as indispensable activities in everyday life which are also a bottom-up social practice to construct “lived space.”\textsuperscript{43,44}

1.3.2 Locations (part 1)

The second implication of “public” is related to places where the arts engagement occurs. Understanding the word location as merely easy public accessibility cannot satisfy public art in the sense of public engagement. For example, one can easily find huge abstract sculptures erected

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{38} John Dowey, The Public and Its Problems (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 2016), 38.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space, translated by Donald Nicholson Smith (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 33. A further discussion of Lefebvre’s social theory is in chapter II.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1988), 95.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Dot Tuer, Mining the Media Archive: Essays on Art, Technology, and Cultural Resistance (Toronto, Canada: YYZ Books, 2005), 135.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Terry Lynn Cornwell, Democracy and The Arts: The Role of Participation (New York, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), 4.
\item \textsuperscript{43} de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, 4-5.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 39. A further discussion of Lefebvre’s social theory is in chapter II.
\end{itemize}
from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s in national and state parks, civic centers, city plazas, university campuses, entrance areas to bureaucratic buildings, and even parking lots and airports. The openness and unrestricted access seem to validate site-specific sculptures—especially those outside of the confines of museums and galleries—as “public” art. However, such artistic productions in public areas may prove to be extraneous to the integrity of the spectators, and the built environment, if they are irrelevant to “public interest.” Such “public” art proclaims an institutionalized autonomy composed of self-expressed aesthetics, decorative effect, utilitarianized function, and federal ambitions, yet makes little genuine gesture to public engagement. Understanding the term location as mere physical accessibility results in the public’s indifference and even aloofness toward the particular situation of the sites. People become the objects rather than subjects of “public” art. What is worse, even today, this understanding of public art as artworks situated in designated public locations, which function more like an extension of museum, still dominates the comprehension of public art in the general public.

An alternative is to recognize the word public location as a context of “free selection” in which participants can decide “a common ground” where activities “bind a community” to engage

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45 For example, sculptures of American pop artists, such as Claes Oldenburg, Robert Indiana, and Roy Lichtenstein, among others.


48 Ibid.

49 This conclusion is based on the interviews for this research conducted by the author from October, 2019 to March, 2020 at Plano, Texas.
the arts, especially in digital forms. For community-centered arts, the quality of intimacy is attached to the environment by improving familiarity or friendship in the given community. The quality of “public” is attached to the environment by increasing communicative cooperation among the participants or even beyond the target group and extended to other groups. As long as one regards people, places, and groups as a whole and not a part, the unity of “public” and “private” may be affirmed in some environments.

The fusion between the contexts of “public” and “private” suggests that arts engagements occur concurrently in the same space, and that both possess a political dimension. In addition, the free social media platforms have accelerated the trend of engaging arts; in a way that changes the understanding of public space, as well as the landscape of public art. For example, the home, as a traditionally “intimate” place, is no longer private in the modern age, especially with the drastically rapid technological advances that provide the public new opportunities for art-making and art-sharing from home to the world (via electronic and digital media such as TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, etc.)

This dual nature of space suggests an aspect of social organization manifested by modern participants who daily navigate both the public and private spaces to suit their own needs. Distinct from the privileged, who create exclusive spaces by economic and political power, ordinary people alter space for entertaining, socializing, and making arts. For example, myriad


forms of arts participation, especially of amateurs (many other kinds of non-professionals), have altered and even reshaped cultural spaces to suit their own needs to communicate with other individuals and groups. Social media platforms offer a broadened stage for all—regardless of gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, and educational and economic background—to showcase and appreciate their chosen arts in the flow of everyday life. Whether in physical or virtual spaces, the participants steer the variations between public and private spaces toward the level of their needs. These purposeful participants have changed the assumed audience. They interweave their experiences with the arts and deliver their artistic activities to others as part of their daily routines.

1.3.3 Locations (part 2)

The second aspect of accessibility is based on the ability or willingness to pay. There is now less need for affluence to engage art because mobile social networks are blurring the distinction between social and intimate spaces. Informal cultural practices in cyberspace have made the boundary between formal and subordinate cultures hardly discernible.\(^5\) This cultural shift relies on the accessibility and convenience of internet, all of which make informal arts expressions a form of mass distribution and a key sector of mainstream web culture. Online arts-based activities include, yet are not limited to performing/watching dances, singing/listening songs, and reading/writing literature. One may easily find art performances online for free. Popular art is evolving due to a remarkably broad group of people who have benefited from and have been influenced by media development, despite various social and economic status.

This transition from elite exclusion to mass participation is significant to this research because cultural engagement—in particular informal arts practice—serves as a sign of public interest in a stratified society. Inequality in arts participation is likely related to participation in economic and social sectors.\textsuperscript{54} Arts consumption and arts participation appear determined by differences of education, social status, and ethnicity.\textsuperscript{55}

1.4 The Importance of Informal Public Art for Research and for Public Policy

A definition of the arts is easily found in the policy sector, yet defining the arts for the purposes of research on participants’ engagement is trickier. In addition, the amateur part of the arts sector has largely been neglected. From the policy perspective, the arts are not just for art’s sake, but to support community development at the national and local levels. Community-based arts activities are prolific under such supportive circumstance in the United States. According to \textit{US Code}, “the arts” include, but are not limited to music, dance, drama, creative writing, painting, folk art, television, video, performance, and many other creative activities carried out by any citizen in America.\textsuperscript{56} These activities and non-profit sectors in legislations serve for the prosperity of people


\textsuperscript{56} \textit{US Code}, Sec. 952 (sec. 3) \textit{Definitions (b)}, Cornell Law School, available from https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/952; accessed on October, 13, 2020. The Arts include but are not limited to, “music (instrumental and vocal), dance, drama, folk art, creative writing, architecture and allied fields, painting, sculpture, photography, graphic and craft arts, industrial design, costume and fashion design, motion pictures, television, radio, film, video, and sound recording, the arts related to the presentation, performance, execution, and exhibition of such major art forms, all those traditional arts practices by the diverse peoples of this country, and the study and application of the arts to the human environment.”
and culture. Furthermore, the mission of National Endowment for the Arts is “to broaden public access to the arts and to expand opportunities for educational experiences in the arts for Americans of all ages.” These legislations focus mainly on the economic and humanitarian support for the arts organizations and programs. However, the extent to which the public may benefit from the arts remains unclear because of the lack of understanding from the participants’ view, as well as the arts leaders’ lack of reflection on critical issues in public art. 

The policy community has addressed the “informal arts” as the “unincorporated arts,” ranging from community, avocational, and folk arts, to the indigenous arts, while community-based arts have been of marginal concern on both governmental and theoretical stages. Now, the internet enables a more democratized media condition than ever before; activities of the informal arts are far

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57 National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act, Sec. 953 (sec. 4), U.S. Code, available from https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title20/chapter26&edition=prelim; accessed on October 13, 2020. The policy mission toward the arts reads: “The purpose of the Foundation [National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities] shall be to develop and promote a broadly conceived national policy of support for the humanities and the arts in the United States and for institutions which preserve the cultural heritage of the United States pursuant to this subchapter.”

58 National Endowment for the Arts, available from https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/pubs/statement/ddsnea.htm; accessed on October 13, 2020. “The mission of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is to broaden public access to the arts and to expand opportunities for educational experiences in the arts for Americans of all ages. The NEA, in partnership with State and local arts agencies, arts organizations, foundations, the corporate community, and other government agencies, supports programs to benefit at-risk youth, their families, and their communities through involvement in the arts. Grants to organizations to support arts-based youth programs are typically awarded through the Education and Access and the Partnership, Planning, and Stabilization Divisions of the NEA.”


beyond the official and conventional planning of “formal arts” or “high art.” Classical music, jazz, musical and non-musical plays, opera, ballet performance, other dances, and visiting art facilities (museums, crafts fairs, and historical parks and monument sites) are seven “benchmark” artistic creativities categorized in 1982. American cultural policy makers have become more progressive and realized new forms and activities of arts enjoyment and arts leisure. In Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, the NEA has added the idea of sharing arts by posting and creating online and identified venues where residents attend multiple arts-related festivals to the arts field since 2012. Yet, the artificial distinction between the “formal” and “informal” arts may convey an imagined “interest of the public” conceived by bureaucratic officials rather than the real public interest.

If the policy field continues to give little attention to the extensive changes in the community-led arts sector, diverse individuals and groups will likely remain disadvantaged by public-art policy, and the growing bodies of critical research will leave a largely data-free space, in particular those informal community groups and activities. A scarcity of the participants’

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perspective and a dearth of sociological methodologies are the main reasons for this deficiency (see details in chapter IV).

1.4.1 Contributions of this study

By placing “informal arts” under the four categories of public art, this research sheds light on grassroots engagements as informal sectors with the under-examined arts sector on an individual and group basis. This allows this thesis to examine the integration of people, places, and environments and enlarge the informal arts scholarship; this in turn facilitates public awareness of the “unaccounted” arts sectors, and provides a means to understand aesthetic experiences in daily lives.

First, this contributes to a theoretical rationale for ordinary people who engage with informal arts in authentic ways yet have gone unrecognized in mainstream structures. Sparking new conversations about research on arts practices in ordinary life is necessary to expand the understanding of the grassroots’ arts participation (in particular those historically marginalized groups such as Asian people in the U.S.) and to resonate with the core value of creating a democratic environment for a broadened, diversified public in American public art. This endeavor is not merely about the art world, but about the idea of the universalized, encompassing “physical reconfiguration and mental landscape” of everyday life. 67 Bearing in mind that public art is an approach to public engagement and social practice, this research focuses on the relationship between arts activities in everyday life and the common good with particular emphases on perspectives of the chosen community. This focus requires this research to focus on community-based arts engagers to address the reception and production of heterogeneous representations of the

arts, which are beyond the confinement of the pure art world, to demonstrate the common interest that people have in public life.  

The second purpose of a research focus on informal arts is to highlight the special role the informal arts sectors (especially those sites such as homes, religious facilities, and natural settings beyond traditionally profit and non-profit art venues like galleries and museums) play to bond grassroots’ cultural practices with their communities in reality. These informal, “amateur-engaged” sectors have taken a prominent place in the digitalized world that is worth of deeper investigation to interpret social practice from a realistic, honest position in people’s lives, while they have been under the radar of cultural policy centering on “a market-orientated mentality.” Centering on the arts from a broadened, multi-faceted, and more nuanced position is fundamental for academic and policy sectors to grasp a more authentic understanding of the role and value of the arts as applied to the wider community.

The third purpose of this focus on informal arts is to offer unique insight into the identity of informal arts communities with a particular focus on how the arts participants face social issues and improve the quality of life for both themselves and their communities from the view of “everyday aesthetics.”

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level of society have moved the conversation of public art to the direction of universality, whether they reflect commodity desire or self-expression. This trend blurs the boundary between art and life, and between different disciplines of arts activities to an unprecedented extent. For example, to define basketball-playing shared on a social media platform (e.g., TikTok or Instagram) to be a form of sport or an art expression may be difficult because a lopsided classification can unavoidably lead to either a reduction or a total loss of its richness. As mentioned, different communities may hold different ideas about art. Community-oriented (process-oriented) activities offers more open, healthy, and participatory environment than expert-based (object-based) practices do. A sport usually features competitive process and the rules of the game, yet art centers on aesthetic sensitivity and experiences. However, if the sport is not merely played for competition but for leisure, pleasure, fitness, and even social purposes in a private settings (e.g., the backyard, religious property, streets, and meadows), can sports be incorporated into community-based public art? This research suggests a positive answer to this question.

\textit{Fourth}, while dialogue about public art as socially engaged practice has been explored mostly in the context of artwork, this research places the arts on the conceptual ground of exploring the potential of people to engage with “everyday aesthetics” from a socio-political perspective.\textsuperscript{72} The term “everyday aesthetics” in this research refers to informal arts activities in which people engage for their affective benefits, demonstrating ordinary people’s intended purpose and the value of informal arts in daily regimens. On the one hand, ordinary people’s interest in everyday aesthetics has significantly increased in both the physical and the internet worlds. However, the power and possible implications of such interest have been rarely explored in the field of public art.

For some scholars, the discourse of daily life is hardly even worth taking into account while setting the goal of public art for “the people.” The commitment to serving people proves to be empty without a fusion of art and everyday life. Because informal arts alleviate social exclusion, insufficiently recognizing the creative experiences’ place at the heart of common life unavoidably curtails the exploration of community-oriented arts activities.

As a result, this research deliberately focuses on the specific, embodied groups of informal arts, such as those in the case studies, which are generally considered separate from the primary aesthetic notions deployed in the art-world (e.g., artistic beauty and taste of visual art, films, and novels, among many others). By emphasizing grassroots’ expressive experiences and social practices as the essential component of normal life, this research extends the scope and practice of an often artwork-centered domain to examine and evaluate the participants’ arts engagements in the context of collective engagement in daily routine.

Fifth, what also motivates this research’s broadening of the concept of aesthetics is the recognition that politics overlaps with aesthetics through the fundamental perceptions, experiences, and events of the arts in the realm of the everyday. This research argues that the specific mode of ordinary people’s arts activities in daily routines should direct the conversation of public art to a broadened aesthetic discourse. The lived experience of “the quotidian”—a dual meaning of the ordinary and the repetitive in French—is significant for this research to search for the role of informal arts in the public-art field. For example, badminton in a local church is usually


considered a common, amateur-based sport.\textsuperscript{75} However, the aesthetic aspects are essential to this research: movements of bodies that cause corresponding response of the opposing side, rules prescribing certain behaviors (e.g., women’s doubles, men’s doubles, and mixed doubles in three standard courts, while single pairs practice in the extra, smaller court) that still leave every second undetermined, and the unexpected encounters of different individuals that produce specific, collaborative experiences under a given game (e.g., sometimes one may play with strangers because of the limitation of court space). \textsuperscript{76-78}

There are two correlated layers pertaining to such group-based arts activity: one is the sensuous aspects associated with the aesthetics (e.g., proper techniques and skills, such as endurance, speed, explosiveness, and mental strength demonstrated on a badminton court), and another is the political features of power relations that facilitate and sustain the badminton group. In the example of the badminton group, one must consider the subtlety of the tolerance toward less-skilled players in regular playing times, designing the set of rules for teams, coordination for each seasonal tournament, and the volunteers’ management of video, photography, and meal services in self-launched badminton events. Such an epitome of society deserves thorough observation and investigation to reveal the role and value of informal arts in the given community. As an interviewee, coming from India, put it without any hesitation, “Sure! For me, playing badminton is

\textsuperscript{75} An interesting fact is that, some participants of the CCCFC badminton group consider their badminton playing as a form of “art,” others see the sport as a “non-art,” still others decline to comment on the interview question “Do you think badminton playing is art?” See chapter four, five, and the appendix 1 (part 3-5) regarding the detailed discussion of the interviews.

\textsuperscript{76} An interview over phone taken on February 23, 2020. Recording.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{78} A face-to-face interview taken on March 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2020. Recording.
an art because it is full of creativity.”79 This statement does not establish badminton is a universal form of art. Rather, at least for some, this activity is a desirable “lifestyle” as a part of the social fabric, which is beyond the meaning of merely a hobby.80 This research calls for a turning away from the narrow aesthetic discourse primarily centered on the purity and autonomy of art in order to pursue the multiplicity and heteronomy of aesthetic experience in life.

In eliminating the ambiguous border between form and formlessness in the informal arts in daily life (e.g., watching artistic TikTok videos, talk shows, or pet performances and the like has become as routine as brushing one’s teeth, washing one’s face, and going to bed, especially for younger generations), this research takes an obviously different and extensive approach, which is less about merely analyzing the formalistic aspects of artworks and more focused on unveiling how and why people adopt and adapt cultural materials in a chosen place. For example, in various ways, such as the fandom subculture that includes movies, books, games, sports, sports teams, and so forth, the members have shown creative approaches to everyday life through clothing-designing, craft-making, and video-sharing, all of which demonstrate that their engagements with the arts have gone beyond a mere appreciation from watching a game or reading a fiction. Rather, these engagements construct a remarkably cultural space grounded on a particularly shared enjoyment in the given cultural cluster.

“Participation” and “engagement” used in this research seem interchangeable. However, this research prefers to use “engagement,” which is more suitable to describe the participants’ attitude toward the arts they choose to participate in, implying the experience that requires more willingness to be mentally involved. Furthermore, the word “engagement” has been mostly used in a political

context, such as civic engagement, referring to community service, collective action, and political involvement. In this research, this term is in line with the notion of public art which suggests the capacity and right possessed by everyone to communicate decisions about and take actions in (who is simultaneously affected by) the process of formulating public life in order to establish and negotiate identities in a community. “Participation” in this study denotes a stronger sense of “active practice” than that of merely the “involvement” in the “passive audience” era. More importantly, focus on the engagement with informal arts is essential to understand the landscape of everyday creativity produced and possessed by the amateur and grassroots arts sectors (see discussions in chapter II and III).

Another important concept is duration, distinguishing this study from “the often reactionary emotional response” in public art’s realm. The time during which the given project needs to survive is significant for examining the participants’ experiences and the meanings when they engage in creating new social spaces and new social relations in their everyday lives. However,


82 Other scholars conceptualized the terms “arts participation,” “arts conception,” and “arts engagement” in different ways to assess cultural involvement. Some resources, among others, include Tak Wing Chan and John H. Goldthorpe, Social Status and Cultural Consumption, Academia, available from https://www.academia.edu/24709989/Social_status_and_cultural_consumption_tak_wing-chan_and_john_h_goldthorpe; accessed on October 13, 2020. Aaron Reeves, “Neither Class nor Status: Arts Participation and the Social Strata,” in Sociology 49 (2015): 624-42, available from Research Gate, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280306860_Neither_Class_nor_Status_Arts_Participation_and_the_Social_Strata; accessed on October 29, 2020. This research solely and particularly focuses on the terms’ closest relevance to the informal arts participants instead of the distinction between them (e.g., artists provide the artistic experience for a receptive audience, artists’ “active” engagement as opposed to the spectators’ “passive” attendance or involvement).


such endeavors remain a notable omission in the critical writings about public art. In order to adequately address the long-term informal public art projects via research, this study incorporates two case studies.

1.5 Two Case Studies: the CCCFC Badminton Fellowship and the 227 Incident

1.5.1 The CCCFC Badminton Fellowship

The first case is drawn from the project of a localized informal arts sector, a badminton group at Collin County Chinese Fellowship Church located in Plano, Texas, abbreviated as CCCFC Badminton. This community-based project began in 2008 as a small badminton group located in the church, while serving as a relatively independent arts sector. The goal of this badminton fellowship is simple: “to play badminton together.” This group is run by volunteers who are also the membership of the group, and anyone who comes to play badminton can become a member. No membership fee is required, but only two dollars (per person per time, except for the person’s first time) as a nominal fee for the shuttlecocks provided and consumed by the group.

Many immigrants have been attracted by this badminton community to satisfy their own cultural inclinations. Most players are first-generation Asian immigrants (Chinese, Malaysian, Indian, Indonesian, Vietnamese, etc.) and a few are from South America and Europe. Because badminton is a particular niche sport in American society, many of these immigrant-players experienced difficulties finding the appropriate activity to engage in their daily routine, especially when they were new to this country. Over years, the CCCFC badminton fellowship has become the biggest non-official and non-commercial badminton community in the Dallas-Fort Worth

85 Form an interview conducted on December 13, 2019.
metroplex, providing opportunities for badminton practices and organizing dozens of seasonal tournaments for anyone willing to come.

### 1.5.2 The 227 Incident

This example is also named “Xiao Zhan Scandal” or “Boycott against Xiao Zhan,” amongst other designations, according to different groups. The research prefers the neutral title. The 227 Incident is a campaign launched on February 27, 2020, involving both online and on-ground mass denunciation of a popular star, Xiao Zhan, primarily in but not limited to China. The event began with a Weibo post linked to fan-fiction titled *Falling* (published on Archive of Our Own, also known as AO3) on February 24. Xiao’s fan groups felt assaulted by their idol’s name appearing in “pornography” fiction and reported AO3 to Chinese cyberspace police. The platform for China’s ACGN (animation, comic, game, and novel) lovers and LGBTQ communities—AO3, an online platform with an estimated amount of two million registered users (by July 20 of 2019) and six million articles (by May of 2020)—was taken down on February 26. Since then, Xiao’s fans’ censorship plot resulted in intensified controversies, including a boycott against Xiao and his associated productions (e.g., films, plays, and endorsement products), all of which have fermented until now. Discrete parties have exacerbated the situation, including different fandoms of this idol, users of AO3, other multiple virtual arts communities (e.g., video gamers, sports lovers,

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86 “一只知更鸟, “肖战事件全过程吃瓜记录 (2.24-6.27),” A Robin, “The Record of Eating Melon during the Xiao Zhan Incident (2.24-6.27),” Zhihu, available from https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/118553604; accesses on October 23, 2020. The author of this research chooses this resource because of its neutral standpoint and reliable record of the incident’s timeline after investigating a great deal of original online records (many have become deleted posts or hidden posts).


cosmic animation players, and novel writers and readers), various social platforms, and Xiao’s endorsement businesses.\(^8^9\)

“Irrationality,” “cyber-violence,” and “digital censorship” are the tags attached to the occurrence, and this research aims to examine the public and private relationships in this cyber-war regarding how to balance the multiple yet often conflicting interests and rights of different individuals and groups when they engage in the arts. The 227 Incident inspired a series of under-scrutinized conversations on the problems particularly faced by young people (e.g., writers on AO3 and Xiao’ fans) in China: fandom sub-culture, sexual orientation, internet censorship, and more. These conversations lead to other collaborative communications, such as months-long societal discussions about personal free expression, public responsibility, and governmental protection for individuals and online clusters.

1.5.3 Reasons for Selecting These Two Cases

These two projects mark the trend of a body of contemporary public arts practices, concerned with creative collaboration among different communities and potential emancipation from undesirable realities experienced by grassroots participants in everyday life. The CCCFC case primarily occurs in a physical place, with the online group as its operational supplement by socializing (e.g., sharing information regarding badminton activities, community services, and other types of conversations) before the pandemic. A Wechat group has become the only space shared by this badminton community during the pandemic times. The 227 Incident is totally an online case; the effects of the netizens’ activities are tied within a digital society despite their geographically dispersed locations. A deep investigation of the 227 Incident reveals public art in the entire mobile

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cyberspace and its growing influence on social practice to show people’s creativity and collaboration when engaging with the arts and connecting communities, regardless of positive or negative outcomes. This research shows the internet as a new, temporary public space (yet it may have long-term impact) in which people engage with the arts due to the transference from the physical space to an entirely digital space or a combination of the two spaces, in particular under the Covid-19 circumstances in 2020.

These case studies serve two purposes.

The first and most immediate is to extend the knowledge of public art in a cross-national scenario where social impacts and benefits of the amateur arts practices likely develop individual wellbeing and social cohesion. The second purpose is to bring the research on public art into a closer relationship with the convergence of physical and digital worlds, which would open a new opportunity for understanding informal arts groups in community development. These cases illustrate the relationship between informal arts engagement and the broader sociological, ethnographical, and political worlds, concerning the public who possess the capacity to create new social aesthetics and expand lived space in their daily routines.

**Conclusion**

This thesis approaches informal public arts engagement as a practice of collectively creating new social connections carried out by grassroots participants is their everyday settings, within which exists the potential to transform personal identity, establish collective ethos, and instill a respect for the wider environment. More fundamentally, this research critically investigates informal arts engagement as the cultural mediation of broader social, economic, and political processes to connect communities. Through the lens of the participants and observations of how ordinary people create, interact, negotiate, and facilitate informal arts, this research throws light on
the dynamic interrelationships among people, places, and groups. These interrelationships rely on creativity, cooperation, and trust demonstrated by the individual participants’ actions, all of which suggest that shared experience on a mental or emotional level constructs the space of group coexistence.\(^90\) So, public art is about grassroots’ lifestyles, ways of living, and everyday regimens, rather than merely about a work of art. Public art is a process rather than an outcome, within which the “well-defined groups” socially construct a revitalized space for living.\(^91\)

As chapter II and III discuss, those engaged in informal public art find meanings and values in a given environment (e.g., trust, respect, equality, harmony, safety, and sense of belonging) from which they build healthy interpersonal relations through creative expression.\(^92\) \(^93\)

\(^90\) Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 71-3.

\(^91\) Ibid, 74.

\(^92\) Ibid, 38-9. See a detailed discussion about Lefebvre’s theory of space in the following chapter II.

\(^93\) From empirical data of the interviews conducted from 2019 to 2020.
CHAPTER II
Theoretical Discussions about Public Space and Public Art

Introduction

This chapter aims to create a framework for analysis within which ordinary people’s social interactions in the chosen arts field are situated in their community lives from a multidisciplinary perspective. This chapter focuses on Lefebvre’s spatial triad analysis and Ranciere’s new aesthetics theory, elaborating on three points as follows. Firstly, people are the medium of transmitting place to space. The chapter introduces Lefebvre’s reflection on social space and analyzes why public space is not naturally formed, but is produced by the people who engage with the arts. Secondly, people possess the capacity to create new social spaces for new modes of social relations to pursue the lifestyle they appreciate. This study understands art as an expressive way in which people co-build social relationships. In traditional thinking, art relates to the representation of mimesis, involving outcome-driven process of making and doing, and the communication between artists and the audiences. In this study, the researcher understand art as socially engaged practices of co-creating new social spaces and new social relations in everyday life toward shared goals, such as co-building a wider community.94-95-96

By presenting a Lefebvrian analysis of social interactions and Ranciere’s interpretation of everyday aesthetics as unnoticed and repetitive actions in daily life, this chapter examines how the material space is produced, negotiated, and shared by the social actors, the people. Thirdly, people make real their right to lifestyle, social space, and aesthetics in daily life by persistently creating new social interactions. The chapter discusses that the shared space that forms and is formed by the networks of interpersonal relations is likely to eliminate aesthetic specificity and cultural deprivation. This leads to the conclusion that people should be at the heart of research on public art. This chapter ends by reiterating the goal of public art to enhance the validity of this research’s empirical basis and conceptual foundation of the informal arts practice.

2.1 Henri Lefebvre

Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) is one of the most important social theorists in the contemporary era. As one of the most prominent French left-wing intellectuals, he published numerous works on a wide range of themes and issues; he is best known for pioneering concepts of everyday life, modernity, people’s ability to create social space, and the urban.

He graduated from the Sorbonne (University of Paris) in 1924 and finished his doctoral thesis on peasant communities’ social change in rural France in 1954.97 98 In his early life, he witnessed the lack of food and heat in occupied Paris and the French people’s uneasiness with socioeconomic changes in the post-First World War in the early 1920s.99 These experiences paved


the way for the philosophy and social criticism of Marx and Hegel, as well as his joining the Parti Communiste Francais (PCF) in 1928; his relationship with the Party broke up in 1958. He was persecuted for his Communist writings by the post Second World War authorities and excluded from the mainstream intellectual circle, but he finally became a significant figure in urban social theory.

Among his extensive corpus of work, this thesis is interested in his influential and seminal concepts of social space and everyday life. This thesis uses three main points of his social space theory to analyze informal public activities: ordinary people as social actors, their ability to create social spaces, and everyday life as a social domain of people’s co-creating new social relations.

Informal arts practices are the significant means and great opportunities for ordinary people to participate in the arts activities in daily life to attain a better quality of life. While almost the whole world is on lockdown in 2020, changes in society’s perception of arts-sharing and arts-making are an example of how social interaction and community connection are playing an even more important role in mental health and wellbeing. The separation from family, friends, and colleagues resulted in a shift in public life. Under the impact of the coronavirus crisis, the arts organizations are unlikely to go back to the way they were before. What is more, this pandemic

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has brought the racial, gender, and socio-economic inequalities into sharp focus (e.g., the BLM movement and anti-Asian hate).\textsuperscript{104} The sociological study of public space has become essential to an understanding of people’s sense of collective wellbeing and happiness during these unprecedented times. Probing the participation in creative activities that occur in the informal settings, such as homes, churches, and various cyberspaces, is essential to deeply understand “the dignity of common behaviors” with intrinsic motivations.\textsuperscript{105}

Henri Lefebvre’s theoretical understandings of social space is useful to research that uncovers the role of people’s common behaviors in the arts in a creation of socio-spatial dialogue. According to Lefebvre, social space does not emerge naturally, nor is it statically produced, but exists as a three-“moment” entity: perceived space, conceived space, and lived space.\textsuperscript{106, 107} In a Lefebvrian way, the social space should be seen as a process of myriad activities instead of a final product, aligning with the understanding of public art in this research. Deciphering the social space through Lefebvre’s theory allows an examination of public art as socially engaged practices.

According to Lefebvre, the perceived space (spatial practice) refers to the social settings which people inhabit and in which they are influenced, suggesting the visual essence in one’s mind.


\textsuperscript{106} Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 40, 60.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, 38-41.
infused with the social reality designated and constructed by others. In the case of public art, the perceived space is how an individual thinks about a physical place (e.g., plazas, streets, and churches, where the art is exhibited). The perceived space depends on how people interpret the social setting as a concrete existence.

Two points are important to understand the perceived space in the informal arts sector: one is that the perceived space is associated with any symbolism specific to the individual; another is that the modes and experiences of the place, in turn, affect how individuals perceive the space. For example, one may see an empty court in a Hindu temple as a space affiliated with this religious building. But, after attending a workshop, dance classes, or a meal, the individual may reconsider the place as a mixture of transcendence and secularity.

The conceived space (representations of space) is associated with the properties of a location. In this research, the perceived space refers to a literal or virtual space constructed by a group with shared interests and goals. The conceived space is a measurable, concrete makeup of a space, formulated by certain groups of creators (scientists, urban planners, artists, etc.) In an informal sector, the essence of the conceived space is where individuals can map their personal experiences and interact with the appointed. Back to the Hindu temple example, the exterior,

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108 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 38. “The spatial practice of a society secretes that space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it. From the analytic standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space.”

109 From an interview conducted on February 8, 2020, recording. See footnote 98. This interviewee, who has been both a member of the CCCFC badminton group and the Hindu temple, claimed that she hoped her temple could have a badminton group or something alike to allow more people to take part in sports so that the temple could better serve a wider community.

110 Ibid. “Conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent- all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived.”

111 Ibid.
concrete building, the interior layout, and the set of its dimensions are the conceived space, where the informal arts activities (e.g., the dancing practice and performance, or the cultural food sharing) take place.

The lived space (*representational space*) is the most noticed space in any society that accommodates a wider, diversified public.\(^\text{112}\) The lived space overlays the perceived and conceived space and intimately concerns how individuals use, modify, and organize the space for their own needs. From the public art perspective, the photographs, music pieces, (non-)fictions, videos, paintings—among many other kinds of creative forms—shared and created, demonstrate how ordinary people use the physical or the online lived space to interact with others, to build groups, and to improve quality of life. This lived space neither solely exists nor serves as a mediation between the perceived and conceived space, but in a perpetual connection with the other two.

These three types of space are interrelated; none can exist without others. In the examples of the Hindu temple and the online arts field, the space is a multifaceted amalgamation of how the location (the physical building in the former case and the virtual platform in the latter example) is constructed, how people feel about the place, and how people use the space. This is always obvious. For example, an empty downtown area or an overcrowded street in a suburb cannot convey a scene of how the inhabitants actually use the space. Simply put, the way individuals and groups use the same space may vary according to different or even disparate ideas and strategies. Thus, conflicts, negotiations, and other creative communications emerge to alter the space. For example, the divergence between members and the “outsiders” of the Hindu temple likely causes various

\(^{112}\) Ibid, 39. “Space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’, but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who describe and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated—and hence passively experienced—space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. “It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects.”
understandings of the multifunctional court, such as who should be in charge of the space in a specific time period, how long should be appropriate for a chosen group to use the space, and what solution can be suitable for an unanticipated conflict.

2.1.1 Social Space as Lived Space for the Arts

Using the spatial triad, this research mainly focuses on human actions to mold the lived space for their everyday arts practices. Examining this lived space is critical to understanding space as an ongoing totality. In particular, the word “moment” (according to the English version of *The Production of Space*) used in Lefebvre’s idea suggests that the spatial triad is an aggregate of three realms holding no hierarchy. In the Hindu temple example, one can regard the perceived space as the multifunctional hall blending the sacred and the secular between the time of a worship and a dancing class. The stage, the furniture, and the wooden ground constitute the conceived space.

Without the lived space as a mediated social space connecting the other two spaces, the three spaces fall into an unrelated state separating the mental properties and physical body (e.g., gestures, voices). The conceived space stays totally abstract and unassociated with the movements, gestures, and voices of different people, and the perceived space consists solely without any connection to reality, such as the height of the proof, the width of the stage, and the number of the chairs. The concept of lived space overlaps the other two concepts and brings subjective spatial practices to energize the temple (in the case of the Hindu temple) by accomplishing the arts event.

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114 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 31, also see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley, California: University of California, 1984), 95. Social space can be seen as a place of transformation and appropriation, which is extensively influenced by inhabitants’ daily activities including the Internet, which blurs the geographical distance between different regions in the world. For example, in cyberspace, the city dweller’s social and cultural activities is little different to an individual that inhabits rural life.

According to Lefebvre, a reconciliation between these two spaces (the perceived and the conceived) is realized by how people talk, cooperate, and interact with each other. This circulation of social interactions among the triadic facets achieves a dynamic equilibrium and makes a spatial event (e.g., the dancing practice in the Hindu temple) effective in creating new social relations.\textsuperscript{116} An activated space is achieved through body languages (e.g., remarks and behaviors) evoked by perceptions of the physical space, and thus, the social space emerges. In the sense of building healthy communal relationships in the chosen groups, this research may define the lived space as the milieu and the moment in time where the participants attempt—consciously or unconsciously—to attain a harmonious state. This process of configuring the space is therefore a process of achieving a dynamic equilibrium.

More importantly, the lived space is the space where social relations take place and where people actively experience the activities in daily routine. This double-edged characteristic of the perceived space requires this research to take an honest and closer investigation into varied aspects of everyday life interwoven with the informal arts in the given communities from both historical and philosophical perspectives.\textsuperscript{117, 118} How do participants articulate their belongings in public space? How does spatial engagements with the arts interact with social and cultural life in


\textsuperscript{117} Henri Lefebvre, \textit{Critique of Everyday Life}, translated by John Moore, with a Preface by Michel Trebitsch (London, United Kingdom: Verso, 1991), 314-6. According to Lefebvre, “history is a fundamental science,” but the approach he takes to examine everyday life, culture, and art, has a particular awareness of the separation between a grand interpretations (the historical) and trivial ones (the everyday) in modern society. Therefore, because history merely covers some major moments of human existence, Lefebvre calls for the critique of everyday life as a necessity to avoid the pitfall of oversimplifying the structure of human knowledge and consciousness.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, 316-9. According to Lefebvre, exploration of everyday life should unveil the possibilities of people’s real experiences, aiming to make visible the abstract philosophical concepts and reflections.
communities? Drawing inspirations from Lefebvre, this research examines how unrepresented communities explore identities of individuals, their groups, and environments, highlighting their capacity to integrate people, communities, and spaces.

2.2 Power, Aesthetics and Everyday Life

From the Lefebvian view, humans’ actions produce space in a way that draws attention to the connections between power, aesthetics, and everyday life, among other themes. In Lefebvre’s concept of space, specific groups of people: bureaucrats, capitalists, and administrators, demonstrate the capacity to implement their creative thoughts and concepts in the environment. So do the community-based arts engagers in the household, neighborhoods, religious communities, schools, municipal regions, rural areas, and many locations, observed by this research. For example, in the CCCFC badminton case examined in the case study, the bonds of belonging of the players have been strengthened, weakened, exchanged, or transformed during these twelve years; each member has his or her own stories, myths, and even struggles of the arts experience and the badminton community.

2.2.1 Power

In Lefebvre’s analysis, the power relation has shifted from the traditions of object-making by professionals to meaning-making by amateurs. Traditionally, art administrators (e.g., city planners, curators, and artists) are the professionals who create “orthodox” representations of space, in particular visual representations, including schemes, maps, constructions, artistic expressions, and policy documents. These representations impose certain meanings into the space (e.g., establishing the image of the space, implying who may or may not use the space), and the space is

119 According to Ranciere, aesthetics used in this study refers to ordinary people’s aesthetic perception and experience in everyday life. The concept of a new aesthetics is identified as a process of both collectively creating new social relations by expanding new spaces in a community.
seemingly destined to be a physical product. However, those who implement the blueprint (e.g., workers) or inhabit the space (e.g., residents, travelers) are the genuine subjects of the space. They display an energizing capacity to vitalize the space, the everyday environment.\textsuperscript{120} In light of Lefebvre’s theory, this research focuses on the non-art professionals who provide the content of the social space through a creative, collaborative, and process-based approach.

Today, the grassroots (residents, users, and consumers) of a physical or virtual space are less likely under the control of the so-called creators or decision-makers because they can sustain and define creative and cultural encounters by themselves. For example, ordinary people make and share their creative activities, such as making dance videos, song imitations, dialogue reenactments, animal videos, among many others, on TikTok and gain social impact. These performances—taking place on streets, at homes, schools, offices, and in other public territories—engage in a wider field of discourse. More importantly, discussions about these cultural phenomena as socially engaged arts activities should pay more sufficient attention to the ongoing process of creating social relations than any fixed identities of “art-making.”

An excellent example is the group of TikTok users over sixty percent of whom come from the Generation Z, have been looking for ways to make their voices heard not only in artistic creations but also in the political realm.\textsuperscript{121-122} Their engagements on TikTok have dramatically increased since Coronavirus, suggesting that a positive tonality of fun, relaxation, and

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\item\textsuperscript{120} Michel de Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life}, translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley, California: University of California, 1984), 94-6.
\item\textsuperscript{121} Wallaroo, “TikTok Statistics – Updated October 2020,” available from Wallaroo Media, \url{https://wallaroomedia.com/blog/social-media/tiktok-statistics/}; accessed on November 9, 2020.
\item\textsuperscript{122} Shelly Banjo and Misyrelena Egkolfopoulou, “TikTok Teens Are ‘Going to War’ Against the Trump Campaign After Republicans Call to Ban the App,” in \textit{Time}, available from \url{https://time.com/5865261/tiktok-trump-campaign-app/}; accessed on November 10, 2020.
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lightheartedness may help people better adapt to the virus and the quarantine measures. The relatable, ironic, presented, and playful gestures of this video-based social media platform make the pandemic, gun violence, racial problems, and political fear in American society seem irrelevant. However, underneath the artistic practices of the fun-making TikTok users, the political horizon has been opened up since political self-expressions appeared on the platform (e.g., some accounts such as Charli D’Amelio, the biggest TikTok star who advocates “stand up for what is right,” the Liberal Hype House who owns some 31,100 followers, and Gabrielle Katharina Huggler who has more than 253,500 followers). Topics range from abortion rights to political correctness through variously creative representations (e.g., performances, dances, and songs). This shift from object-making to meaning-making by non-professionals demonstrates how ordinary people perceive the world around and manage to express themselves.

2.2.2 Aesthetics

Jacques Ranciere (1940- ) is a French philosopher, cultural critic, and professor of Philosophy at the European Graduate School at the University of Paris (1971-2000) and the European Graduate School at Switzerland. He studied philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure (Paris) following the structuralist Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser; he turned to


explore the role of the unprivileged population in cultural engagement and the value of their spontaneous activities in social life from late 1960s.\textsuperscript{128} His writings focused on people’s right, need, and ability to construct their social life in political philosophy in the 1980s and 1990s. His theoretical stance has been on art and aesthetics since the late 1990s, engaging with literature, film, visual and contemporary art. Based on the ideas of anti-elitism and anti-authoritarian, his work spans history, literature, aesthetics, art criticism, meta-politics, and post-democracy.

This thesis uses Ranciere’s fusion of art and life to complement Lefebvre’s space analysis, emphasizing ordinary people’s need and ability to expand their social relations in a shared space. In Ranciere, equality is a precondition rather than a destination for people’s everyday social activities and aesthetic practice. His ideas of considering people as the protagonist and their ability to construct social spaces align with Lefebvre’s viewpoints. His emphasis on the egalitarian critique of the distribution of the sensory experience in daily life is useful for analyzing informal public art.

As Lefebvre has expanded the notion of social space, Ranciere has expanded the notion of aesthetics. New aesthetics have emerged in the grassroots’ arts practices concerned with the wellbeing of society.\textsuperscript{129} Old aesthetics refers to a limited scope of aesthetics, a tendency to equate aesthetics with the philosophy of art, and the interest in outcome-centered making and doing. New aesthetics emphasizes the aesthetics in daily life, including perceptions of objects, events,

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\item[129] Ranciere, \textit{The Politics of Aesthetics}. According to Ranciere, the notion of new aesthetics focuses on the specific construction, distribution, and perception of the sensible in the everyday experience. Ranciere’s concept of aesthetics is a fusion of aesthetics and politics, showing an overlapping relationship between art and life. The new aesthetics emphasizes the various ways people engage in their everyday lives. It is different from the autonomy of artistic experience that inform many art historical narratives, but rather, it refers to the heteronomy of aesthetic experience in daily life. In particular, in this paper, the new aesthetics is related to social and collective transformations that have powerful impacts on both individuals and communities.
\end{enumerate}
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and activities that constitute people’s everyday experiences. In the dialogue of public art, the understanding of aesthetics needs not yield to a narrowed, artistic hierarchy of discipline (e.g., ways of doing and making). Rather, the very meaning of “aesthetics” and all its associations are inseparable from the historical and societal situations within which aesthetics function, aiming at giving a voice to those excluded from the hierarchies of knowledge. Arts are rooted in, and reflective of cultural life of different individuals and communities; creativity that is embedded in almost all community-based arts engagements is a substantial catalyst to promote the space construction on both global and local scales to build social bonds.

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130 According to one of the findings of comparative aesthetics, the aesthetics of everyday life is a greater emphasis in many non-Western cultures than in the West. In this sense, the widening discourse of aesthetics can be seen as a way to overcome modern Western aesthetics’ limitation on the various ingredients of people’s daily life, rather than to create a new scope of aesthetics. Kathleen M. Higgins, “Comparative Aesthetics,” in The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics, edited by Jerrold Levinson (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 679–692, 2005).

131 The scope of everyday aesthetics covers not only everyday activities, such as eating, walking, and even shopping, but also include some occasional events, such as wedding, sporting events, and traveling. The purpose of everyday aesthetics is not so much related to a list of the many objects and activities but rather the attitude people take toward them. Such attitude is related to how people create relationships with others and within their living environments, as well as the way they live with an emphasis on their aesthetic potentials. Kevin Melchionne, “The Definition of Everyday Aesthetics,” Contemporary Aesthetics, 11, available from https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/ca/7523862.0011.026/definition-of-everyday-aesthetics?rgn=main;view=fulltext; accessed on June 27, 2020.


Ranciere regards the old aesthetics as inherently isolationist aesthetics aiming at purity that causes disengagement, as opposed to connective aesthetics. First, this research will show informal public art can build healthy social relations. Being ethic and purpose-oriented, connective aesthetics focuses on social and environmental responsibility. Universalized creativity and multi-disciplinary cooperation embodied in the participatory process of informal arts activities in building relationships for the common good.

Second, informal public art serves as a means to understand these social connections better. Differentiated from employing social action as an art medium in contemporary era, the concept of art has been extended to various everyday occurrences, mechanisms, and ordinary participants. Employing art as a means to articulate reality, “the problems of survival itself,” socially engaged art faces the imperative to generate communication through a multitude of events at different levels of society.

Third, public art constructs a new society within which each individual can contribute co-creatively. The essence of the new society describes what it means to be human: naming the deep need and fundamental ability to create. This idea of joining form and content in a spiritual union—despite of its utopianism—holds the value of challenging the traditional object-based static and


138 Ibid, 67.


140 Ibid, 245: In Beuys’s view, “the problem of life, soul, humankind’s spirit, the problems of intuition, imagination and inspiration,” and “the problems of survival itself” are real and concrete, rather than symbolic and abstract.


calling for an aesthetic action as a common will to transform society. The goal of expanded art is to “build a social organism as a work of art” in order to fully realize democracy in the social, political, and economic spheres, within which everyone can choose and take part in the targeted arts despite unprivileged backgrounds (e.g., the poor, the marginalized, and the minority). All of these ideas of aesthetics regarding socially engaged art practices unveil the relationship between art and social life (and between aesthetics and politics), embodying the longing for democracy, freedom, and equality by creative subjectivity.

The traditional self-sufficiency and autonomy of art have been expanded by the broadened conversation of public art, in which ordinary persons’ creativity, everyday cooperation, planet-wide communication, and technological advancement have made the globe a “village.” Art is no longer limited to classes intimately associated with the boundaries of taste, the isolated genius, and the conventions of artistic presentation and display. Rather, for ordinary people (this research’s emphasis), building the inter-human relation is the fundamental function of art.

Moreover, in public art, the artist or the final object is no longer at the center. Instead, these non-traditional ideas of aesthetics highlight the everyday moments of people’s engagements with a variety of arts activities in the given community. Particularly, under the profound impact of media

144 Joseph Beuys, in Energy Plan for Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America, 19.
148 Ibid.
technology, different modes of spatial practice that bring people together despite time and geographical location (physical or virtual space) have become new aesthetics.

2.2.3 Quality of Life

Quality of life refers to every aspect that contributes to an attitude toward, an orientation of, and a modification in life and culture. As discussed in chapter one and earlier this chapter, Ranciere’s concept of everyday aesthetics widens the scope of aesthetics by including actions, events, and cultural activities that constitute people’s everyday life.149 Understanding everyday aesthetics is fundamental to understanding people create new social interactions and new public spaces to improve the quality of life. The co-creation of new aesthetics includes various ingredients of everyday life: artifacts of daily use, interactions with other people, and even mundane activities such as cooking, talking, and walking. Everyday aesthetics liberates the narrow understanding of aesthetics from an almost exclusive focus on beauty and taste, with a particular emphasis on people’s mundane experiences of expanding new social relations and creating new social spaces. These qualities are seemingly unnoticeable because of their ubiquitous presence in the daily life. Yet, they highlight people’s requirements and actions to improve quality of life, regardless of people’s identity, lifestyle, socioeconomic status, cultural background, and familiarity with art.

In the case of the Indian temple, the female dancers who come to worship the gods through their artistic expressions are also there to meet others with same beliefs, exchange opinions about their families and work, and enjoy the process of dance-learning. The pleasure of the dancers in

their dancing process results not merely from the formalistic accounts of dance as an artistic movement (e.g., bodily motion, expressive claims of genre). For the non-professionals who are mostly housewives, what they see, hear, say, think, do, and create is partitioned into various modes of expression in their surrounding environment. This process of the amateur participants gathering together to engage with various sorts of cultural creations in a community builds a shared space within which discovering new aesthetics is a process of uniting art and life, though not always in discernible ways. Meeting social needs (eye contact, handshakes, face-to-face communication) is an important aspect of the quality of life, which may be even more valuable to people during the quarantine era caused by the pandemic in 2020.

2.2.4 Equality Is Essential to Human Life

Drawing on the works of Lefebvre and Ranciere, equality is essential to human life in terms of constructing new social spaces, creating new social relations, and having new aesthetic experiences. Every individual and community have the right to engage with a certain kinds of art activities in a shared space, despite their biological markers and sociocultural backgrounds. This right should be respected, and that is dignity. Dignity is a fundamental part of equality. As the badminton case study will show in chapters five and six, informal public art can be seen as the demonstration of the driving force for equality in an Asian immigrant group. People create new interpersonal relationships and extend social spaces to a larger context through informal arts engagements in their public life to configure a shared space full of respect, dignity, and inclusion. In the discussion about informal public art, equality is not inborn and fixed but an awareness with which people treat each other to construct a better social space full of respect, altruism, and fairness.
There is a clear need for bringing communities of color into dialogue about creative activities in daily life to highlight the diversified public in the field of group-based informal arts. Particular attention to an excluded group invites contemplations upon the metaphor of the melting pot as the notion that this nation was supposed to be a harmonious space for people of different cultures and colors. “The right to be different” is crucial to discussions about public art, which should feature an inclusive and empathetic attitude toward the cultural practices of excluded communities regarding the members’ feelings, thoughts, and experiences in a daily routine. How do the socio-historical context and the perceived racial position influence their sense of group attachment and a community’s chosen arts practices? Reviewing the strengths, achievements, and struggles facing Asian immigrants in the United States is helpful to reveal the deep-seated reasons for their informal arts activities in everyday life. Crucially, this section’s discussions enable a full recognition of the role that informal arts and the values created within marginalized groups have played in defending and enhancing their cultural rights, and therefore makes the climate where public arts take place, and the study of it, more just.

For an extended reading of the Asian American experience, see Appendix 5.¹⁵³


¹⁵¹ Angelo N. Ancheta, “Introduction: Neither Black or White,” in *Race, Rights, and the Asian American Experience*, second edition (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 1-18. Examples can be found in the legal history of the United States, such as the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. US-born Asian Americans are perceived as immigrants, which is a common perception of Asian Americans, instead of legitimate citizens. This law caused more discrimination against Asian Americans who are therefore more likely to be undocumented and disadvantaged. Also see Gary Y. Okihro, *Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1994), 34. The dominant black-white binary in the US racial formation ignores the existence of Asian American poverty and inequality by categorizing Asian Americans as a “yellow” group that is neither black nor white group in American society and legal system.


¹⁵³ References of Appendix 5 are included in chapter three in the Bibliography session.
2.2.5 Public Art as A Form of Living with Dignity

This thesis sees informal arts activities of grassroots—specifically the marginalized communities, and what concerns them most about life—as the fundamental, salient way to improve societal consciousness of equality in daily life. For research on marginalized groups, the examination of how they feel, where they go, and what they do during their daily regimens unveils their process of searching for dignity through the acquisition of socio-historical and cultural characteristics. Creating a space where they stay safe and comfortable is collectively and uniquely associated with the process of exploring identity and values within the sensible realm. Scrutinizing informal arts provides opportunities to reveal the approaches of Asian American participants to live a worthy way of life defined by the individual.

Equality should be the first and foremost consideration for discussions about groups, places, and the functions of informal arts in society. The responsibility of public-art research requires an emphasis on two major considerations to secure the need of “the people” for their cooperative and creative practices within a dialogue of informal arts. The first necessity is to regard the general public as an unrecognized and diversified community, and the second is that their daily activities deserve recognition for challenging the established order within multidimensional contexts. A discussion about “the distribution of the sensible” in chapter II challenges cultural essentialism by advocating sufficient acknowledgment of common people and their creativity in life which is excluded by the so called pure-art world.\(^{154}\) Rejecting the traditional aesthetic hierarchies validates the forms that individuals use to shape their way of life within a new aesthetic realm breaking down the real world social and political stratifications that distinguish art from everyday life.

From a historical perspective, Asian immigrants have never embraced a victim culture; rather, they have made tremendous efforts to build familiar and safe surroundings within the reality of discrimination. Yet, the search for dignity has been present. In the 19th century, the early Asian immigrants provided labor to mines, farms, railways, agriculture, and manufacturing throughout the American Southwest, West, and the South. They were perceived as foreign and non-American; they were killed and their properties were plundered and destroyed by white rioters that included men, women, and even children without any reason. Rare records of the early immigrants—most of them were husbands who left their families in China and were illiterate—reveal their leisure activities beyond heavy labor and a poor life. From the limited letters and other documents of those immigrants, they lived a plain life with a strong sense of familial obligation and home-country nostalgia. They saved money for their original families in China without spending too


much on themselves (e.g., “clothes and other unnecessary luxuries”) or engaging in leisure.161 162 They gathered together to celebrate Asian festivals linking themselves to the origin, existence, death, and afterlife of their ancestors (e.g., the Qingming Festival).163 In the realm of informal arts, the early Asian immigrants kept quite a different lifestyle that was distinguished from their white counterparts due to the deep bond to their homeland and cultural traditions.

In the mid-20th century, Asian Americans were confused about and struggled for their collective and individual identity when they were suspected as disloyal outsiders.164 Amid the pandemic in the 21st century, immigrants of Asian descent confront violently racist hate crimes endangering their daily life.165 In spite of being marginalized, excluded, and under-respected in American history, a peaceful and prosperous life has been the central purpose of Asian immigrants’ everyday activities. As documented in the case studies in chapter V, by establishing various communities of arts, maintaining cultural ties with their traditions, and using affordable spaces for

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arts activities, Asian immigrants have sustained their dignity and have made America their home. Today, Asian communities are engaged in cultural cultivating in multiple fields, including dancing, fishing, painting, photography, running, racquet sports, team sports, ping pong, skiing, climbing, and performing. Situating Asian American experiences within the wider sociopolitical and historical framework, a dialogue about informal arts should focus on their forming or maintaining collective and individual identities for the purpose of calling for equality of cultural aesthetics. The Asian communities’ informal art engagements will be further explored through the case studies in chapters five and six.

2.3 Everyday Life

The notion of everyday life provides particular vitality to research into public art as socially engaged practice because the realm of the everyday serves as the background on which the amateur aspect of the arts offers illuminating paths. Placing the informal arts in the realm of everyday life is crucial to conceptualizing public art as the process of integrating people, place, and space. This section elaborates on two interrelated concepts in detail: 1) Jacques Ranciere’s concept of “the distribution of the sensible,” and 2) creativity in everyday life to elucidate how avocational arts activities mobilize the masses in support of meaning-finding in life when art and social practice are closely allied.

Secondly, creativity in the everyday indicates an attempt to reenergize the revolutionary potential of daily life as the common ground of aesthetics and politics. What is the essence of everyday life? How does creativity function in turning the routinized experience of the arts into

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166 These cultural activities are based on this research’s observation of Asian communities at the Dallas-Metroplex area from 2017 to 2022.

“events”? A conversation about informal arts will be more fruitful if it frames creativity less as one of “pure-art” and more as one of “possibility” of novelty in daily routines. Everyone possesses the ability to solve problems and find meaning in life, from housecleaning to working, from gardening to playing sports, from cooking to fishing.\textsuperscript{168-169} Any determined self-expression can be creative. Ambiguity, repetition, and normality are likely the essential interpretation for group-based informal arts as daily regimens. Every individual establishes one’s daily routines to give life rhythm and predictability, and in turn, various contingencies and disturbances occur to “create and maintain meaning.”\textsuperscript{170}

For informal arts research, the notion of everyday creativity functions as a metaphorically political space of normal experiences. The ordinary people (also the underprivileged) establish the political quality of the space through engaging with the arts and addressing what concerns them about life. The community arrangements, household affairs, and the social issues that may influence their lives point to a power relation (e.g., who has power, who is under that power, who gains advantages from the power), which penetrates every aspect of daily routines and directly changes the original space. The arts spurs thoughts, actions, and remarks, all of which are beyond the narrow symbolic function of “art” but construct “a specific sphere of experience.”\textsuperscript{171}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{171} Jacques Ranciere, \textit{Aesthetics and Its Discontents}, translated by Steven Corcoran (Cambridge, Malden, Massachusetts, 2009), 24.
\end{itemize}
The definition of politics in line with the purpose of this research suggests the investigation of both the spontaneously artistic and social practices with the unrecognized embodiment of power relations, yet avoids the reduction of political discussion of informal arts and its engagers to purely ideological content discussion.

“Politics, indeed, is not the exercise of, or struggle for, power. It is the reconfiguration of a specific space, the framing of a specific sphere of experience, of objects posited as common and as pertaining to a common decision, of subjects recognized as capable of designating these objects and putting forward arguments about them.”172

Emphasizing the fusion of social and political attributes, this research formulates the arts space by centering on people’s concerns about the public discourse, including considerations of the given community and the site. The basic elements demonstrated by the participants are by no means the agenda-setting for any predetermined concepts of the common regime, but the stage-setting for generating the concepts of the common regime that concern every participant. Public art as socially engaged art therefore is a process that holds consistency and coherence in arranging the settings of common concern or the public sphere. The participants’ senses, behaviors, voices, and material objects and things precipitate a domain, which is shared and apprehended by themselves.

“The art in the everyday” and “the everyday embodied by the art” are the two dimensions of informal arts engagement involved in the notion of everyday-ness. The former is associated with the social realm represented by creative, social actions in daily life, and the latter, the daily routine represented by the political experience.173 “The art in the everyday” indicates that people inspired by the examples of globally disseminated arts activities (e.g., amateur group-dancing) have realized

172 Ibid.
173 Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 313.
that everyone can work in various ways which may be difficult to comprehend as art. However, these “non-art” forms suggest approaches and methods utilized by ordinary individuals for the fusion of both political intention and social values. “The everyday embodied by the art” implies the inseparable yet paradoxical relationship between art and life, emphasizing product-based actions instead of ongoing processes. This outcome-based understanding of art centers on the physical “work of art” in the imaginary sphere. The development of “experiences,” “possibilities,” and “opportunities” in the real world stresses the process of creating and maintaining interpersonal and communal relations in people’s community-oriented activities.

2.3.1 Everyday Life in Community-Oriented Informal Public Art

Borrowing the analogy used by Lefebvre, community-based arts is the “play-generating yeast” in the everyday to generate new social spaces created by the informal public art participants of any social status. The process of fermentation eliminates hierarchies of political and aesthetical representations, such as class, authority, beauty, and so forth. The special role of informal public art in everyday life is that each and every person can engage in creating new social interactions and new social spaces, whether in real or virtual settings. More importantly, the process of bubbling is occurring inside, not outside, the yeast. From a policy perspective, community-oriented practice does not give the chosen group what authorities (e.g., art professionals or governmental administrations) think they want. Rather, building a healthy community demands deep learning and investigation to know what cultural canon is meaningful to this community and then to work with the inhabitants. These inhabitants’ many ways of doing and making are ubiquitous in everyday life and reflect people’s needs for creating new social spaces within which they collaborate with others

\[\text{174 Lefebvre, Critique of Everyday Life, 499.}\]
to build better communities. What this research identifies as “the arts” in the arena of public art is based on observations from inside the community, revealing the lived experience of everyday life that is multidimensional and composed of various social practices. Therefore, the scheme of perception both makes the arts autonomous and links the autonomy itself to a more generalized realm—a shared space—within which ways of doing and making are diffused.

In a family-based basketball game, for example, the players enjoy the process of playing not necessarily because of its competitive nature nor the economic advantage (as opposed to those activities in the sports industry), but because of the satisfaction of playing with families and friends. In the sense that creating relations involves various creative experiences, the basketball game is a form of “art.”\(^{175}\) In addition to discussing the new aesthetics focusing on the landscape of political production in later paragraphs, the essence of “play” embedded in the basketball game validates this collective experience to be a form of the arts. The playing process of family members (or friends) is characterized by seriousness and unimportance, regulations and randomness, and individual competencies and team collaboration, all of which suggest an integration of the external form (the basketball sport) and the intrinsic movements (a common interest or just a pursuit of fun) in a daily regimen. This activity is informal public art not only because the family members collectively create new relations among the players, such as deepening the familial bonds, and create new spaces by changing a backyard into a basketball “court.”\(^{176}\) The intrinsic nature of informal arts engagement is demonstrated by the possibilities and opportunities that people interact with others

\(^{175}\) Public art may be a misleading term if the research frames the term as more of “art” and less of “public.” Articulating “art” as merely the visual form is a narrowed understanding of “public art,” which likely undermines this research’s analysis of the goal of public art: serving the public, a broader group of people.

\(^{176}\) A backyard basketball practice can also be seen as a form of performing art in the sense that neighbors can watch the how the family members interact with each other through basketball playing from windows or sidewalks.
reflected in every levels of their lives. This research sets out to capture inner movements (e.g., how and why people organize and implement basketball-playing in a community) hidden behind the external form by placing the informal arts at the center of everyday life.177

Everyday life focuses not merely on the outcome-based actions, but also on the noticing, looking, and judging.

For example, this interaction came across a semi-commercial dance group that has adopted an online service to mitigate the effects of a global pandemic by building an energetic, virtual community for all of the members.178

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This chapter has set Lefebvre’s proposal of space and Ranciere’s manifesto of new aesthetics as the foundation upon which a conceptual framework is established for this research. A Lefebvrian notion of space incorporates three interrelated axes: the practical “perceived space” of everyday life refers to basic, common actions and interpretations of amateur practices that are often ignored in the professionalism. The theoretical “conceived space” refers to the realm regulated by governmental, organizational, and urban planners. The “lived space” touches on the essence of what it means to be human—the world of cognition—where arts and creativity meet and maintain accessibility to all. This third space likely transcends both the popular “perceived space” and the

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177 Here, the word “form” is used in a narrowed sense, which primarily refers to the visible arrangement, configuration, or organization of activity, such as a kind of sport or an artistic genre. The same word used in the following chapter “Living as Form,” however, widens the meaning of the types of the visibility discussed related to socially engaged art. This research aims to shift the dialogue of form—often as an outline contrasted with the content—away from the arts’ conventional analysis of aesthetics (regarding painting, sculpture, and other classical kinds of the pure art) and focus on a broadened, dynamic relationship enjoyed by the given community and other formations, artistic or otherwise.

178 The term “semi-commercial” used here is based on the fact that, unlike some other companies in the same business relying only on a money-relation, what sustains this dance-learning group is a strong interpersonal network via its virtual platform. Compared to other private dancing groups, which collapsed due to having to close their physical locations during the global pandemic, members of this community have kept is stable as before.

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official “conceived space,” and ordinary inhabitants in this “lived space” who are proactive initiators have the vital strength to balance and reconstruct the other two spaces. The process of people’s reconfiguring the everyday sphere through arts engagements to create new social relations is what this research examines.

Ranciere’s idea of the distribution of the sensible focuses on the significant engagements conducted by the amateurs whose right to express thoughts, doings, and makings about arts are often ignored in the academia. This concept of aesthetics also meets the methodological need of this research to interpret a shared environment within which people perform act and deeds in terms of how they achieve something in common. Based on observations on those intentional and incidental actions occurring (and reoccurring) in different arts groups, this research leads to an interdisciplinary method from philosophical, socio-historical, and anthropological perspectives to reveal the complex, contradictory overlapping of repetition, authenticity, alienation, creativity, and reunion posited in the sphere of everyday life.

Community-oriented participatory arts, social practices, and political engagements enrich the meaning of everyday life, leaving no room for any unrelated hierarchy but calling for reciprocal interlinks. Based on the work of Lefebvre and Ranciere, the dialogue of public art should focus on a broader group of participants—especially the grassroots—who proactively create and appropriate varied spaces for purposes of their aesthetic and political expressions. A narrow, rigid, and hierarchical discipline of the pure-art can be nothing but a barrier against producing representations of the grassroots’ rights to engage their lives and the environment with the arts. Implanting informal arts activities in the ebb and flow of everyday life from a multidisciplinary lens will better and more honestly show how ordinary people fulfill their needs for healthy interpersonal relationships, security, and creativity in communities and neighborhoods. This chapter has identified informal arts
as spatial practices and routine ways of life by framing the research as one of people’s opportunity and dignity, rather than as one of a narrow set of references. The process of the grassroots’ capacity to create the potential for their everyday existence is the fundamental form of living, as well as the highest form of democratic public space.
CHAPTER III
Social Life as Form of Art

Introduction

To further understand the meaning and importance of informal public art, this chapter needs to examine distributed cognition in relation to how people co-build shared cognitive resources to achieve common goals in the revolution of the human mind. Informal public art is intimately associated with various cultural expressions as everyday experiences in the sensible realm and reflects the very rich cognitive accumulations of human culture.

Through exploring the motivation, dynamism, and tensions inherent in multiple manifestations of informal arts practices, this chapter suggests that the nature of informal public art is social networking in the human community. In this context, distributed cognition is a vital aspect of informal public art.

3.1 Informal Arts in the Context of Distributed Cognition

Distributed cognition refers to Merlin Donald’s theory about the evolution of the uniquely collective human mind that create the shared culture in human society. According to Donald, the art is an expressive way through which artists deliver their thoughts and techniques through symbols, images, and other artistic forms; people create art in the context of distributed cognition. Human culture can thus be seen as “massive distributed cognitive networks,” within which people


interact with others through engaging with different ideas, perceptions, memories, and knowledge.\textsuperscript{181}

In this sense, informal public arts are a form of distributed cognition. In co-creating new social spaces and social relations, informal public art is also a process of annexing, exploiting, and incorporating “nonbiological stuff deep into our mental profiles” as a “basic human nature.”\textsuperscript{182} This statement is in line with Lefebvre’s space theory, which emphasizes that the social-spatial relation (re)construction is a universalized presence in shared spaces. It also aligns with Ranciere’s theory of new aesthetics, which highlights the fusion of art and life. The new aesthetics emphasizes the various ways people engage in their everyday lives, and specifically relates to social and collective transformations that can generate powerful impacts on both individuals and communities. The cognitive “artifacts” of informal public art, such as the symbol systems (fanspeak, emoji, and social spaces in the real and online worlds), are not merely external things, but are part of the human mind. In this sense, informal public art takes place not merely outside the brain, such as a form of actions or objects that can be seen or touched. In this chapter, it is an extended cognition often distributed across multiple systems related to psychological, bodily, social, and technological resources.

The discussion of the case studies in chapter six will further show the interaction between the distributed cognition and empirical research.

The form, movement, thought, and action of people seem to fall into scattered disciplines because arts experiences seem like a trivial phenomena of everyday life. Conversations about

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid, 4.

informal arts arise in the context of living condition, and everyday activities reflect one’s attitude toward life (e.g., facial and bodily expressions represent emotions such like angry or excitement in daily communications). Is there a scientific way for a dialogue about informal arts to explain why different cultural activities should be equally treated? Why does a person need to equalize people of different ethnicities whose biology, social, cultural, and environmental patterns are different, despite race, gender, class, and other aspects of identities? Why should public-art research challenge social norms around the high-low art classifications by acknowledging art in daily life?

Following the premise of Merlin Donald’s four cultural stages of human representational systems (episodic, mimetic, mystic, and theoretic), one may capture a sense of how people’s minds work to help one adapt to a shared environment from an evolutionary standpoint. Donald hypothesizes that modern humans’ ability to adapt to new situations played a vital role during cognitive skills’ evolutionary development. Each new representational system has remained intact within humans’ current mental architecture. Various ways of communication play a critical role in the survival values of different human groups and cultures.

One important social function of public art is to create common knowledge (e.g., one may benefit from healthy interpersonal relationships built in an arts group), which ties people together in a shared space. While people understand that they share information, they also need to know that they are the creators and beneficiaries of common knowledge. The process of creating common knowledge is critical for explaining the need for people to participate in decoding informal arts in a broader context. Donald’s examination of the human mind reveals how humans produce and are produced by culture, a reflection of common knowledge. In Donald’s view, each person acquires

\[\text{183} \text{ Merlin Donald, } \text{Origins of the Modern Minds, 3.}\]
symbolic skills from their outside environment; then people express their thoughts through communicative methods. Donald suggests that when unpacking the concept of shared knowledge, the corporate dimension is more important than isolated cognitive work because each person should be seen as a connected member of cultural networks. Mental content is non-reducible to individual cognition; it extends into the environment, where other agents share the same information as the individual. Symbols exist in the environment, and people learn to use them by interacting with others. In this way, people are more likely to serve as symbol carriers and manipulators than symbol inventors. Positing this logic within discussions about everyday arts activities, every engager utilizes eye-contact, body language, facial expression, and tone of voice to build connections with others in a collective setting.

An analysis of the relationship between public art projects and community may raise a question: What causes the need for humans to interact reciprocally between and across individuals and groups? This question entails understanding culture from a cognitive anthropological perspective, which suggests that the motivations, capacities, and manners people learn from others, and use to interact with them, affect the knowledge they acquire and, in turn, shapes the content of culture. Donald’s theory reveals that expanding human consciousness is part of the evolutionary characteristic of culture. It drives humans to survive and to search for the meaning of their existence. Each stage of the mind—episodic, mimetic, mythic, and theoretic—remains in modern people’s daily routine. By interweaving a complex form of matter (the brain) with an invisible symbolic web (culture) to generate a “distributed” cognitive network, people perceive, comprehend, and interpret their living conditions from the outside in. The hybrid mind of the human species has provided an evolutionary advantage that promotes collectivity, which is the essence of both human reality and public-art research. The cohesiveness demonstrated in Donald’s description of mimetic
skill—for example, in mimetic rituals—can be seen as modeling social structure or producing mimetic activities that create symbolic messages in the modern world.

A brief introduction of the four stages is necessary to unpack a set of relationships in a community. First, episodic culture, centering on problem-solving situations, pertains to the awareness of specific events. This representational form of memory is available to both non-human primates and humans, but due to semantic structure in their memory, only humans possess the ability to re-present situational knowledge. In primate (i.e., chimpanzee) culture, new ideas are hard to generate. Second, mimetic culture is a mediating layer of cognitive culture, which distinguishes other primates and humans. Mimetic culture involves intentions, used to convey various aspects of the perceived world to other beings, and it was at the core of the cognitive style of Homo erectus. Reproducing others’ behavior without using symbolic language—“reciprocal mimetic games,” or ritual dance, for example—can lead to societal changes. Tool-making and the combination of vocal and facial emotional expressions were likely useful devices for social communication in families and tribes in early hominid culture. Third, mythic culture integrated knowledge through early humans’ inventing narratives and creating meanings for social events. Mythic representation is “the intellectual leap” from the mimetic stage to an integrative system of

184 “The representational form of memory” refers to the memory of specific events discussed in the “episodic” stage in Origin. This research adopts Donald’s hypothesis that apes’ memories include only particular events, without taking into account how animals generalize for one event to another. There is no formal definition or clarification of the term “mimesis” offered in Donald’s discussion; Donald uses this term to express any forms of imitation of the real world presuming the non-involvement of language and incapability of apes. An elaborated discussion, see Eric B. Baum, “Did Courtship Drive the Evolution of Mind?” Behavioral and Brain Sciences (1996): 155-64, available from https://case.edu/artsci/cogs/donald/ContinuingCommentary.PDF, accessed on March 28, 2021.

185 Ibid.

186 Donald, Origins, 160.

187 Donald, Origins, 271.

188 Donald, Origins, 173-5.
mental creations, where speech is introduced into the representational system to depict episodic and mimetic material, such as events occurring in daily life.189 Fourth, theoretic culture is the highest stage on which modern humans represent reality. This is achieved through three cognitive phenomena: visual symbols, “external storage system (ESS),” and theory construction.190

Understanding the three transformative transitions between the four stages of the human mind is important to mapping the human cognition illuminating public-art study. In the first transition, from episodic to mimetic culture, the cognitive shift that Homo erectus underwent revealed the fundamental cognitive need for humans to interact with others and to develop a society where “cooperation and social coordination of action are central to the species’ survival strategy.”191 Although erectus were not able to speak, their human cognition had both an individual and a collective dimension. Mimesis still permeates modern human cognition. In the case of avocational, doubles-only badminton activities, players’ intentional representational form of communication (i.e., gestures, eye-contact within the same team) allow for structuring an appropriate offensive-mode or setting the pace, etc., promoting roles and group norms (e.g., building a tacit understanding between partners) to benefit the individual participant, the group, and the community. In everyday life, they get involved in different social media platforms using different sets of emoji and cyber-language data distributed among various groups to convey emotions and exchange opinions not limited to the game itself. They create shared cyberspace on Wechat and Telegram, where they utilize mimetic skills to negotiate issues regarding multiple aspects of badminton playing. These

189 Donald, Origins, 268.
190 Donald, Origins, 272-3.
191 Donald, Origins, 163.
continuous actions taking place every day reveal that humans’ mimetic skill has been retained vestigially as mimetic adaptation retained and encapsulate humans’ episodic memory capacity.

In cyberspace, for example, textual and imaginary expressions have demonstrated a multilayered consciousness. In the communication process of a seasonal badminton tournament in the church in Plano, the planners and other participants collaborate using physical and virtual means to achieve effective negotiations and dialogue about the event. They communicate online by making new forms of emoji and images to mimic gestures and facial expressions (forms other than written language) to create a more effective atmosphere and to solve practical problems. For example, one may use a screenshot of a baby’s “angry” face as a manmade emoji to end up a somewhat unpleasant argument without any words. The emoji serves as a moderate response containing at least three layers of ecological awareness—keeping anger at bay, finishing an argument by relieving frustration, and reconfiguring the public environment—to maintain the friendliness in the group. Generally speaking, no one would hate to see an emoji of a lovely “human cub,” which proves to be a wise and an effective strategy to stop the argument. In addition, a mixture of Chinese characters, local dialects, numbers, and symbols used as textual expressions effectively reduces a risk of being awkward or embarrassed in the virtual, shared space. Without these strategies to maintain a healthy social relationship between the members

192 In online slangs, the term “human cub” represents netizens’ appreciation and favorability toward babies whose bodily movements and facial expressions are usually used to express mixed feelings of humor, ridiculousness, and hilariousness.

193 This example is based on the researcher’s observation in the CCCFC WeChat group, and other online groups.

194 Ibid.
within a community, the shared space may disappear because the healthy interpersonal relationships collapse.\(^{195}\)

The second transmission from mimetic to mythic minds demonstrates that symbolic thought is the driving force creating and conveying meaning in people’s daily communications. Following Wittgenstein’s position on language—that physical symbols are usually ambiguous, but this ambiguity in form does not hinder their effective dissemination when people construct social networks—Donald proposes that myth-creation is the primary function of language in cultures dominated by linguistic cognition. In mythic cultures, people passed and continue to pass collective knowledge about survival by creating semantic symbolism. This “general-purpose capacity” not only depends upon but also “extends beyond vocal-auditory pathways.” Totemic art, ritual, and mimetic songs and dances also belong to the mimetic heritage. What Donald suggests about this shift from mimetic to mythic culture is not confined to narrative creation; it is the basic social exchange by which myths are produced. According to Donald, consciousness serves as 1) a mental state, 2) a central executive in the human mind that receives, analyzes, and concludes perceptions from reality, and 3) a symbolic capacity to illuminate human life rather than merely to increase attention. For example, prehistoric cave paintings found worldwide demonstrate that hunting, fertility, and cosmological images had been the “governing cognitive constructs of human society” as they recorded and maintained the myths created by early humans.\(^{196}\) Myriad examples exist in contemporary public-art engagement, such as regeneration projects (through renovating architectures and infrastructure) to promote stronger social connections. In public-art research,

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\(^{195}\) The CCCFC WeChat group was closed once in the period of the 2016 United States Presidential Election, based on conversations between the researcher and several players in 2019 and 2020.

\(^{196}\) Donald, *Origins*, 282.
cultivating an awareness of the elevation of the unconscious to conscious level helps members of a community understand the shared values embedded in their traditions.

In the history of the third shift from mythic to theoretic culture, cognitive symbiosis was not an inherent characteristic of human nature but a structure dependent upon both symbolic invention and technological hardware.\(^\text{197}\) Visuographic invention, the management of external memory devices, and the training of metalinguistic skills resulted in an evolutionary transition. Although writing played a key role in this shift, Donald stresses that other external memory devices such as pictorial invention, were vital as well. For example, Chinese tradition is associated with oral-mythic and ceremonial cultures, and astronomic symbols in architectural sites illustrate the power of these aboriginal people. In America, Chinese immigrants inherit, explore, and develop mythic ideas about the cosmos and ancestors that were initially existing mythic cognitive structures, and they use symbols to express and preserve their understanding of the relationship between the universe and their lives. For example, Feng Shui, the ancient philosophy that harmonizes one’s living or working environment plays a vital role in people of Asian descent purchasing houses, though many are aware that it is a primitive superstition.\(^\text{198-199}\) The philosophy of Feng Shui was based on observations of astronomical phenomena, natural scenery, and human actions.\(^\text{200}\) The utilization of this idea aims to build a favorable space harmonizing spiritual and concrete aspects for living

\(^{197}\) Donald, *Origins*, 356.

\(^{198}\) The term “Feng Shui” is made of two Chinese characters “Feng” and “Shui.” The former means “wind,” and the latter “water” in English.


(building layout, interior architecture, furniture layout, landscape planning, etc). In Asian family-based parties, seriously or jokingly talking about the context of Feng Shui related to houses and environments is an interesting topic.

A Latin-dancing group in the Dallas area serves as another good example to showcase how public art connects the concrete and spiritual spaces of the participants. This is a large online community comprised of five hundred people, among whom only a few actually participate in the dancing classes held by the teacher and coordinator. For the participants, the Wechat group serves less as a place for studying dance, but a chatting room for negotiating familial and sociopolitical matters (e.g., folk drama, private school, or leader election). Thus, a Latin dance-related setting transforms into a multidimensional space of politics, entertainment, education, history, and more. During the 2020 election, members in favor of different parties argued for their opinions, some of which included conspiracy theories, which made the virtual space “a mess.” When someone asked the coordinator to “calm down the noisy folks,” the teacher replied in an indulgent tone, “encouraging freedom of speech.” Many people withdrew from the space maybe because of different understandings of the term “freedom” or the actual lack of “freedom.” Nobody was talking as of September 20, 2021 after the 2020 election, and the online group has been socially dead.


202 This is how a member phrased in that space, observed by the researcher in this virtual group.

203 Ibid.

204 This is how the teacher replied to the request of “no talking politics in an online dance group.” Observed by the researcher.
For the members, the meaning of community was related to the spiritual phase of constructing a “family” not only for dance-learners, but for the interpersonal spirit (a political fanaticism) they sought. Donald’s theoretical transition from the mythic to the theoretic shines light on the exploration of how everyday practice is read and executed by the participants. In the Latin-dance-learning community, updated information about families, life experiences, children, etc., replaced the initial intention of attracting (potential) dance-learners and changed the previous function of a public space, although at a fairly slow pace. Furthermore, this conceptual transition ceased to be restricted to the changes in people’s minds (as the first two transitions were); it became dependent upon external memory devices such as cameras. By using cameras, group members recorded not only the new content they shared with others; they also recorded the changes occurring in their lives (e.g., selfies of the coordinator when she was on vacations, pictures taken when someone attended political campaigns). Technological hardware thus enables an entirely new culture of adaptation that gradually incorporated and extended cognitive dimensions at all the previous stages: episodic, mimetic, and mythic.

In line with Donald’s ideas of the evolution of the human mind, the contemporary culture of public life is simultaneously pre-modern, modern, and postmodern. One cannot understand how humans relate to each other without first understanding that learning is an extension of the processes of cognitive evolution. Shared knowledge is linked to the processes of evolution, and cultural dynamics engender collaborative activities with shared goals and intentions. Understanding the role of cultural and social variables in cognition enables one to see informal public art as a collective community expression and a celebration of people’s experiences of art in everyday life. Public art projects are created for and by people, and they shape communities. By putting discussions about informal arts within the historical and scientific trajectory of human evolution,
how people connect with others through engaging with arts in the daily routine becomes visible in participatory, negotiable, and collaborative ways.

3.2 Distributed Cognition in the Evolution of the Human Mind

Distributed cognition is a process of building shared knowledge to expand individual cognitive resources, in which people have continuously created new forms to update the older ones (e.g., in the system of language and technology). This process needs collaboration and networking that characterize any human society. Understanding the evolution of the human mind is helpful for understanding people’s collaborative ability to generate a shared cultural space that no single individual can achieve alone.205 In this study, a shared cultural space can be seen as the product of informal public art that reflects the structure of human cognitive and cultural engagements. The product of new social spaces is also a process in which the arts engagers collectively develop new modes of social relations that contain all the elements of human’s evolutionary history to express how they perceive the world and engage in aesthetic practices.

Viewed in the evolutionary context, the new forms and media of informal public art are driven by technology as an extension of human capacity. The distributed cognitive processes occur between individuals, and between humans and machines.206 207 People’s social interactions in public life are related to the most ancient domain of the human mind, manifested in their process of co-


creating social spaces through new structures of social relations to improve their quality of life. Informal public art involving public activities, cultural events, and everyday gestures, can be seen as the fundamental, expressive way through which the human mind manifests how people weave everyday regimens into the deepest layer of meaning of being human. Informal public art occurs in the context of distributed cognition, and technologies help empower people create new social spaces in both the physical and virtual worlds.

In the idea of distributed cognition in a shared environment, the nature of informal public art can be seen as demonstrations of human cognition that is distributed beyond one individual person. Rather, informal arts engagements involve interpersonal and communal relations, symbolic media and external devices, and different surroundings and artifacts.\textsuperscript{208} A detailed discussion of how people create new forms in the physical and virtual communities to continue their way of life through informal public art engagement during the quarantine times is found in chapter five and six.

**Conclusion**

Merlin Donald’s analysis of the revolution of the human mind as a process of collectively building a shared space helps the reader understand more fully about Lefebvre’s work on co-creating social space and Ranciere’s work on everyday aesthetics in co-creating social relations. A commonality shared by these three theories is that art—involving a wide array of expressive forms and media, including informal public art as everyday activities—reflects collective endeavors for building a larger community.\textsuperscript{209}

\textsuperscript{208} Ibid, 89.

\textsuperscript{209} There have plenty of discussions about works of Lefebvre and Ranciere regarding (re)configuring social spaces through building new social relations in chapter two. Merlin Donald used the word “reciprocal” to highlight the social impact of art generated from the artists to guide effective communication between the artist and an audience. Though Donald analyzed the relationship between art and cognitive revolution within the strictly defined art world, his theory
An understanding of distributed cognition is necessary for a discussion about informal arts to acknowledge the need for grassroots (e.g., forming and maintaining dignity, seeking individual and group identities), improving the quality of life, promoting the spirit of community, and thus constructing a healthier, fairer, and more equal society. In the context of distributed cognition, informal arts engagements occur in a shared, cognitive cultural process in which people employ various methods, such as external aids (e.g., social media technologies), to construct new social networks through interacting with others in their everyday lives. Informal public art can be seen as a distributed cognitive activity taking place in a community, as well as an approach through which permit a space of continual deliberation, complex arrangement, and intense concern.

fits in this study on informal public art in the sense that art functions as a means to co-construct human social interactions. See Merlin Donald, “Art and Cognitive Evolution,” 4-5.
CHAPTER IV
Research Methodology

Introduction

This study uses a variety of methodologies to examine the potential of informal arts-based practices to engage ordinary people in constructing their lives together. Participants at CCCFC badminton group and engagements of the 227 Incident are the cases this study examined. These methods help show people’s capacity to maintain social relations through creating new spaces when their original informal public art spaces became dysfunctional.

4.1 The Importance of Multiple Methodologies in the Study of Informal Arts Engagement

One source of investigating the nature of the informal public art groups studied in this thesis is drawing on interdisciplinary methods for understanding diverse communities. They are found in the history of Asian immigrants as found in chapter 3 and the Appendix 5. This history exemplifies the importance of understanding racial diversity and complex prejudice in American society, which serves as a major factor for necessitating taking into account ongoing racial and cultural tension to accurately interpret the members’ identity-searching through informal arts practices.210 211

Yet, to understand sociological, aesthetic, economic, and even political dimensions of a given community, one needs to acquire first-hand data by involving oneself deeply in the

210 Bryant Jr., Keithl, Culture in the American Southwest: the Earth, the Sky, the people (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2014).

community. The richness of community arts requires researchers’ participation in the arts group to understand various values embedded in personal satisfaction, creative engagement, and collective integration. In the case of the Chinese dance team mentioned earlier, without in-depth exploration from the inside of this group, one may not be aware of their passion for life, the hope of beauty, and a yearning for freedom underneath their unskilled, even sometimes awkward bodily movements.

4.2 Participant Observation/Participatory Observation

In order to get a full understanding of group member dynamics, participant observation allows researchers in the field of public art to examine communities, their accommodators, and local areas from a multidisciplinary perspective including views of cultural anthropology, sociology, psychology, and other disciplines. Participant observation is one of the methods fitting into the general category of quantitative research. Given a foundational, strategic method for data collecting, participant observation deployed by this research will show how ordinary people...
reconfigure the world via everyday arts engagements, and by what means these sense-based and affective actions express their emotions, sentiments, and passions within public life.\textsuperscript{214}

For example, community-based festivals are an important form of informal arts engagement which often provide free access, cultural services, and social benefits. In the CCCFC badminton case, various feasts are the usual occasions for gathering together when celebrating Chinese traditional festivals. Parties during the Chinese Spring Festival often take place in different families’ homes, Asian restaurants, or the church where they play badminton. According to this researcher’s observations, the mode of festival parties varies by site.\textsuperscript{215} In this study, at an individual player’s house, some thirty people and their family members (who are also players, on most occasions) dress casually and come with one or two home-made dishes and desserts that are mostly traditional Chinese cuisine. Various entertainment (e.g., singing, dancing, watching films, playing cards, chatting, etc.,) programmed by the host family are available for guests to engage in after the meal. If the Spring Festival is held in Asian restaurants, around eighty people, including players and their non-player family members, will attend the dinner in formal dress. If the festival event is hosted by the church, more than three hundred people, including both the players and other church members, will take part in more traditional activities (e.g., making dumplings inside the church hall, barbeque outside the building, riddling), and public services (e.g., child-care, youth games) will be organized for groups of different ages. Participant observation can engage or study the rich, complex interactions related to the group.


For this research, the researcher took an active role in the cases of the CCCFC badminton team (and the correspondent church), the classical Chinese dance group, and the Latin-dancing group (only the online group), and a passive role in the case of the 227 Incident. Different levels of participation, such as being a member of the community and attending meetings and activities held on-site or online, or being a non-member of the group serving as a bystander without interacting with members allow this researcher to observe the selected groups from multiple perspectives to gather varied data. For the physical fieldwork, the membership-status put the researcher in a position to record field-notes, take pictures, and map sites to make a more careful exploration of the cultural meanings of a chosen community.

This approach allows this researcher to pay attention to specific terms used by the community and use those terms within the group to understand them better. For example, in the badminton group, “the short service line” identifies the line 6 1/2 feet from the net, and a serve must reach the line to be legal. Using the language other participants use is important for researchers to gain and impart greater insight into the processes of knowledge and skill acquisition in the community’s everyday routines. In addition, the outfit of a researcher matters when appearing in the chosen community because appropriate clothing may be a tacit rule and a taken-for-granted routine in that group. In the badminton case, a non-sports dressed researcher is suspicious near the court, and it is difficult to nurture trust when asking questions. The same concern about language also applies to online groups. When entering an online community, a


217 DeWalt and DeWalt, Participant Observation, 1.

researcher should firstly observe “in the corner,” and then seek appropriate opportunities to ask questions or join in conversations in settings and contexts within which the researcher will not be intrusive. The role of an active or passive observer is not static or rigid, but intermingled and complementary.

The degree to which a researcher involves herself in participation in the culture of the chosen community affects the quality and amount of data gathered. In this study, the researcher’s total immersion as a full-time member in the selected community was necessary to study the role that informal arts activities play in public life.\(^{219}\) For example, the CCCFC badminton team has ceased almost all public meetings and practices for more than a year due to the pandemic. The full membership status helps the researcher keep observing the group primarily in its online setting (the CCCFC WeChat group). In addition, the researcher has built up friendships with some players during long-term engagement with the badminton community. This strong level of trust helps the researcher get information about how individual players connect with other players through the common interest, badminton-playing, when physical gathering is not happening. Some smaller badminton teams emerged after the host church temporarily closed in March 2020, and the standard courts were set up in different private facilities (e.g., one family transformed one big room of their house into a “luxurious” badminton court.\(^{220}\) Another “plain” one was set up in the vacant storage unit which belongs to another family).\(^{221}\) The degree to which the researcher immersed herself in the


\(^{220}\) The difference between commercial and non-commercial badminton courts is obvious; the players used the quoted words, among other jokingly used ones, to describe the condition of the court.

\(^{221}\) Ibid.
arts community notably helped her attain a holistic understanding of the selected group, the members’ engagements with arts, and the places people choose to interact.\textsuperscript{222}

In this research, participant observation enabled the research to be on site when the cultural members conduct arts activities (e.g., what they do, how they arrange things, with whom, and “under what circumstances”).\textsuperscript{223} This method has provided various opportunities for the researcher to develop questions that are culturally relevant to the selected community (e.g., using the language that this group normally uses for a better understanding of their behaviors, intentions, and interactions) in everyday settings. The fieldwork ensured the researcher developed trust with the cultural informants during long-term communications on various levels. The researcher was invited to many activities that were external to the CCCFC group to collect data related to the informal-arts study. A full membership has enabled the researcher to build natural channels through which to communicate with the members who were not aware of being observed.

\textbf{4.3 Semi-Structured Interviews}

The semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method that this researcher deployed to attain thoughts and feelings of the informants in order to decipher the ethos of the group.\textsuperscript{224} By using face-to-face interviews (some interviews were conducted by phone or other audio-communication techniques by the informants’ request due to the impact of the pandemic), the researcher gained

\textsuperscript{222} DeWalt and DeWalt, \textit{Participant Observation}, 92.

\textsuperscript{223} Howard Becker, Blanche Geer, and Everett Hughes, \textit{Making the Grade} (New York, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1968), 13.

\textsuperscript{224} Qualitative research methods usually help researchers examine how and why people engage with arts practices, while quantitative research methods helps the researcher primarily to determine how many people undertake the arts activity. In this research, both research methods are intermingled and utilized by the researcher to examine informal arts taking place in the participants’ “real life” environment over years in Plano, Texas. A rough description about qualitative and quantitative research methods see Jane Sutton, Qualitative Research: Data Collection, Analysis, and Management, \textit{Can J Hosp Pharm}, 68 (3) (2015): 226-31, available from \url{https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4485510/}; accessed on April 1, 2021.
clearer responses from the participants regarding their arts engagements.\textsuperscript{225-226} In the CCCFC badminton case, the research was concerned with obtaining accounts of and attitudes toward the seasonal tournament and the usual planning, grouping, training, and gaming on everyday occasions. A set of questions provides a basic framework for examining the phenomena of cooperation, anticipations, and conflicts within or beyond the arts community. The researcher deliberately designed ambiguous inquiries to leave greater freedom for the interlocutors, which proved to be compatible with the cultural patterns of East Asia. These open-ended questions were, to some extent, geared by the informant for the purpose of making the communication between the researcher and the interviewee more productive and effective.\textsuperscript{227} A complete list of questions found in the appendix.

During the interviews, the researcher guided the process of obtaining information from the interviewee by asking pre-planned questions (on a sheet when conducting the interview), while retaining space within the conversation for the informant to raise new ideas. This situation allowed the interviewee to sometimes take on the role of leading the conversation and allowing the researcher to be a more passive listener.\textsuperscript{228} The informants described how the participants ascribe

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meaning to their arts experiences, how the arts events provide a range of forms, symbols, and roles for the individuals and the group, and where people engage with their cultural aesthetics.229–230

In conducting this interview, the researcher used a “participant-centered approach” for both ethical and credential purposes.231 Recording is usually necessary for the semi-structured interview.232 However, the researcher solicited the permission of the informants every time before the interview started. The interviewee decided whether or not a recorder should be present during the conversation. Most interviewees were willing to have their voices recorded, and a few of them requested the researcher to turn the recorder off when they shared thoughts about personal experiences. In such circumstances, the researcher granted their request yet continued the conversation, making notes about their key points with their permission. Some informants allowed the researcher to rephrase the recording as long as the original meaning was retained.

English and Mandarin Chinese are the two main languages these members use in public, and they determined which language they would like to use in the interview.233 The researcher prepared a list of questions for the interview, but varied the order in which they were asked slightly.


233 All the members can speak at least two languages in this Asian community, and each of them speaks the unique dialect—not necessarily in Mandarin Chinese, but Cantonese Chinese or other local languages in China, as well as various languages used in India, Malaysia, Vietnam, etc. English and Mandarin Chinese are the two primary languages used in daily communications.

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with the different interlocutors. An important reason for this change resulted from the semi-structured approach: every interviewee elaborates and offers more information according to her or his own pace, and the researcher encourages the person to develop the interpretation at her or his own pace. To make the informant feel free and relaxed (e.g., forgetting about the recorder and turning a “formal” interview into an “informal” one) ensures the quality of data-collection.\textsuperscript{234}

Neither the researcher nor anyone else can guarantee whether an informant tells the truth, but the method of an open-ended interview enables the researcher to obtain valuable data of arts experiences that cannot be gained through mere observation. Based on years of observing and examining the Asian community in Plano, this researcher eventually determined that documented interviews were suitable for the CCCFC badminton case to attain high-quality data in everyday settings. The transcripts present “the accuracy of their discovered truth, rather than the less important what-did-they-say-exactly.”\textsuperscript{235} Without interviews with a recorder, the researcher could hardly attain the unexpected information about how the participants described the relationship between the arts activity and the quality of their lives, between the bodily movements and their definition of beauty in life.\textsuperscript{236}

\textbf{4.4 Survey}


\textsuperscript{236} Based on conversations and interviews this researcher have conducted with the members of the CCCFC badminton group.
Survey research is “the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to a questionnaire.” In this case, an online survey was the only way to gather data from the sample group in China because face-to-face communication was not possible, especially during the pandemic. In this research, the researcher used the survey method to help articulate and explore arts engagers’ behaviors by obtaining information of a large sample of population and their opinions on the 227 Incident which occurred in February 2020. Details are found in appendix 2.

The targeted participants live in China and primarily use Chinese websites. To capture the 227 Incident’s influence and impact, the researcher needed to scrutinize the netizens (citizens of the Internet, primarily the Z-generation) by identifying their experiences as “shared” and “in-common” relationships of arts in mundane public life.

Questions related to the 227 Incident encompass gender, age, educational background, and the perception of the incident in the last 14 months. In this case, questions of engagement included personal information, participation, reflection, or volunteering in and beyond the incident. This researcher purposefully chose to distribute the online survey to professors and teachers of universities in metropolitan cities in China. The targeted sample is the netizens whose personal identities are hard to discern through an entirely online survey, and the questionnaire was as succinct as possible to attract more potential respondents.


239 The researcher of this study conducted this survey in April 2021.

240 The survey website is https://www.wenjuan.com/list/.

241 The researcher conducted a pre-research before the formal survey was distributed to know how long a survey should be appropriate for young people in China, in particular the college students around 20 years old who are supposed to be the targeted population in the case of the 227 Incident.
4.5 Protecting Informants and Participants

According to the policy regarding human subjects in research of Southern Methodist University, the researcher of this study conducted the research so as to assure the ethics and safety of the respondents and participants. In both the interview and questionnaire, this care for the informants and observed individuals of this research is in line with the participant-centered focus of this study. The researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Southern Methodist University, who reviewed the aims and plans for field research, and evaluated the ethics and hazards of this study. The IRB granted approval of this research on February 19, 2020 (see Appendix 3). Due to the impact of the pandemic, the researcher made some adjustments on the pre-planned case study and research methods in 2020. The IRB issued a “Human Subjects Research Submission Approval Letter” (see Appendix 4) on March 31, 2021 after reevaluating the updated study.

All individual interviewees were given the explanation and content script (see Appendix 3 and 4) and knew about the use of a recorder before the researcher started an interview. For face-to-face interviews, the informant could read the consent form and see a recorder on the table; for the online or audio interviews, the researcher sent the consent form and requested a permission of recording to the participant prior to the interview. The informants were free, as per the consent form, to withdraw from the interview, or omit or refuse to answer the question(s) whenever they felt uncomfortable with any part of the interview. The researcher met the request of any informant who asks for full dissertation chapters where her or his interview excerpts are included to ensure approval. This promise is not a requirement in SMU’s ethical guidelines, but the researcher’s

obligation to protect the participants’ “right to know” about the context in which the researcher inserted their remarks.

For the online survey, all potential participants (Chinese citizens living in mainland China) voluntarily filled out the survey (see Appendix 2), and the way this survey was distributed by teachers working in universities in China was legal and safe. The questionnaire asks no names of those who are willing to participate in the survey, so nobody’s name was on display on the internet. The researcher cannot guarantee the website (https://www.wenjuan.com/) through which this survey was conducted is absolutely safe (e.g., without information leaks regarding the participants). However, the researcher had trialed an online survey and taken part in it as a respondent seven months prior to the survey’s “formal” distribution in April 2021, and did not find any risk of personal information-leakage. Therefore, there is no obvious hazard to the participants of this survey.

All the informants, including the people being observed, interviewed, and invited to take part in the survey, have been kept anonymous in this dissertation to protect their privacy. This anonymous status also protects the informants from being identified, persecuted, or prosecuted by anyone else in consideration of the risk of criticizing a government decision (whether in China or the U.S.). Neither the interview nor the survey contain potentially sensitive topics, such as critiquing government policies; however, the survey has space for the interviewee to express thoughts on subculture and the online space in China. The survey purposed to help this research discover how ordinary people, especially netizens, view subculture as a form of public art. In China, those who are interested in the 227 Incident often focus more on the dispute between the actor's fans and AO3’s users instead of the government's decision to take down the website (AO3). In addition, critiquing the government in everyday conversations is not a violation of “Inciting
Subversion of State Power;” Chinese citizens express their thoughts freely without worrying about being arrested or persecuted.

There are three considerations related to the risk of criticizing the government’s decision to take down the AO3 website, associated with the survey. First, people who disseminate political opinions in the cyber space in China are primarily safe. In the online space, one may easily find various opinions, critiques, and comments about the government on social websites popular in China, such as Wechat, Zhihu, and Weibo (similar as Facebook, Quora, and Twitter in the U.S.), etc., including positive and negative remarks, rumors, and even conspiracy theories in casual conversations. Among that information, political remarks also appear. In the Chinese tradition, politics simply means ugliness, which is not a welcomed topic on most occasions in daily life.

Second, people can gain access the blocked internet, including potentially sensitive information, if they desire. There is the Great Firewall in mainland China, but one can get around it to access blocked services by using VPNs. Some organizations (big companies, international corporations, and universities) do not block contents (e.g., from Google or Facebook). For example, people working in universities can easily access the extensive internet blocked by the government without using VPNs.

Third, the selected participants are Chinese youngsters who showed little interest in ideological debates. In metropolitan cities in China, ordinary people around 40 years old have much less interest in the AO3 and the actor (Xiao Zhan) than people roughly 18 to 35 years old. Many of those above 50-years-old do not know about the 227 Incident; they might have read the news and stories about the incident on social media, but they quickly forgot it. For the 227 Incident, the older one is, the less one pays attention to it. In the cities in mainland China, people around 20 years old care less about ideological narratives (whether official or western ones) than subcultures and youth
trends, such as the "Buddhist lifestyle" (not a truly religious, Buddhist life), LGBT (topics related to this group are not in mainstream culture in China and Asian), 2-D culture and cosplay, Techno music culture, etc., all of which are popular in Southeast Asia.

Neither the interviews nor the survey involved explicitly critical or controversial questions related to politics, ethnicities, or other sensitive questions which might be potentially hazardous to the informants and participants. The semi-structured interviews invited participants to comment on their arts practices and life experiences, and the online survey engaged the ordinary youngsters with their opinions about subcultures and lifestyles. All the informants gave their opinions of their own accord and were not led, entrapped, or solicited to provide critical or potentially incriminating comments.

4.6 Challenges of Data-Collection

For the purpose of understanding and assessing cultural activities in communities, the methods utilized in this research enabled the researcher access to the chosen study areas and to engage with the groups concerned. However, there also exists some data collection challenges for the researcher that must be noted. First, the researcher needed enough time, patience, and proper strategies to fit in the CCCFC group. Becoming familiar with the targeted location and being present play a vital role in the process of gathering information about people and their arts experiences.243 Members of the CCCFC group are families, friends, and other types of relationship (e.g., husbands and wives, fathers or mothers and children, acquaintances, members of the same church, or none of the above) coming from different countries.244 The culture of this community is


244 Adult players are first-generation immigrants coming from countries of Asian, South America, and Europe.
quiet and focused, reflecting the politeness of Southeast Asian culture; acquiring the members’ personal information proved to be a challenge for the researcher. One has to speak louder than usual to make others clearly hear in the rest area because players on courts make noise. The researcher made a great effort to know where the members come from.\footnote{These members are immigrants coming from China (including mainland China, Taiwan province, and Hong Kong district), Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Vietnam, Korea, Singapore, Bangladesh, Honduras, and Russia. Chinese immigrants (including people from Taiwan and Hong Kong) are the largest population in this group.}

Second, remaining sensitive and not becoming blind to familiar sights was critical for the researcher to refine and focus subsequent observation and data gathering. Research fatigue is inevitable, especially after the researcher’s extensive commitment to gaining knowledge through long-term, direct observation. This research focuses on arts activities in daily settings, so a single observation may not bring to light connections or relationships over there. Making notes as soon as possible allowed the researcher to stay open to unexpected dynamics and keep a fresh eye on reoccurrences. For example, conversations in the CCCFC badminton online team (its WeChat backup) opens a window for this researcher to obtain data about what concerns the members most. In February 2021, the discussion about personal security became a top concern in this Asian community because of the nationwide rise of hate crimes against Asian Americans.\footnote{Yan Zhang, Lening Zhang, and Francis Benton, “Hate Crimes against Asian Americans,” The American Journal of Criminal Justice 7 (2021): 1-21, available from \url{https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7790522/}; accessed on April 4, 2021.} Is the public security concern typical in the group? What feelings do they experience in this climate? Is there any connection between their insecurity and badminton-playing? All these questions inspired the researcher to refine the previous hypothesis of the study by analyzing a wide range of interactions in the record of the group chat.
Third, the representative sample of the survey utilized in the 227 Incident is key to validity and reliability from multiple responses. The generalizability of a study refers to how the results of a study are applicable to other groups of people or new situations. For the 227 case, the demographic information is critical for approaching the goal of making the study results useful to not only the focus population but also to similar populations. Each participant of the survey in the focus sample population who had been selected made unique contribution toward this study; so this researcher purposefully selected the sample population to increase credibility of the study findings. The survey was delivered by various channels, mainly centered on higher education institutions in different regions of China to cover as large of a geographic area as possible to avoid data-ineffectiveness caused by pure, random online surveys. The sample population that responded to the survey was large enough to ensure the reliability of these data; however, given the sample size is around eight hundred, whether the survey can represent the entire targeted group—the Netizens in China—remains uncertain.

Conclusion

247 Brett Smith, “Generalizability in Qualitative Research: Misunderstandings, Opportunities and Recommendations for the Sport and Exercise Sciences,” *Contemporary Views and Provocations* (2017): 137-49, available from Taylor & Francis Online, [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2159676X.2017.1393221?casa_token=L-lCwDmjawiwAAAA%3Aou9gBSsVyLU4a-5DJd9Bm_6bU68xGWxp4-IhZur9SbPXkxDLwa_6nJAp_9HD1mOvQDghtW9k_gg1A](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2159676X.2017.1393221?casa_token=L-lCwDmjawiwAAAA%3Aou9gBSsVyLU4a-5DJd9Bm_6bU68xGWxp4-IhZur9SbPXkxDLwa_6nJAp_9HD1mOvQDghtW9k_gg1A); accessed on April 19, 2021.


249 This survey was delivered by teachers and professors working in universities mainly located in the Southeast, West, and East China, including metropolitan cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Xian, Changsha, Nanchang, Lanzhou, etc.

250 The concern of a pure, random online survey usually refers to the uncertainty of the authenticity of the respondents and their information.

Starting from the participants’ perspective is pivotal for studies on informal public art, which demands that the researcher focuses on observing the arts participants engaging with the arts activities in public life. The researcher needs to consider the applicability of approaches that helps attain data and the sensitivity of various demands that were explicitly or implicitly demonstrated by the members in real community settings. Even the language used by the researcher plays an important role in the process of examining arts groups that determines the extent a researcher builds relationships with the arts engagers. Being familiar to the cultural group and using colloquial language are critical for aligning with the informants for the validity, effectiveness, and robustness of data-collection.

This chapter has introduced the methods of participant observation, semi-structured interview, and survey of data collection as means to discover how ordinary people collectively expand their social relations by co-creating shared informal art spaces in everyday settings. The researcher performed roles ranging from active to passive participation, facilitator, and observer within the selected settings. In the process of establishing and sustaining relationships with insiders (and outsiders) of the focused group, the researcher has gathered detailed, rich data of the arts phenomena in various environments, networks of people, and events. The researcher remains primarily involved with one group, but has gradually found more subgroups associated with the main one. In the badminton-team case, more organized smaller-scale sub-groups emerged during the pandemic.\textsuperscript{252} In the case of 227 Incident, the researcher has noted demographics, sample source, and survey distribution to ensure the reliability of data gathering through an online survey.

\textsuperscript{252} In the pandemic situation, these smaller groups usually comprise two to four players, depending on the capacity, state coronavirus-related gathering restrictions.
Conducting community-oriented research on informal arts activities is challenging yet also necessary and rewarding. The methods described above provide a robust data set for the analysis follow.
CHAPTER V

Case Studies of Informal Arts Engagement: People, Place, Space, and Meaning-Making

Introduction

Based on the definition of informal public art—the process of continually creating new social interactions within and beyond a focused community to fulfill people’s social and aesthetic needs—this study investigated two groups: the CCCFC badminton team in Plano, Texas, and the 227 Incident which occurred online primarily in mainland China.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the participants’ lived experiences by examining the case of the CCCFC badminton community. The second part of this chapter is the 227 Incident based on a survey of a sample of Chinese netizens. A presentation of the findings follows each case study. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the results and their implications for further analysis in later chapters.

This chapter endeavors to illuminate the most important themes of public-art research: the process of simultaneously creating new forms of social interactions and social spaces (in both physical and virtual worlds) is a form of informal art carried out in public. The chapter will illustrate ordinary people’s capacity to transform social spaces for improving their quality of life in the face of coronavirus (the CCCFC badminton case) and in times of rapid social changes (the 227 example).

5.1 People: “Serving Others is A Privilege” - CCCFC Badminton Fellowship

The CCCFC group is an amateur-based badminton group is a localized informal arts sector set up in 2008 in the CCCFC church in Plano. Besides the “physical” setting, this group has had an online version since 2014, when the social platform WeChat became popular among Chinese
people in the United States. The online CCCFC community has played a remarkable role since physical contact was restricted back to the spring of 2020.

5.1.1 Context of the CCCFC Badminton Group

Asian Americans make up the fastest growing racial and ethnic communities in America. However, these communities and their cultural practices remain undercounted. The population of Asian Americans reached 18.9 million in 2019 and is projected to rise to 35.8 million by 2060. In the public-art field, data on their arts activities is scarce, and many cultural disparities for this ethnic population remain unknown. The number of Asians is 60,633, 21.12 percent of the total residents (287,064) in Plano, Texas. However, one may find little information related to this ethnic group in this city’s official public-art website. Similarly, the public-art website of Frisco merely exhibits several sculptures. It includes no reference to the cultural identities of its population, 20.88 percent of whom are Asian (36,962 Asian residents versus a total population record 177,020).


The public, ordinary people, are fundamental to public art. So the researcher must ask: Who are the people engaging the world through arts activities? Where are the places they engage in public art? How do they engage in public art? Why do they engage in informal public art? To begin to answer these questions, this study examined the CCCFC badminton group because it is the largest arts group in the DFW Metroplex and also because most of the members of this group belong to the largest subgroup of Asian Americans, Chinese Americans, in the state of Texas and the US as a whole.259 Correspondingly, this case study primarily centers on Chinese culture and its influences prevailing over large geographical territories of East and Southeast Asia, where the badminton lovers came from.260

The portrait of Asian Americans is complex because there are more than thirty ethnic and cultural subgroups within this population, and each subgroup differs in immigration experiences, cultural values and beliefs, religion, income, education, etc. Each generation’s characteristics are variously influenced by the specific historical and social circumstances in their home countries and the US. For example, the number of U.S.-born Asian American adults increased tremendously between 1990 and 2000.261 These people are the children of post-1965 immigrants. Their social engagement has been more active than that of their parents since the 1990s.262 This case study


260 In the CCCFC badminton group, the researcher primarily focused on the largest number of the participants and Chinese culture, aiming to provide meaningful amateur-arts data for this case study. This study is neither to highlight the importance of collecting and analyzing Asian-American sub-groups as a whole, nor to mask differences between Asian-American subgroups within the community.


focuses on first-generation Asian immigrants primarily in their 40s and 50s. What do these Asian immigrants from non-Western cultural traditions think about their daily activities when they engage in informal arts practices? Why did these Asian people choose and launch a badminton community in a church? The CCCFC badminton team, a small-scale informal arts community, reveals the subtleties and intricacies of complex social contexts of Asian American experiences.

In this badminton group, more than 80 percent of the players originate from mainland China. 263 Most of these first-generation immigrants of Asian descent came to the United States in the 1980s and the 1990s, when China underwent massive economic and political reforms after a long-term “catastrophe.” 264 Many of the CCCFC members are over fifty and experienced cultural “devastation” in their childhoods. 265

The Great Cultural Revolution (officially from 1967 to 1976) transformed the normal way Chinese people were involved in social affairs into “domestic turmoil” in China. 266 Before this political campaign, Chinese people had lived in a simple, poor, and austere condition which the Chinese Communist Party had set up in 1949. Because of the egalitarian policy, an artificial equality covered almost every aspect of peoples’ daily lives and social engagements around the

263 As noted in chapter IV, these members are immigrants originated from China (including mainland China, Taiwan province, and Hong Kong district), Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Vietnam, Korea, Singapore, Bangladesh, Honduras, and Russia.


country. Social involvement in China was highly active not only because of the government’s advocacy and implementations of social practices in cities and towns, but also due to a historical factor: the value of being a part of a group had been ingrained in Chinese people’s minds for thousands of years. However, beginning in 1967, the unprecedented Cultural Revolution ruined morality, education, workplaces, daily routines, and other aspects of people’s lives, and the repercussions have affected Chinese people in the long run. This political campaign was an ideological cleansing, aimed at reviving revolutionary fervor to remove “bourgeois” influences. The Great Cultural Revolution began with verbal attacks and physical abuses by young Red Guards against so-called “intellectuals” (people deemed “class enemies”) and gradually led to enormous social, economic, and political upheaval in China.


268 The Red Guard were students, urban youths who answered Mao’s call for reviving revolution and targeted political enemies (including teachers, faculty, and bureaucrats) for public humiliation. They criticized and denounced intellectuals, and destroyed historical sites and cultural relics.


Millions of Chinese people were persecuted, tortured, and reeducated during the Chinese Cultural Revolution.\(^{270}\) Ostensibly because of the purge of impure and capitalist elements, Chinese traditions and cultures were plucked like weeds if they were defined as inappropriate or even reactionary by authorities. People were forced together to cleanse the wickedness arising from bourgeois sympathies. Spouses, friends, teachers, and parents—anybody could be a judge or an enemy of the people according to the “absolute truth” of ideology that came from the government. This devastating movement was like an epidemic virus—it got into the brains of the people—and many people, especially the youth, transferred their revolutionary ideas into a furious passion and lost the bottom line of ethics and morality. This disaster driven by political extremism almost destroyed China by ruining millions of lives, crippling the economy, and thrusting people into ten years of bloodshed, hunger, and loss of belief in truth, beauty, and goodness.\(^{271}\) An ineffable pain has remained on both the collective and individual level since this horrible campaign ended. The Chinese Cultural Revolution made people lose their faith in others, politics, and the security of daily life. This national agony has become an alert for people to remember that once the suspicion and hatred hidden in the darkness of people’s life is unleashed, the social good is obscured.

The generations born between the late 1950s and the early 1970s—which in China are referred to as the post-'50s generation, post-'60s generation, and post-'70s generation (五零后, 六

\(^{270}\) No exact number of dead is known, but a figure of 1.5 million is most commonly cited. See World Peace Foundation, “China: The Cultural Revolution,” available from https://sites.tufts.edu/atrocitiesendings/2016/12/14/china-the-cultural-revolution/#_edn20; accessed on April 26, 2021.

零后, and 七零后)—make up the largest proportion of the CCCFC badminton group. Despite the disastrous disruption, Chinese people’s traditional family life endured through the Cultural Revolution. Traditional family life in memory becomes the commonality shared by these members. They may recall the evenings and night times of their families and childhoods, when they played games with their friends, or when their homes were full of interesting conversations, parents’ caring, and frolicking with other kids in the yards or at home. Although China had a severe shortage of materials in the 1960s, 1970s, and even part of the 1980s, this interruption did not truly hamper the social relationships in personal sectors among those who followed their conscience and not political rules amidst national chaos. Almost all individuals, families, groups, and organizations were confronting economic hardship, but interactions between neighborhoods, family members, and colleagues were active and fertile. What brought people together was more than a common hobby and similar age, but a shared belief in truth, goodness, and beauty carried by this social generation in the 1980s in China.

In China, the 1980s marked a second generational turning point in Chinese people’s living experiences. They lived through a significant cultural shift and began to speak freely about what concerned their lives most, rather than merely political extremities. Romanticism, sincerity, and simplicity may be appropriate references to describe Chinese people who survived the Cultural

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272 According to the participant observation of the researcher, among the frequent players who play badminton in the CCCFC church, the post-'60s generation (六零后) stands more than 50% of, the post-'70 generation (七零后) the post-'70s generation is about 30%, and the post-'80s generation (八零后) is around 10%.

disaster and wanted to rebuild a harmonious homeland in the 1980s. Multifaceted, profound reflections on the nation’s political catastrophe resulted from Chinese people’s resilience and confidence to steer their commitment toward fundamental social needs (e.g., basic education and higher education). The communist party admitted the mistake of the Great Cultural Revolution by transforming from a focus on egalitarianism and class struggle to that of common people’s quality of life, aiming to narrow the rural-urban gap and regional differences at multiple levels. The Chinese government adopted for-profit family farming nationwide and reformed the educational system from political loyalty to academic achievement to improve the quality of education and to cultivate a significant number of innovative experts for society.

274 Here the Chinese people mostly refer to those who lived in cities and those who went to the countryside during the Great Cultural Revolution for political reasons.


These political, economic, and cultural remedies sparked people’s hope for revitalizing their lives by making up the time lost in the ten-year catastrophe. Literature and arts had experienced a vital revival from the late 1970s. Scientific beliefs and traditional forms that were drastically restricted and diminished during the Revolution flourished again. Young Chinese people, the post-’50s and -’60s generations, thirsted for knowledge to fulfill their needs, including yearning for spiritual pursuit, livelihood, and new opportunities. About 5.7 million young Chinese, including workers in factories, farmers, and high school students, participated in “the college entrance exam” (the Gaokao) in 1977, which was reinstated after its decade-long hiatus due to the Great Revolution.280 Less than 5 percent of them had entered various higher educational institutions in 1977. This lowest admittance rate in China’s history has increased to a current rate of roughly 70 percent.281 From 1977, many of the CCCFC players obtained various bachelor’s degrees and went abroad to discover new perspectives on education, life, and the world.

The 1980s in China significantly divorced from the egalitarian idealism and collective prescriptions in political, economic, and cultural domains; a series of social transformations validated individual goals and private solutions.282 In the educational sector, besides colleges and universities being restored in the late 1970s, avocational schools and training institutions proliferated in the 1980s and the 1990s. These institutions have offered diverse learning experiences and various outcomes for those who pursue knowledge, skills, and attitudes for


individual development. China’s “reform and opening-up” initiated in 1978 by Deng Xiaoping paved the way for an ethos of industrial development in the nation, and Deng’s southern-China-tour in 1992 accelerated market liberalization and communications with the world.\textsuperscript{283}-\textsuperscript{284} More importantly, Deng’s advocacy of “respect knowledge, respect trained personnel” (proposed in 1977) to liberate productivity encouraged Chinese people, in particular young and middle-aged intellectuals, to expand scientific and technical horizons.\textsuperscript{285} Since the end of the 1970s, the Chinese government has established extensive study-abroad scholarships and incentive programs to provide opportunities for young people to study abroad.\textsuperscript{286} Given the open and prudent climate from political, economic, and cultural views, more and more Chinese students and scholars chose to study abroad for graduate degrees between the 1980s and 1900s. The economic prosperity and liberal education reform in China have bred a new middle class who have higher expectations of obtaining foreign graduate degrees. By the late 1990s, most of those who had gone overseas

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{284} Ibid.


\end{footnotesize}
(public-funded and self-funded) had stayed in host countries for new opportunities and lives without returning to China.  

Given the “study-abroad fever” that gripped the student population in the mid-1980s, students and scholars from China became the largest group on American campuses, despite the fact that obtaining an US visa was remarkably hard. Many of the CCCFC players were among that

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290 According to a number of researches, Chinese people went abroad to study primarily in graduate programs in the 1980s and then in undergraduate programs from the late 1990s. See Qiang Zha, “The Study-Abroad among Chinese Student,” International Higher Education 69 (2011): 15-7, available from https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ihe/article/download/8635/7767; accessed on April 27, 2021; Wanbo Li, “Study Abroad Waves and China’s Development” [master’s thesis online] (Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, 2015), 2-3, available from https://na-si01_ext.exlibrisgroup.com/01BRAND_INST/storage/alma/36/AF/23/EB/50/28/67/C4/BD/73/B2/01/D4/96/A2/F0/LtHesis2015.pdf?Expires=1619641412&Signature=Y3Z4t2hp0otodUsKCG2NhA0QKMLyiHoWJZFeMQk2kEiiX-EfCqCBSHKoe8oKpNU2TqvOBX69FHjcrkNj796o4OIL1SPfJvJae2t6LbWLVMimHW2oFmmn5TnOyamxZjxzn0lW-Qgy5jU5nDvotiqGQiL7-BqckteRR8R-EfxBKHmHGZYZiWuJhGW3VT3-R-QM4MIV2WCHSnuJeANYQNzPeaw3fC--6PSuJvxDixmaBNByvNT6zU-Pw7nUPKRhyy2oBE7HzmLYaqDc999MamvJ--el4wSEizY88CCeNUA3vAkUUtIXo3nRxHakyEpCeejMXxOH38l37FKOeKuvSLJg_m--&Key-Pair-I'd=APKAJ72OZCZ36VGVASIA; accessed on April 27, 2021.

international student group in the 1980s and the 1990s. They came to the United States for “a better way of life,” as described by public media.

These Chinese immigrants experienced freedom of speech, more advanced academic knowledge, and a democratic atmosphere in the States, all of which made them proud of their choice to stay. On the other hand, they were largely unaware of the racism Asian people confront in America. While racism exists in China, the western concept of racial discrimination and racial bigotry was alien to Chinese people, whose society generally suggested a shared public culture to promote a harmonious climate for all ethnic groups. Chinese society neither provided anti-racist discussions nor promoted public awareness of sensitivity to racism in the 1980s and 1990s.

Moreover, in the ‘80s and ‘90s, information about American society was insufficiently available to Chinese people. Hollywood movies and commercial advertisements that prevailed in Chinese society largely formed the image of the US (e.g., the strong, sexy, heroic, free, and masculine qualities exhibited in Marlboro Cigarette ads). Chinese people, especially the young


296 From interviews conducted from December, 2019 to March, 2020.

generations readily embraced Western cultures that were represented by the US. Because of their ideализed image of the US, the land they once dreamed of and now their beloved home, the CCCFC players are somewhat reluctant to reflect upon the negative aspects of their lives here, such as racial discrimination. In the online arts groups in the DFW area, people rarely talk about things that could be perceived derogatory to American culture. This protective attitude toward their past choices may be because they truly cherish the process by which they realized the American dream, becoming the “middle-class” from scratch.

As the readers will see, this positive attitude toward life in America is embedded in their informal arts engagements and reflected in daily routine. With convenient Internet access beginning in the 1990’s, the first-generation Asian immigrants who have been in the U.S. for some two decades set up varied online-informal arts-communities. These spontaneous groups are usually organized by participants interested in music, dancing, calligraphy, painting, fishing, photography, pet raising, farm life sharing, cooking, baking, various sports, and many more categories. They regularly hold offline arts events. The name of an online group enables people to easily access a shared sense of identity and the purpose of a particular group, such as “Northern Texas Wildlife Photography (北达拉斯野外摄影),” “Chinese Calligraphy and Painting Association at Dallas (达

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298 This statement is based on what this researcher observed in the physical and virtual spaces of the CCCCFC badminton fellowship.

299 The term “middle-class” was used by an interviewee when she described how she felt proud of her decade-long struggling to improve her family’s economic and fiscal conditions after she immigrated to America at the end of the 1980s.

300 The “farm life sharing” is a phenomenon appeared in Asian/Chinese communities in the DFW area. These city dwellers plant a handful of vegetable and fruits (dates, pears, apples, etc.) in their yards and exchange or give their products as a gift to others. For some who purchase farms and farmland for residence and personal recreation, they set up online groups on the WeChat platform to invite people to come and enjoy a pastoral life, such as digging bamboo shoots, raising baby chickens, picking fruits, etc.

301 Based on this researcher’s observation and experiences of being a member of such online groups primarily on the WeChat platform, as well as interview conversations.
5.1.2 Settings

The CCCFC badminton team in Plano, Texas, has 50-60 players who regularly participated in badminton-playing before the pandemic, though a total of 276 members are in its WeChat group as of June 8th, 2021. The physical environment (in the CCCFC church) and virtual environment (on the WeChat platform) are the two primary settings on which this case study centers. The CCCFC badminton group is semi-affiliated with the CCCFC church.\textsuperscript{302} As a fellowship (团契) of the CCCFC church, the badminton group is a part of the church.\textsuperscript{303} Yet, the team’s leaders determine the team’s organizational structure by negotiating with the member players. The badminton team does not need to follow the church’s religious practices, such as participating in the Bible study, prayer meeting, Sunday sermon, etc. Cooperating with the team’s leaders, the church makes decisions on the schedule and opening frequency for the badminton team who uses the venue.

5.1.3 Participants

The number of participants in the CCCFC badminton team counted was about 50, based on the registration list of participants six months before the pandemic. These avocational players took part in badminton activities in the CCCFC church, attending the double-only playing three times a

\textsuperscript{302} According to the opinion of the church leaders and some badminton players, the CCCFC badminton team is a sub-organization of the church. However, some other players regard this team as an independent entity, though not completely independent.

\textsuperscript{303} The term “church fellowship” (团契) refers to a gathering of determining the characteristics of church activities in the context of Chinese churches in the U.S. There is no English word to accurately describe the Chinese term “团契,” but Chinese Christians and followers use the word “fellowship” for such church groups.
week for four hours before the lockdowns in the April 2020. A total of 45 players were interviewed in this specific group by the bilingual interviewer with a recorder. These interviewees are first-generation immigrants, coming from China (including mainland China (36 persons, 80 %), Taiwan (one person, 2.2 %), Hong Kong (one person, 2.2 %), Malaysia (two persons, 4.4 %), India (3 persons, 6.7 %), Indonesia (one person, 2.2 %), and Singapore (one person, 2.2 %). More than 20% of the member players come from diverse cultural settings. Sixteen women and 27 men participated in the interviews, accounting for 37% and 63% of the total number of the respondents. There are five couples among the interviewees: five women and five men.304

One commonality of these respondents was higher education. Eighteen people have one or two bachelor’s degree(s) (one dual bachelor’s), 20 people have one or two master's degree(s) (four dual masters’), four people have a doctoral degree, and one person chose to not answer the question of educational background. A highly educated group, the CCCFC badminton participants claimed that their badminton practices brought them “comfortable social relations,” and this “healthy lifestyle” has been a significant part of their “good life” in Texas.305 Enjoying the supportive environment, they confirmed that weekly badminton practices proved to be “considerably helpful to the body and mind,” balancing their work and family life.306

Another commonality of the CCCFC players (including the team leaders) was the love of playing badminton. Through the interviews and participant observation, 80% of the participants attended badminton activities in the church at least twice a week. Some of them bring their

304 The data of the participants of CCCFC badminton group has been changed since its first reopen in December 2021, the post-pandemic era.
305 Interviews conducted between 2019 and 2020.
306 Ibid.
badminton equipment (racquets, shuttles, shoes, etc.) on personal vacations or even business trips, nationally or internationally. These participants understand playing badminton as a practice that is intimately associated with their “lifestyle,” “quality of life,” and “belonging to a community.” If these descriptions of playing badminton indicated their cultural needs, what efforts have the players made to more effectively strengthen alliances among individual members to enable this group in sustainable growth?

5.1.4 Participation: Internal Collaboration

The participatory model of the CCCFC badminton community is comprised of three roles: the board of leadership, supporter volunteers, and other member players. The development of the CCCFC badminton group builds on practices intimately related to every member’s physical and psychological goal to lead “healthy,” “productive” lives. To achieve these goals, this group encourages every participant to share and input ideas and initiate actions to create a positive and transparent socializing environment. Sufficient cooperation among the players, volunteers, and team leaders have laid the foundations for different individual members to communicate at a team and organizational level.

From the position of the leadership board, this badminton community aims to bring many people together, regardless of their colors, ethnicities, genders, social status, and economic conditions. As mentioned in the early chapters, the leadership board includes four Christian

307 Ibid.
308 An interview conducted in the March 2020.
309 An interview conducted in the February 2020.
310 A conversation by phone took place in November 2020.
311 Many interviewees used the terms “healthy” and “productive” to describe how badminton functions in their lifestyles.
members and one atheist member, all of whom reached a consensus that “taking responsibility is the mark of leaders.” They consider “serving others” as “a privilege,” which laid the foundation for building a friendly environment for all community members. Because “every player starts as a beginner,” the main leader who coordinates the CCCFC WeChat group has constantly emphasized the importance of treating beginners with empathy. When newcomers appeared, other members welcomed them and spontaneously played badminton with them. The patient and tolerant attitude toward beginner players rarely occurs at commercial badminton centers and recreational centers because intermediate players tend to rally with those at the same skill level. Many interviewees and members mentioned this difference between the CCCFC group and other badminton sites. This perceived superiority-inferiority structure caused by different skill levels is observable, though sometimes can be considered very subtle in a wide variety of badminton sites. In the CCCFC group, the participants attain equalized positions by building friendly networks in their badminton practices reinforced by the leadership board and effectively carried out by most members.

The role of volunteering had proved remarkably influential in the processes of fostering healthy social relationships between arts participation and community cohesion. Volunteers played an essential role in vitalizing this community by inspiring a love of badminton in players in ordinary settings and tournament organizing. They helped to open and close the doors, set up nets,
clean the courts, and freely train the learners in this community in the daily arrangements. This community provided plenty of opportunities for helping hands in special settings such as tournaments and festival events held in the church. During the process of holding seasonal tournaments in May and October before the pandemic, the CCCFC members actively participated by creating teams; others chose to be non-contestants engaged in being referees, photographers, linesmen, scoring, statistics, broadcasting, etc. The family members and friends of the CCCFC members engaged in the game services as well, volunteering for logistics networking such as contacting food service providers, transporting lunches, and even designing the annual trophy. These volunteers actively participated in festival activities by making foods and donations to the church before the pandemic.

Volunteers among the member players were not fixed. Everyone, including the leaders, could be a volunteer when necessary. For example, one leader suggested that a deep cleaning be done before the church took actions to reduce possible injury caused by the slippery floor. The church consented yet needed some time to arrange. Badminton is a high-intensity activity requiring speed, power, endurance, flexibility, and body-mind coordination. Most of the CCCFC badminton members are in their forties and fifties; ankle injuries often occur during a sudden stop, turn, or slide during game play. The floor surface in the church is not ideal for badminton courts. Because safety is the priority of all badminton players, more than ten players responded promptly after this leader proposed the cleaning action in the badminton WeChat group, exceeding the six to eight volunteers he needed. The members came to the church with their own detergent and finished the cleaning before the regular playing time. This episode occurred in April 2020, similar to many other occurrences over the years that have demonstrated the egalitarian atmosphere of the badminton group.
Collaborations within the CCCFC badminton group enabled all members to feel respected, relaxed, and fulfilled. Based on participant observation, interviews, and daily conversations, the leaders assisted the group in establishing social norms that encourage participation, respect, and trust. Team collaboration occurred when individual players voluntarily engaged in providing continuous services for the whole group (e.g., opening and locking the church door on regular playing days) to maintain and develop their badminton space.

Respect, friendliness, and reciprocity have fostered trust among the members. One female interviewee stated that her first response to a life problem was asking for help in this badminton WeChat group, though she had lots of virtual groups, and she could always get practical solutions.\textsuperscript{316, 317} People warmheartedly posted sound advice and accurate information in the WeChat group to answer one’s queries for a reliable plumber or an inexpensive gardener. The online group became a social space where members exchanged ideas about life.

Additionally, regardless of age, gender, and national identity, the amateur players felt safe and comfortable about their badminton skills; this community culture consciously prevents various types of discrimination from occurring. An elderly female player expressed her satisfaction with her consistent improvement in badminton skills over the years, which was beneficial due to the members’ empathy toward, courtesy, and respect for her starting as a beginner. More importantly, the doubles-only rule—women’s doubles, men’s doubles, and mixed doubles—enabled each and every player to learn and practice interpersonal skills when one was on the court. There was a consensus among these players that collaborative performance is more important than personal

\textsuperscript{316} An interview took place in February 2020.

\textsuperscript{317} This information is also based on the text messages stated by this woman in the CCCFC badminton WeChat group. Observed by the researcher.
playing-skill in badminton doubles. Doubles rallies have vastly different strategies than singles rallies, such as doubles positioning when serving, attacking, and defending. Supportive, caring, and trustworthy attitudes between the partners always secures that the rally will be a positive one that makes every player smile.

One interviewee who is an Indian immigrant described the relevance between badminton and his culture (Indian culture):

“Commitment, being in the moment, and community. These are three things I link to badminton as I live to be a human being and my culture. So, let me explain, I think the most important point: when I am playing, I am more, I’m totally enjoying when we are all four playing together, not against each other. So when all four of us [are] smiling, we are having an excellent match, that [which] is my best memory of badminton. And even outside. Versus when I play in a tournament, and it is about having to either win or die, kind of, I don’t enjoy that much. And the same I like more relationship also, catching on more people. It is more about spending the time together, happily versus having some sort of risk.”

One interesting thing about this badminton WeChat group is that most members would not have missed messages that were important to the group, though not many people raised their voices on this platform. Three interviewers pointed out this phenomenon, including the leader of the online group. Ninety-nine percent of the interviewees were in favor of the necessity of this online platform because of its convenience and efficiency. When the researcher had conversations with the players about the content of the WeChat group, they knew about the information that appeared in the online group even if they did not participate in any discussion.

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318 Interviews and conversations with the members occurred between 2017 and 2021.
319 An interview conducted in January 2020.
320 According to an interview of a badminton team leader, the CCCFC badminton group communicated with each other via email before the WeChat platform emerged in 2012. The interviewee stated that the most common issue about communication via emails was that he often could not get timely responses from the recipient members.
The bar graph below represents the number of days that daily conversations occurred in the CCCFC badminton WeChat group from January 2020 to May 2021. The CCCFC church has remained closed since April 2020. The number of days that nobody talked on this platform is displaced on the graph: In 2020, two days in August, two days in September, three days in October, and three days in November. In 2021: six days in January, two days in February, two days in March, one day in April, and nine days in May. For the purposes of counting, recalled message were not included.

321 The CCCFC reopened for a short while a couple of times between April, 2020 and February 28, 2022 and has not been closed since February 28, 2022, according to the chat history of its WeChat group; observed by the researcher.
The complete data set is found in appendix 6.

Another graph shown below looks at the volume of the everyday conversation that occurred between January 2020 and May 2021, it shows that conversations continued even when face to face communication stopped. The online platform is a window through which one can see beneficial effects of informal arts which offer beauty, durability, trust, and style flexibility that originated from playing badminton together. The players shared and discussed top-level badminton.
tournaments videos, skills of excellent players in the world, and practical information about their life troubles and accomplishments. One amateur composer occasionally shares her new songs, and another active speaker shares old English songs popular in the 1960s and 1970s on most weekends. The daily conversation spiked to hundreds of texts when traditional festivals (e.g., the Chinese Spring festival in February 2020) and serious social events (e.g., discussions about the pandemic crisis in April 2020, the 2020 presidential election, the anti-Asian violence) took place.

The complete data set is found in appendix 6. Daily messages are not counted after May 31, 2021.

Based on the researcher’s participant observation, about 18 players liked to speak in the online group on normal days, and more than 30 speakers got involved in conversations when something important occurred (e.g., the pandemic in February 2020, nationwide Asian hate crime in March 2020, and American partisanship in November 2020). Dialogue in the online group
occurred every day before the pandemic lockdown in April 2020. After the coronavirus shutdown, conversations about badminton and life experiences continued occurring every day in this online group until August 2020. Although with fewer conversations in 2021, this WeChat group remains socially active as of June 15, 2021, waiting for the reopening of the CCCFC badminton fellowship in September 2021, estimated by the players who are also the members of the CCCFC church.

An interesting phenomenon is that the male players spoke more than their female counterparts in the online CCCFC badminton fellowship, while female members have played more important roles in on-site activities. Before the pandemic times, female members were involved in organizing social gatherings, such as family parties and festival feasts, to foster community cohesion and interpersonal interaction. Although male players make up 60% of the team and speak more frequently in the WeChat group, female players contributed to social cohesion. Before the pandemic times, female players facilitated family parties, welcomed newcomers, cared about the injured, and held festival feasts at restaurants to create more opportunities for interpersonal interactions. One leader described gender roles in the CCCFC badminton group: “Male players contribute more to physical labor work, such as repairing the wheels of the base and setting up the net, but female players enliven the community atmosphere.” Remarks of other players confirmed this opinion from different perspectives. An older woman player, who started badminton practice almost two decades ago and joined in the CCCFC badminton fellowship when it was founded in 2008, regards this badminton society as a family in which the relationship between male and female players is based on “a spirit of mutual respect,” “caring,” and a “consensus of sharing” to reflect a “harmonious community.” Players with different national origins expressed a similar attitude

322 An interview conducted in December 2019.
323 An interview conducted in March 2020.
toward the gender roles in this group: both sides voluntarily work and manage badminton affairs together with “equal rights and responsibilities,” despite their own differences and dynamics.\textsuperscript{324}

The volume of daily conversation showcases that this badminton group maintained its vibrancy and attractiveness, and that the members kept their social lives going while social distancing and staying at home. They encouraged each other during the hard times, advocating to help small restaurant owners by ordering online and raising funds for those in need, discussing strategies to fight anti-Asian violence in neighborhoods, and sharing fantastic international badminton rallies, dances, and other genres of art. The recalled (and edited) messages demonstrated how the members attempted not to be offensive which ensured a friendlier, more respectful, and more caring social environment. The members made an effort not to magnify and complicate social issues when controversies emerged and consciously used empathetic language, tone of voice, and appropriate emojis to convey a respectful attitude.

5.1.5 Community Collaboration

Based on the interviews, collaborations between the CCCFC church and the CCCFC badminton team demonstrate a shared concept in the public environment: setting the standards for a culture that is open, tolerant, engaged, and trusting. The relationship between the CCCFC badminton team and the church is both independent and dependent. When it comes to community connection, these two entities are a host community and a hosted community, respectively. The CCCFC church has provided the badminton group with a multi-functional hall, two atriums, and a built-in kitchen at a low cost since 2008. The badminton group freely used and cleaned up all the church area open to them. The relationship gave the church an opportunity to outreach. A certain

\textsuperscript{324} Interviews conducted between January and April in 2020.
church elder gave short biblical talks to the badminton members for eight years. One talk is about 15 minutes at Wednesday night, and another is about 20 minutes on Saturday morning. Most badminton members enjoyed the exposure to Christian knowledge and the exchanging of life experiences. The badminton team determined how to arrange practice times and space; and planned tournaments upon approval by the church. The cooperation between the badminton team and the church precipitated the three-time-weekly playing time, three standard courts and a smaller space for practicing, and two seasonal tournaments each year.

Second, collaborations between this badminton group and outside badminton groups at other badminton facilities have provided the players more opportunities to engage in social activities in different public environments. Aiming to mitigate the congestion of players and to cut down on wait time, the volunteer players negotiated with other badminton facilities (e.g., the commercial badminton centers) to provide incentives for lower cost to encourage CCCFC players to get better playing experience. This offering was not effective until after the reopening policy in Texas in May 2020, when safety concerned the players most and deterred mass gathering. The participants enjoyed the CCCFC badminton group not necessarily because the cost was more economical than the commercial or recreational centers, but because of the friendly atmosphere, which they felt was “peaceful,” “comfortable,” and “home-like.”

Third, this badminton community actively provided humane assistance to outside communities and neighborhoods right after the surge of Covid-19 in China in January 2020, and

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325 Interviews occurred between December 2019 and April 2020.

326 The CCCFC church closed in April 2020, so did the CCCFC badminton group. According to the regional legislation, the payers began to seek places that were safer to play badminton after quarantining for weeks.

327 Interviews conducted form November 2019 to Aril 2020.
then the US in March 2020. Many players began seeking and buying masks to support Chinese medical workers after the lockdown of Wuhan in January 2020. They did the same thing when the U.S. had a severe shortage of medical supplies in mid-2020. Women players played a vital role in making and donating sufficient supplies of PPE to neighborhoods, small businesses, and medical properties. New WeChat groups for making masks and collecting donations were launched by some players in 2020. For example, one member organized a group of CCCFC players to buy and transport PPE supplies and equipment at no cost to local hospitals and frontline workers in April 2020. This member later claimed that the CCCFC badminton group was the most empathetic and engaged one because so few people responded to his proposal in other groups that he approached.

5.1.6 Results: Serving Others and Building Community

From the perspective of the leadership board, fostering participation was consciously embedded in their badminton activities to build reciprocity and trustworthiness in the community, which then radiated to outside entities. The regular players engaged in various volunteer activities and cooperated with each other in order to create and sustain a shared environment suitable for all.

Seven key themes emerged from the research data of the CCCFC badminton fellowship.

1) The CCCFC badminton group features being empathetic, kind, and open to every person who joins this community, regardless of one’s skill level, social stratification, and other demographic markers.

328 This description is based on the messages observed by this researcher in the CCCFC badminton WeChat group in April 2020.

329 This information comes from multiple interviews conducted in 2019 and 2020.

330 See appendix 1.
2) This group provides a safe and supportive atmosphere for both the physical and online experiences of the participants.

3) This community is devoted to delivering ideas and practicing behaviors that encourage respect, mutuality, and love.

4) The training, practicing, and gaming sessions created by and for the players promotes interpersonal communication, altruism, and creative collaboration.

5) This badminton community has developed social connections with outside groups and neighborhoods.

6) This badminton fellowship has encouraged personal development, creativity, and enjoyment while fostering teamwork, camaraderie, and bonding.

7) This badminton group has built healthy social relationships and contributed to individual and community wellbeing.

5.1.7 Conclusion of the CCCFC Group

The CCCFC badminton community exists as a public space for fulfilling the members’ social and psychological needs. The participants are the ones who create and maintain the badminton space for seeking: 1) Safety, respect, and cooperation; 2) Face-to-face communication, relaxation, and stress relief; 3) The opportunity to make decisions when interacting with others; 4) Facilitation of personal growth. These participants aimed to improve their quality of life, depending upon individual and community accountability, interpersonal and intergroup trustworthiness, and face-to-face interaction.

In this case of a community-oriented badminton group, meaningful evidence emerged to prove that this activity not only fostered community development but also provided effective ways to motivate healthy interpersonal relationships during a crisis, the pandemic.
This badminton group can be understood as to be engaged in informal public art as described in chapter III. Drawing on Lafebvre’s space theory and Ranciere’s new aesthetics theory, the manifestations of informal public art are the new spaces and new forms of social relations created collectively by people in their communities. These manifestations show through the case studies in this paper.

5.2 Space: “Freedom versus Responsibility” - The 227 Incident

The discussion about the CCCFC badminton case demonstrated how people who closely connect to each other, engaged in physical and online interactions to improve the quality of life by building and maintaining a lived space. The 227 Incident exemplifies how loosely connected groups, engaged in online cultural activities, creating new forms of social interactions and spaces.

The 227 Incident launched on February 27, 2020, involving both online and offline mass denunciation of a Chinese idol, Xiao Zhan. Archive of Our Own (AO3) is a platform for fandoms and a project for transformative fanworks, such as fanfiction, fanart, and so forth. The online conflict between the fans of Xiao and the users of AO3 originated with a fanfiction, Falling, published on AO3 that used Xiao’s name, but represented him in a way that was upsetting to some fans in Xiao’s fandom. Without rational, adequate discussions with the author and readers of the fanfiction group, Xiao’s fandom reported the AO3 platform as “underage pornography” to Chinese authorities. The conflict eventually caused the shutdown of AO3 in China two days after the


332 Information about this platform, see https://archiveofourown.org/; accessed on April 11, 2021.
Incident. Chinese users could no longer easily access the site of AO3, and this censorship further intensified debates over balancing the different interests and rights of disparate arts groups in cyberspace.

The 227 Incident was a group-based online struggle between the fans of a 28-year-old idol, Xiao, and AO3 users in mainland China. Xiao is a tall, thin, male actor with big eyes who had attained more endorsements than almost any idol in China by March 2020. Xiao’s fans are mainly youths living in both urban and rural areas. AO3 is a noncommercial and nonprofit hosting site for a variety of fan-works such as fanfiction, fan-art, and fan videos. AO3 users in China are fanfiction writers, illustrators, and ordinary audience members of a wide range of ages from teenagers to adults. A fanfiction, literary work, *Falling*, was published on AO3 and mentioned Xiao. This fanfiction evoked anger among Xiao’s fandom and soon became a controversy involving many netizens in mainland China.

Xiao’s fandom insisted that the author of *Falling* insulted their idol’s image and reported the AO3 platform as “underage pornography” to Chinese authorities. On February 24, 2020, the Chinese cyberspace police shut the AO3 platform down. As a result, a cyber war between AO3 users and Xiao’s fandom roared to life.

For Chinese netizens, the shutdown of AO3 was not the only reason for the mass anger against Xiao’s fans; anger that ultimately led to a boycott against brands represented by the idol. The core issue of the 227 Incident was that online violence initiated by a fan group raised

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334 Chinese internet users can access AO3 (or other foreign websites that are blocked in China) via virtual private networks (such as international corporations and universities) or VPNs.
nationwide debates on how different online groups construct a shared community when pursuing individual freedom while still upholding their public responsibility. However, this case study does not focus on ideological debates resulting from unapproved information displayed online, rather, it examines how younger Chinese generations realize and claim a broader cultural space to most of their needs in the process of building the online community.

5.2.1 Settings: Fan Culture in China

It is necessary to briefly introduce the current Chinese subculture, which is relevant to the Xiao Zhan fandom and the other online groups centering around AO3 to understand the relationship between participants and their cultural interests this digital era in China.

5.2.2 Participants of the 227 Event

Consumerism emerged in the late 1980s when China pushed its economic openness to a higher level. Since economic reform started in 1978, Chinese people have undergone a transformation of economic behaviors and consumption values that were previously suppressed by poor economic conditions and an authoritarian regime. A degree of tolerance in China points to the nation’s social transition from a traditional value system to a modern one, a transformation of social values. Chinese market and society have become increasingly diversified embracing global consumer culture, allowing more individual choices, new things, and new opinions. The younger generations search for their identity and explore their gender values within the parameters set by the


cultural industries to communicate their individual desires and pleasures in a more open and
globalized context. China’s younger generations in this study primarily refers to those born during
the 1980s and the 1990s, growing up in the era of reform and opening-up.\footnote{337}

These specific generations experienced the rise of the Internet, domestic economic growth,
the one-child policy, and education expansion amid many significant societal transformations in
national and international contexts. Significant social changes in China dramatically influenced
their living environments, life opportunities, and cultural orientations, all of which, in turn, have
shaped the shared characteristics in this specific generation. As a result of the reform and opening-
up, China has increased people’s average income and improved the living conditions. The average
disposable income in China increased 22.8 times from 1978 to 2017, with the poverty rate dropping
from 88.3\% in the early 1880s to 1.9\% in 2013.\footnote{338} The new generation has grown up in the
contemporary era that coincided with the proliferation of the Internet. The prevalence of
smartphones has made the Internet more accessible and cheaper for the younger generations, who
have played crucial roles on various social platforms.

The one-child policy (1979-2015) caused many Chinese youths born after the reform and
opening-up, particularly in urban areas, to confront unprecedented pressures and attention.\footnote{339}\footnote{340}

\footnote{337} These born after 1980 are named “post-1980 generation” born between 1980 and 1989 and the “post-1990
generation” born between 1990 and 1999.

\footnote{338} Household Survey Office of the National Bureau of Statistics, Significant Improvements of the Living Standards of
Residents and the Quality of Consumption: Serial reports on the Economic and Social Development in the 40 Years of

\footnote{339} China’s one-child policy was replaced by a universal two-child policy in October, 2015.

\footnote{340} The single-child policy was strictly enforced for urban citizens, but was unenforceable in rural areas where residents
were allowed a second child. For ethnic minorities, two or more children were allowed. See Susan Greenhalgh, \textit{Just
One Child: Science and Policy in Deng’s China} (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: the Regents of the University
of California, 2008); Yi Zeng and Zhenglian Wang, A policy Analysis on Challenges and Opportunities of

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Most urban children are single children in China, and most rural youths have at least one sibling.\textsuperscript{341} According to the data collected by the 2017 Chinese Social Survey (CSS), 19\% of the post-1980 generation, 32\% of the post-1990 generation, and 60\% of the post-2000 generation are single children.\textsuperscript{342} A national downward trajectory in fertility rate and increase in small families was ingrained into the fabric of Chinese society.\textsuperscript{343-344} Rapid changes in socioeconomic development and family structure have resulted in the lack of kinship networks, unreserved familial love and expectations from their parents and grandparents.\textsuperscript{345-346} Families that were getting richer invested more in their children’s living conditions and education. Research shows an enormous improvement for these children in their physical wellbeing.\textsuperscript{347}


\textsuperscript{346} Mo Chen, “In-depth Analysis of the Psychological Characteristics of the Single Children in Cities,” available from \url{https://m.sohu.com/n/471439750/?pvid=000115Ww}; accessed on June 7, 2021. Chen is a Professor of East China Normal University in Shanghai, China, and this article was from her educational lecture given at East China Normal University in 2016.

The new generations grew up when China went through an unprecedented expansion of the higher educational system, which crucially benefited the new generations in China. According to the *Chinese Social Survey in 2017* (2017 CSS), the gross college admission rate increased from 6.1% in the 1960s to 48.4% in 2016. The percentage of the post-1960 generation who entered colleges is 6.1%, 13.8% of the post-1970 generation, 28.3% of the post-1980 generation, and 47% of the post-1990 generation.\(^{348}\) China achieved a nationwide 9-year compulsory education in 2011, and more youth completed secondary education: 47.6% of the post-1980 generation and 73.8% of the post-1990 generation completed high school.\(^{349}\)

The transformation of economic development, intrafamily relationships, parenting styles, and expansion of education led the new generations to demand their own voice and space for more self-expression and individualization than any other generation in Chinese history.\(^{350}\) The Internet provided a rich range of platforms where the new generations have learned, practiced, and explored their roles in social, cultural, and economic realms.\(^{351}\) Unlike the older generations who lived in an era of material shortages and have a conservative attitude toward consumption, they are more


\(^{349}\) Ibid.

\(^{350}\) Chen, “In-depth Analysis of the Psychological Characteristics of the Single Children in Cities.”

willing to engage in social, economic, and political affairs. They prioritize expenditures on recreation to serve their cultural and mental needs.

The Internet, specifically social platforms and websites, has become the main space for young people’s daily activities and community building. Community-based fan culture has developed since the 1980s, when watching imported Japanese animation became a vital part of Chinese children’s daily routine. Besides the official broadcasts, underground pirated copies of Hong Kong and Taiwan versions of Japanese media products (e.g., manga prints) nourished the first generation of fans in China in the 1990s. Chinese people born after the 1970s shaped a complicated fan culture and, in turn, were shaped by their experiences and activities within the fan community in cyberspace. Digital fandom provides various ways for younger Chinese generations to reflect on, respond to, and sometimes subvert existing cultural and social values in every aspect of Chinese society. Exploring the 227 case invites discussions about community-based arts in entirely online modes.

5.2.3 The Two Campaigns of the 227 Incident

Two campaigns were involved in the 227 Incident. Campaign One was the fans of Xiao Zhan: a well-organized community. Campaign Two appeared to be the users of Archive of Our Own (AO3), which is made up of several online groups with the fan-art circle as a core. These


353 Institution of Sociology at Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Chinese Social Survey in 2017 (2017 CSS). According to the report, the post-1980 and the post-1990 generations spent considerably more on culture, recreation, tourism, clothing, and telecommunication, compared to the elder generations.

were initiated when Xiao was depicted as a prostitute with gender dysphoria and a partner of another Chinese actor (Wang Yibo) in the fanfiction, *Falling*.355 This form of fanfiction, called real-person-fiction (RPF), went viral on AO3, a Chinese blogging site called Lofter, and Weibo on February 24, 2020. Accompanying fanart for this fiction was created and widely shared in the cyberworld.

In response, on February 24, some fans of Xiao started a campaign to report the AO3 platform to Chinese cyber police to defend their idol’s image. This became Campaign One. The author of *Falling* changed her username and locked her Lofter account.356 In response, on February 27, fans of various online cultural communities (including Weibo, Huxiu, Lofter, AO3,) initiated a trending hashtag, 227 Unity, on Weibo and Lofter to defend creative rights. Fans from “every single fandom you can think of” joined Campaign Two, including fans of writers, illustrators, designers, comics, and even sports, both professional and amateur.357-358

5.2.3.1 Campaign One: the Xiao fan group

A brief explanation of some Chinese terms is necessary for readers to understand expressions of the fandom culture reflected in the cyber world in which young Chinese netizens engage today. Because of the difficulty of generalizing a theory that can be applied to transcultural sectors in fan culture, discussions about Chinese fan culture are barely available in English-speaking academia, let alone the informal arts. This study utilizes Chinese online resources, such as

355 Wang Yibo is a male actor in China and becomes Xiao’ partner in “The Untamed” (TV series).


358 Examples of these online platforms include AO3, Lofter, Sina Weibo, Douban, Zhihu, Post Bar, Huxiu, Bilibli, and so forth.
Jikipedia.com, and Weibo (the most popular social media platform in China), to unpack the complex structure of the Xiao fandom. Jikipedia features more than 20,000 entries of newly emerged cyberwords created mostly by users; an understanding of this website helps the readers catch a glimpse of young Chinese generations functioning as netizens and participants of the 227 Incident. Eighty percent of the Jikipedia users are young users born after 1985, and those born after 1995 and 2000 are the main force (60%) with a stronger capacity for consumption in the future. Understanding the cyber language created, appropriated, and disseminated by younger Chinese netizens allows readers to better understand fan culture and fans related to the 227 Incident.

Originating from the fandom culture in Japan and Korea, Chinese fan culture is complex. In the case of Xiao’s fan community, the fans are ordinary people, usually spectators, who show a strong interest or admiration for the idol and voluntarily take action on fan sites, message boards, and other cyberspaces. None of the above fan groups work for the idol; they spontaneously gather together and enthusiastically devote considerable time and resources to support the idol in both online and offline settings.

Participating in myriad social media activities, Xiao’s fans express various feelings they experienced vicariously through reported information about their idol; filling up their everyday

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359 Ciweigongshe, “A Dialogue with the Founder of Jikipedia,” Zhihu (May 21, 2020), available from https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/142747473; accessed on June 14, 2021. Jikipedia.com is a freely editable online dictionary in Chinese, also called a little-chicken dictionary in China that features short, humorous explanations for Internet buzzwords in Chinese without too many annotations and quotations. Some of the explanations are homophonic, others are abbreviations, and still others are metaphors or borrowed from other fields. “Ji” is pronounced as % (chicken in English) in Chinese, and kipedia comes from Wikipedia. There is a niche and alternative circle belonging to the Z generation behind each word of the new online vocabulary on Jikipedia. Regardless of an explanation for a new cyberword or an innovative interpretation for an old word, Jikipedia offers creative material for news and events occurred in social, Internet, fan-circle, and two-dimensional fields. Two-dimensional field refers to the ACGN circle, originated from Japanese subculture, the field of animation, comics, games, and novels.

lives with fan affairs in particular online spaces. Fan affairs in China include participating in fan clubs formed physically or virtually, commenting on the fan site appointed by the head-fan, and comparing idol ranking data on major websites. These fans build strong communities within which they interact about almost every aspect of their idol’s daily activities in the professional and personal domain. In the Xiao fan community, fans can find a sense of attachment to the social network through shared interests and various types of participation.

5.2.3.1-1 Fan Work

The shared interest of supporting the idol can be subdivided into different groups, each with its own position and factions, and functioning not only independently but also interdependently. A brief introduction of separate fan groups is helpful for readers who are not familiar with this specific culture. There are more than ten divisions of Xiao’s fandom, and some are shown below:

1) Passerby-fans: those who know but have no special feeling for the idol (路人粉);
2) All-fans: those who love all celebrities and their fans in a fan group (团粉);
3) Cp-fans: those who fantasize about two stars engaged in an erotic relationship, whether a homosexual or a heterosexual couple (Cp 粉).
4) Life-fans: those who like an idol with a going-with-the-flow attitude and without contributing to resources influencing the idol’s career (生命粉).

Passerby-fans, all-fans, life-fans, and cp-fans are groups of casual fans with mild and friendly attitudes toward other fan divisions.

5) Solo-fans: those who exclusively like or love the particular idol or star in the fan-group (唯粉).
Solo-fans go to any length to promote their idol, claiming to be the most “pure” fans, protecting the idol from any “unhealthy” corruption and thus prove to be more aggressive toward the other groups, especially the cp-fans.

The 227 Incident emerged from an internal conflict between these two most opposing groups. This combative relationship between solo-fans and cp-fans is of generic quality and not restricted solely to Xiao’s fandom. Solo-fans desire to keep the idol’s image pristine and untainted; cp-fans want another idol to intimately accompany their idol in a love story, often celebrating explicit homoerotic relationships between men. An example is the coupling of Xiao Zhan and Wang Yibo in Falling, which instigated the 227 Incident. Dedicated fans hate connections between any other person and their idol, afraid that other fans will be attracted by the cp-fans sub-group (also called blood-sucking or fans-sucking).362 Cp-fans care little about the exclusive love of the idol and center more on the fantasy of coupled idols.363

6) Career-fans (data-fans): those who are concerned about the career development and popularity of the idol. These fans are not employees of the idol’s company, but they “work” in their daily routines to promote their idol’s professional performance by creating “data contributions” and creating traffic online. “Data contribution” refers to a wide range of online and offline fan activities that seek to boost the popularity and competitiveness of their idol. These fan behaviors include: creating an account to cast

361 Solo-fans defines the term “pure” as a moral state in which they elevate their idol to an altar become a god-like creature defined by on their imagination.

362 Blood-sucking or fans-sucking is a term of fanspeak: when two idols are in the CP hype, both parties benefit from attracting new fans.

363 Microblogs of cp-fans and solo-fans in Xiao’s fan group, Weibo, https://s.weibo.com/weibo?q=%E6%88%98%E5%94%AF&xsort=hot&Refer=hotmore, and https://s.weibo.com/weibo?q=%E5%81%8Fcp%E7%B2%89&Refer=weibo_weibo, accessed on June 22, 2021.
support votes for the idol in the weekly reports posted on the most popular microblogging platform in China (Weibo), commenting on the audience rating of their idol’s show(s) that is posted on the drama’s official Weibo account; flooding hashtags (with or for the idol) with photos, videos, or by forwarding them; buying products endorsed by the idol. For example, Xiao Zhan’s *Spotlight*, a digital single album, is the best-selling one in China with over 53.6 million copies sold worldwide as of June 23, 2021, despite the questionable musical quality. (事业粉).

7) Head-fans: those who serve as the leader of the fans in a particular fandom. They are influencers with a lot of followers on domestic and/or international social media platforms. A head-fan may possess millions of lower-level fans within the targeted fandom and plays an essential role in leading the fandom to promote their idol (头部粉丝).

8) Anti-fans: those who turn their back on the idol (黑粉). They are also called black-fans, if literally translated from Chinese. Anti-fans are those who actively dislike the idol and even see them as the “enemy.” This attitude puts anti-fans at odds with all of the actual fans in the other groups engaging in fan activities.

As described above, these fan divisions show some significant disparities at the level of commitment and investment. They believe they have the right to support and protect their idol by


365 Caring About Every Day, “Is it the Sadness of the Music Circle that ‘Spotlight’ has sold more than 100 Million Yuan? The Sorrow of Chinese Music Circle Is Not Only Due to Xiao Zhan,” available from https://www.google.com/search?q=fanyi&oq=fanyi&aqs=chrome..69i57j0i433j0l4j0i10j0i3.998j0i15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8; accessed on June 23, 2021.
showing off their specific status with certain identifying slogans, badges, and symbols in cyberspaces.

Career-fans (data-fans) are distinct from other fan groups in terms of their effort to get their idol to the top of the trending charts. Many of these fans possess skills, such as drawing, data analyzing, video making, and copywriting that boost their idol’s social media status and trending occupation. This type of fan plays a key role in discussions about organizational modes of fan community, which will appear in later paragraphs.

5.2.3.1-2 Fandom jargon

Fandom jargon—what people may call fanspeak—in Chinese society is a universe unto a specific fandom itself. The tricky terminology that makes up the Chinese fan culture demonstrates how the younger generations in China form and sustain fandom spaces for themselves. The vocabulary of fans that is circulated in cyberspaces holds internalized, specialized definitions and linguistics, usually impenetrable to people outside of fan culture. Attachment to particular fan communities connects diverse people of similar interests for social, cultural, and even marketing purposes. No research has explained why a digital fan group speaks a unique dialect. The origin of this fan group dialect is unclear, though there are some terms that have been appropriated from Japanese and Korean fandoms. Yet clearly, specific fanspeak proves to be a quintessential tool by which younger generations in China unite and classify themselves to explore identities through fan grouping in a digital era.

From the perspective of informal arts research, the fandom jargon in China is produced within social networks of younger generations who establish a sense of intimacy and prestige by building fan communities. In turn, the community-based, idol-centered activities nurture fans’ engagement and strengthen the entire fan community. In the case of the 227 Incident, netizens of
different campaigns gathered together across boundaries such as social and economic status, age, and geography to create a sustainable discourse in the metaphorical space in the cyberworld. In cyberspace, any person can assume the identity of belonging to one or more sub-fan groups in the targeted fandom, including media fandom, star fandom, and/or sports fandom due to the person’s desire and dreams. Cyberspaces thus help develop a diversified public where individuals are free to join groups that are not as closely attached to demographic factors that becomes a way for individuals to express agency in the social space.

5.2.3.1-3 Fan Organization

The Xiao fan group functions as a highly hierarchical organization. Head-fans serve as leaders who organize fans for the welcome and farewell gatherings for the idol in airports, comment on every aspect of the idol's daily routine on digital sites, and create data on certain mainstream online platforms. Fandom in China features a regulated, procedural, and disciplined structure. Head-fans have generated a powerful force for coordinating their troops of data-fans (career-fans) to maintain the trending status of the idol.

Xiao’s fan circle is a highly collaborative organization. It has many different channels on Weibo as streaming outlets that fans can use to speak for the idol from multiple angles while also connecting with other related fan communities. Fans measure their devotion to the idol by spending hours promoting the idol on social media and popular online platforms. For example, Xiao’s fans comment on Xiao’s projects by posting in functional microblogs on Weibo for 20 million followers.367

366 A detailed demographic of Xiao’s fans found in appendix 2, Part 3, but if it is reliable remains unclear.

Influencers organized fans into the “Xiao Zhan comment-management department,” which is responsible for creating like, forward, and discussion. They created the “Xiao Zhan Intelligence Bureau” to keep their accounts active; the “Xiao Zhan propaganda group” aims to influence existing and potential audiences; the “Xiao Zhan resource unit” attempts to connect to and socialize with other networks, and provides online assistance to other departments. The “Xiao Zhan voting group” aims to secure the idol a high trend by participating in fan ranking on various social media platforms.

The fans perform their own duties as they collaborate to elevate or maintain their idol’s position. For example, fan group leaders manage divisions of the ranking team and the data station to make intense bullet-screen-comments with Xiao’s name appearing on games and videos on the Blibli platform (nicknamed B Site, the most popular video sharing website with a particular focus on ACG for younger generations in China), and they ensure Xiao’s projects are on top of the Super-Topics (超话 in Chinese, a hotspot blog on Weibo) every day by clicking likes of published reviews of every post associated with Xiao in order to generate data. All these departments function as online virtual communities in which ordinary users create their campaigns demonstrate to their loyalty to the idol.

Concurrently, Xiao’s fan circle is a remarkably competitive community within which different subgroups strive for greater influence in the entire fan community. Online fighting between these subgroups has been increasingly common in China (e.g., between solo-fans and cp-fans); competitions between different “departments” and individual fans constantly occur within the

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368 The term “bullet-screen-comment” refers to real-time comments from viewers flying across the screen like bullets, unlike the traditional comment area that appears as a chart besides the screen on YouTube.

369 The term “ACG” refers to animation, comics, games, all of which are contents of Second-dimensional space (二次元) in China.
same subgroup. Individual fans compete against each other to satisfy their various needs, such as aspiring, belonging, and influencing.\textsuperscript{370} Daily posts, status updates, and photos are the methods for keeping their idol in the spotlight; the fans, in particular the head-fans, utilize information networks to gain power, lead the fan group, and/or even change the public’s mind.\textsuperscript{371}

For example, the periodic updates released by the AIMan website rate idols with various Business Value Index (BVI), calculating from popularity value, public reputation value, professional value, and endorsement value.\textsuperscript{372} To elevate Xiao to the highest idol on a Top 10 ranking chart based on the highest BVI, the data-fan group created the departmental competition system to promote the best performance.\textsuperscript{373} Different accounts were created to advocate fans to cast support votes for the idol, and these votes were also displayed in the weekly reports posted on Weibo.\textsuperscript{374} Fans purchase the products endorsed by the idol, especially when the endorsement sale

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\textsuperscript{372} AI Man Data, “Artist Specific Report Indicators Details,” available from http://www.iminer.com/custom-report.html; accessed on June 30, 2021. Business Value Index (BVI, 商业价值指数) is one branch of the “Artist Special Report Indicators” issued by AIMan on its official account on Weibo for free access. The Weibo account of BVI on Weibo is available from https://weibo.com/u/3079676925?ssl_rnd=1625066029.9135&is_all=1#_loginLayer_1625066057239; accessed on June 30, 2021. BVI evaluates the commercial value and the cultural vitality of artists each month, which are widely recognized by the industry and brands.

\textsuperscript{373} Many Weibo accounts advocate Xiao’s fans to create traffic for Xiao’s ranking on Weibo. One example is the topic on Weibo: “Do You Boost Popularity for Xiao Zhan Today?” with 87,000 reads and 128 discussions as of June 26, 2021, available from https://s.weibo.com/weibo?q=%23%E4%BB%8A%E5%A4%A9%E4%BD%A0%E7%BB%99%E8%82%96%E6%88%98%E6%89%93%E6%A6%9C%E4%BA%86%E5%90%97%3F%23&Refer=SWeibo_box; accessed on June 29, 2021.

\textsuperscript{374} For example, the “Star Digital Influence Index Ranking” is a Weibo account measuring the popularity of stars, issued every week, available from https://weibo.com/powerstartup10?refer_flag=100500010&_ssl_rnd=1625078562.4857&is_all=1; accessed on June 30, 2021.
number is being calculated.\textsuperscript{375} These supportive behaviors of the fans demonstrate the emotional passions of fan culture to empower the celebrity.

5.2.3.2 Campaign Two: the fanwork circle and its supporter groups

Although some AO3 users and their supporters refused to be referred to as “fans” (of AO3) to draw a demarcation line between themselves and the fans of Xiao, this campaign and the Xiao-fan campaign represent two “competing fan universes,” “each with their own culture fandom.”\textsuperscript{376-377} AO3 users and their supporters belong to various cultural sectors, including writers, illustrators, and sports lovers. Accurate assessment of demographic attributes such as age, educational background, and gender is unavailable due to the complexity of the cultural composition of this campaign’s massive population.

Explorations of the AO3 platform and associated websites show that the people of this campaign have considerable expertise in their chosen areas. For example, one of the supporter groups belongs to Lofter, an online supplier of users’ digital products such as illustration, fanfiction, music, photographs, games, etc. Many people are consumers of both AO3 and Lofter, and their online identities are multi-dimensional and complicated as they fulfill the various roles of audience, creator, writer, painter, gamer, and designer. Another supporter group is Huxiu, a virtual community composed of sports and video games enthusiasts. Enraged by Xiao’s fan group for


directly causing the shutdown of AO3, these cultural groups united to fight for their rights for free expression in cyberspace.

Not only are they digital consumers, but they must be seen as consumers of other products as well. This was put on display when Campaign Two led a boycott of the luxury brands endorsed by Xiao as a counterattack against Xiao’s fanbase. 378-379 Another important element around identities as it relates to Campaign Two is that participants tend to be more tolerant of ACGN and LGBT communities. For these communities, AO3 is not only a site for publishing, visiting, and exchanging ideas and artwork, but also a sanctuary for people to freely share ideas about subcultures related to sexuality and other topics. People of Campaign Two felt that the Xiao-fan group failed to take responsibility for solving the internal dispute and sacrificed other fan groups’ rights to freedom of speech. 380 Millions of netizens crashed customer service lines of Xiao’s endorsements, dug up dirt on Xiao, his studio and supporters, and flooded official Xiao’s artworks with one-star reviews on Weibo and related platforms. 381

5.2.4 Opinion for the 227 Incident

378 The brands that Xiao Zhan campaigned for include both international and national ones, such as Estee Lauder, Piaget, Cartier, Budweiser, Olay, Lining, and so forth. See Alex Colville, “The Chinese Idol Who Sparked An Online War,” available from https://supchina.com/2020/07/20/the-chinese-idol-who-sparked-an-online-war/; accessed on June 26, 2021.


381 Ibid. Also see “Xiao Zhan’s Works Have Been Criticized because of the Constant Disturbance of AO3,” available from https://www.baobuzz.com/info/385402.html; accessed on June 26, 2021.
Seven hundred and sixty-nine persons responded to the survey distributed in April 2021, including 508 females, 242 males, and 19 non-binary persons. The highest level of education for these respondents is shown below: 2.21% graduated junior high school, 5.46% are high school graduates, 72.30% are current students or have graduated from colleges or universities, and 20.03% are current students or people who have graduated from graduate schools or above. This survey appears to be trustworthy because the data is consistent with other surveys discussed below.
More importantly, the high rate of well-educated respondents in this survey is in line with that of Xiao’s fan group. According to the online data of the education level collected from 1,493 people out of 38,260 Xiao-fans, most of them are well-educated: 28% are current college students, 30% have graduated from college five years ago, and 17% graduated from college ten years ago.\textsuperscript{382} In addition, the online data gathered from Weibo suggests that the number of Xiao female fans (93.6%) is much greater than that of Xiao male fans (6.4%).\textsuperscript{383} Among 769 participants in this survey, 508 were female, accounting for 66%; 242 were male, accounting for 31%. The female-to-male ratio of this survey is in line with that of Xiao Zhan fans, though the ratio of the latter is more extreme.

![The Range of Ages of the Survey Respondents](image)

\textbf{Figure 5.5: The range of ages of the survey respondents}


\textsuperscript{383} Ibid.
Figure 5.6: Online source: The range of ages in the Xiao Zhan fan group of 240,468 fans on March 3, 2020

Figure 5.7: The living environment of the survey respondents

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Correspondingly, there are 517 survey respondents aged 18-25, 179 people aged 26-35, and 72 people over 36 years old. The percentage of the respondents born between 1985 and 2002 is 90.63%, and they are likely the main force of netizens vigorously engaging in online activities. According to the survey, 85.57% of the respondents live in urban areas, and 14.43% are rural residents. Surprisingly, 27.35% of the respondent spend more than two hours on fandom per day.

The data shown in figure 5.8 is roughly congruent to Chinese netizens’ average time spent daily or weekly on the Internet, according to Chinese national statistics. The national data show an average of 27.9 hours that Chinese netizens spent on the Internet per week, meaning that people spend nearly 4 hours on their smartphones and computers every day; young people are the main force in cyberspaces, of which the percentage of 20-29 years old is the highest, at 24.9%.

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Additionally, the data on fans who spent less than 3-5 hours per day (37.76%) and less than 15-20 hours per week (10.68%) displayed in the figure above may indicate that most survey respondents use the Internet in their daily lives. If this hypothesis is true, it will increase the credibility of the survey.

Comparing to the age distribution of Xiao’s fans in general, as shown in Figure 5.9, the survey respondents aged 26-35 (67.32%) are consistent with the Xiao’s fans aged 25-34 (66.17%), which is the biggest age group in Campaign One. This consistency of the age group validates the survey in terms of its target population.

**Figure 5.9: The Percentage of the Survey Respondents Who Participated in the 227 Incident**
As expected, only 21.32% of the respondents claimed that they directly or indirectly took part in either campaign, while 78.67% remained onlookers. Among these participants, 8.06% stood with the Xiao fandom, and 13.26% favored the fanfiction cohort and its supporters, among whom 3.90% are authors, and 10.27% are audiences of AO3.
Opinions on the final result of the 227 Incident

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Simple Battle between Two Different Fandoms</td>
<td>29.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AO3’s Being Banned Is Unreasonable</td>
<td>22.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Do Not Know</td>
<td>21.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Farce Involving Fan-Groups from Different Stances</td>
<td>20.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AO3’s Being Banned Is Reasonable</td>
<td>4.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Have Something to Say</td>
<td>1.91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.11: The Opinion on the Final Result of the 227 Incident

The chart above looks at the controversy caused by the AO3 shutdown among the survey respondents. A large percentage of the respondents (29.18%) agreed that the 227 Incident resulted from two competing fan clusters in cyberspace. People who agreed or disagreed with the AO3 blackout are 4.63% and 22.43%, respectively. There are 2.32% of people who shared no opinions on the AO3 blackout, and 20.32% found the AO3 shutdown unreasonable. Some survey respondents commented that they positioned themselves as people committed to building a more tolerant, fairer shared public space for all members. A tiny portion of the respondents, 1.91% people, chose to provide a response in their own words.
The Core Conflict in the 227 Incident

- Conflicts between individual freedom and responsibility in shared spaces
- Conflicts between the Xiao fans' right to maintain Xiao's image and authors' right to create fanfictions
- Netizens' failure to achieve consensus on building a more tolerant cyberspace

Figure 5.12: The Core Conflicts in the 227 Incident Resulting from the Following Aspects

The chart above showcases choices made by the respondents regarding the core conflict within the 227 Incident. The percentage of people choosing “between personal freedom and responsibility in cyberspace” was 37.57%, which is very close to those who chose “conflicts between different understandings of rights of the two campaigns,” 33.44%. The remaining 29% of people believed that all netizens should be responsible for building a more tolerant cyberspace to avoid the disturbing result of the AO3 shutdown.

Finally, in response to an open-ended question, the survey respondents left their own views on the 227 Incident and expressed their hope that the Internet environment will become a public space that promotes more tolerance and understanding among netizens. Key words in the comments include “tolerant,” “more dialogue,” “freedom,” “equity,” “justice,” and “regulating cyberspace by legislation.”

5.2.5 Results: Freedom and Responsibility in the Online Spaces
The online survey conducted between April 9 and 23, 2021 offers insights about cyberspaces where a wide variety of digital fan groups express a desire for expanded communication to construct a more just, friendly, and reciprocal social space. The survey respondents have had sufficient time to ruminate upon the 227 Incident initiated more than a year ago; they contributed valuable opinions on encountering a wide array of experiences revolving around responsibility and freedom of contemporary digital groups. They recognized and reflected on how to effectively orient different fan groups' behaviors to build a rich and varied environment by suggesting the nation, China, set up legislation and inspire netizens to support specialized areas of interactions and transactions in the collective cyberworld.³⁸⁶

Most of the survey respondents hope for a culture with values, norms, and expectations about creating, exchanging, using, and engaging in various social experiences in the virtual world. The majority of the interlocutors considered the far-reaching impact of the 227 debate to be a positive process through which various fan groups promoted shared values through vigorously improving existing communication rules, rather than sticking to respective conventions within each fan community without bridging differences between groups.³⁸⁷

From the respondents' perspective, fostering an ideal online environment means building a shared space for all instead of for a few privileged groups. Every one of the netizens who engage in various arts activities is responsible for nurturing inclusiveness and kindness in communities.

Eight key themes emerged from the research data of the 227 case.

³⁸⁶ These opinions come from the respondents' answers to the final question of the online survey, paraphrased by this researcher. The final question is “Thoughts on the 227 Incident: your hope of the internet environment as a public space (The number of words is not limited).” A complete questionnaire see Appendix 2.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.
1) Both campaigns existed as open, digital communities for any individual who intended to join regardless of social stratification, economic background, age, gender, and other identity markers. Both digital cohorts provided a platform on which their participants enjoyed free expression, sharing, and acquiring resources before and after the 227 event resulting in the shutdown of AO3.

2) Both sides of the 227 online conflict continue to encourage personal enjoyment, creativity, and a sense of belonging. The Xiao’s fan group has been engaged in large-scale idol-oriented teamwork, camaraderie, and bonding to build shared cyberspace. The fanfiction group and its supporter groups have been devoted to building collaborative relationships across cultural fields (e.g., novels, comics, illustrations, and sports) to maintain their rights to create, share, exchange, and publish art-based representations online.

3) The 227 incident is more complicated than the CCCFC badminton group because there were two contradictory sides devoted to carrying out respective strategies to spark collaboration and challenges resulting from differentiating attitudes toward cyberspace as a public sphere. Xiao’s fans organized well to achieve their goal of defending their freedom to engage with the idol in their preferred way while appearing to lack capacity to solve problems when confronting reconcilable differences in values.

4) The 227 Incident provided a participatory and collaborative opportunity for netizens in both the real and virtual world of communication because fandom exists as a virtual reality in people’s lives in the digital age, but their online behavior can cross over boundaries in the real world.
5) Fan communities involved in the 227 event struggled to deliver ideas while practicing communal skills for effective communication, and they did not initially reach a sufficient, mutual understanding between the two campaigns, which undermined social inclusion.

6) Although some netizens advocated respect and reciprocal altruism from the beginning of the 227 Incident, the two campaigns barely reached an ideal or constructive outcome nor did they purposefully promote friendly collaborations between “opposite” fandoms.

7) Despite the unresolved ending of the 227 cyber battle between the two campaigns, the 227 Incident sparked an enduring, nationwide debate about social, economic, and political fields in China. In addition, this cyber debate has provided younger Chinese generations more opportunities to reflect on the relationships among individuals, groups, and shared public space.

8) The study of Chinese fan culture in the cyberworld needs further investigation.

5.2.6 Conclusions of the 227 Case

The exploration of the 227 event reveals the complex process by which younger Chinese generations engaged in an online debate about cyberspace, bringing feelings of frustration and contemplation on how to improve a shared public space made up of different groups. Similar cultural interests bring people together to create values that resonate deeply within the fan group.

From the view of informal public art: participation, organization, and social needs are the three major factors that drive the development of Chinese fan communities. The fan community is open to each and every individual, and fans form different subgroups according to their different preferences. On the surface, fans’ interest focuses on the idol, the “traffic celebrity,” created by the
Chinese entertainment industry and the fans themselves. But, actually, fans regard their idol as the ultimate embodiment of “ideal self” achieved through tremendous efforts, and they desire to grow up with the idol together. This real, meaningful desire connects fans as a national network of varied ages and genders to establish creative, symbiotic relationships with their idol and among sub-fan groups. The way of creating, building, and maintaining relationships is a form of informal public art, allowing the younger generations to searching their identities and social roles in a virtual space.

**Summary of Chapter**

In both cases, communities create different online spaces that support their cultural activities. The CCCFC badminton group created a supportive space in the church by collaborating badminton practices and socializing with members and outsiders; meanwhile, they maintain a reciprocal space on the WeChat platform for building a larger community. Various fan groups made up of younger generations involved in the 227 Incident focused on expressing their passions and capabilities of managing fan-related affairs while struggling to locate their multi-dimensional identities in everyday life mixed with digital experiences. The digital communities discussed in the two case studies are not identical to physical places, yet, the range of online-generated informal arts engagements has been interwoven into the participants’ lifestyles.

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This chapter revealed how these people engaged in informal arts activities by creating new social spaces and new social relations to expand their creativity, collaboration, and agency in the public sphere. In the case of the CCCFC badminton fellowship, the engagers purposefully pursued a shared social space within which the individual can benefit from healthy, face-to-face and virtual relationships with others. A positive side of informal arts is shown in the 227 Incident: participants created new spaces and new social relations with a wide diversity of ideas, which may lead to open-minded ways of thinking and behaving, a process of constructing new opportunities for identifying themselves.

From the perspective of the participants, informal arts activities chosen by ordinary people may facilitate creative collaborations and communication between different individuals and groups not only within but also beyond the targeted community to help them reach a broadened space full of respect, trust, and altruism. In the badminton case, primarily middle-aged Asian immigrants gathered together to physically or virtually promote physical and emotional health by playing badminton with an enhanced self-awareness of “serving others.” In the 227 case, digital fan groups cooperated with and competed against each other to showcase their interests and capabilities. The badminton players explicitly recognized the importance of well-being derived from community connection, while the fans struggled to find effective approaches to balance responsibility and rights in a shared digital environment.
CHAPTER VI

Discussion and Analysis: Community Connecting Through Informal Public Art

Introduction

Utilizing two in-depth case studies, the previous chapter examined the community-oriented informal arts practice within multi-dimensional contexts: the CCCFC badminton case mainly occurred in the real world, and the 227 Incident primarily took place in cyberspaces. Examination of the two examples of informal arts activity revealed how ordinary people actualize and claim their social needs and aesthetic values to foster community connections. As individuals, citizens, and participants in cultures and communities, ordinary people exhibit their ability to create new social spaces when the original ones disappear, temporarily or permanently, to maintain their social relations and cultural practices in daily settings. Social space is not naturally formed, but is produced by people. As discussed in early chapters (chapter one and two), a social space, as the shared space (both a physical and a virtual one), forms and is formed by the networks of interpersonal relations; it should be seen as an ongoing process of myriad activities instead of a final product.

Findings in the two detailed examples share certain features in common: ordinary people continue to create new social spaces through engaging in new modes of social interactions within and beyond their communities. These two examples show ordinary people’s engagement in co-creating new social relations, which based on Lefebvre’s space theory and Ranciere’s new aesthetic theory, as well as other theorists constitutes informal public art.

6.1 Social Media as A Realm for Informal Public Art

390 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 38-41.

391 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 31.
Developmental technology and the Internet have profoundly altered the landscape for cultural creation, distribution, and sharing of arts activities, enabling people to convey information more effectively. In the case of the CCCFC badminton team, few people responded to the group email, and participants primarily relied on in-person meetings when they needed to exchange opinions. Group-based communication emerged when they employed WeChat as a public platform in 2012; the badminton players’ lifestyles have changed since their online group appeared. Group discussions about management of the seasonal tournament have become a model that supports timely communication among the badminton members, which brings remarkable benefits to allow the CCCFC group’s autonomous operation to thrive via the Internet.

Other community-oriented informal arts clusters in the real world (e.g., the Plano-based dancing group made up of Asian women as mentioned in early chapters) heavily rely on social media. They relied solely on video format—through the YouTube channel or the WeChat platform—to continue their dance classes and exercises during the pandemic quarantine, but they have continued to utilize video format since the reopening of local public facilities in 2021. They recognize the value of social media platforms for convenient and effective communication among the teacher, the dance posters, and others. They use MeiPian, a digital multifunctional platform where users can add and edit texts, pictures, videos, and background music for free to make posts more dynamic and impactful. Some adult students submit their dance video clips to the teacher who shares the work in the online dance group for appreciation and discussion with the dancer’s

392 Interviews conducted in late 2020.

permission. The teacher is accustomed to publishing a welcoming introduction before a dancing term (and a summary after a dancing term) on the MeiPian platform and sharing it with the dance online group to ensure a richly communicative environment in which the dancers can perceive both context and emotion, and exchange opinions.

The 227 Incident goes even further: a series of solely cyberspace-dependent affairs demonstrated how younger Chinese generations stirred up conflicts and affected relationships among different online arts communities.

Media developments are not mere technological advancements; they require readjustments among people, spaces, places, and the ways people engage in everyday arts activities. These socio-political trends expand the space for and grant power to the general public to create new social spaces.

The study of informal arts engagement needs to keep pace with ordinary people’s evolving needs and opportunities provided on social media platforms. There are two main means by which digital tools enhance informal arts engagers to construct cultural communities for themselves: one is participatory creativity and the other is collaborative communication. In this research of informal arts, the term “participatory creativity” centers on the chief characteristic of the community-oriented arts engagers: the everyday creativity each and every individual possesses, as an equitable approach and a socially distributed process, enables people to find ways into a space framed by potential and opportunities sparked by the specific arts activity they choose. Another term, “collaborative communication,” used in this chapter focuses on high-level communicative skills.

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used by the arts engagers for effective collaboration that are vital to building the online environment, regardless of their physical locations.  

6.2 Fanspeak as Informal Public Art

Fanspeak can be a fascinating example of the intertwined nature of participatory creativity and collaborative communication illustrated by the fan groups in Chinese cyberspaces. The younger generations’ combinations of abbreviated, sometimes even unique words prevail in Chinese fandoms: fanspeak created, appropriated, and transformed by young people enables the identity of fan groups to remain remarkably distinctive.

For example, “bai-piao” is a acronymic term (white-prostitution, if literally translated from the Chinese word “白嫖”), metaphorizing a complex, multi-dimensional attitude toward a person who proclaims to be a fan without expending effort or paying for idol-related affairs (e.g., buying multiple copies of the idol’s albums or launching campaigns to boost the idol’s social media ranking). This term denotes a sense of exclusion of the “fake” fan, and thus that distinguishes individual-centered fan-behavior (scorned by the actual fans) and group-centered fan behavior. Paying for the idol’s products is a typical consumption pattern of Chinese fan groups.

In the first-tier metropolitan cities in China, such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou (BSG), Xiao fans showcase their economic strength when expressing their loyalty and love for the idol.  

They offer multi-dimensional financial supports for the idol and lead other fan groups

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nationwide to invest money and online traffic for the same celebrity. Social media platforms make community-based idol consumption extensive, pervasive, and convenient, regardless of geographical separation. In terms of informal arts, this consumption pattern highlights participatory creativity and collaborative communication as key characteristics of the Chinese fan clubs, whether the consuming behavior is internally determined by the generational disposition of the young fans (e.g., consumption patterns and lifestyles, different level of social participation), or is externally decided by characteristics of the context (e.g., Chinese economic and social conditions).

Fanspeak is a significant form of expression reflecting historical, cultural, and social relations. Younger Chinese generations have extensively used fanspeak in the cyberworld since the 1990s. The rich, ever-changing fanspeak vocabulary reinforces the passionate dedication of fans and fan groups. Different online fan communities represent a variety of subgroup identities (e.g., artist, writer, gamer, animator), depending on their willingness to self-categorize as members of one or more types of fan group (e.g., the black-fan or anti-fan group, the passerby-fan group, and the data-fan group in Xiao’s fandom). Fanspeak is also an artistic form in terms of creativity manifested on social media platforms; it is a coherent system of perception and intelligibility of netizens.


The emergence of new systems of perception, creation, and intelligibility due to the prevalence of the Internet and smartphones is deeply embedded in Chinese people’s lifestyles and macro-level social changes. The younger generations contribute to this system of online fan terms to represent their experiences and thus to shape the character of their generation. In Chinese fan culture, the vivid vicissitude of fanspeak demonstrates what fans care about, how fans portray themselves, how their contemporaries depict them, and how they perceive the philosophical validity of members in a specific online fan group.

Based on long-term observations in online communities such as the “Entertainment Gossips Forum” on Tianya Community, “The Gossiping Coming” from the Douban Community (also known as “Douban Eighth Group” or “Douban Goose Group”), and the “Netizens Communication Zone” in Jinjiang Literature City (also known as the “Rabbit District”), fanspeak show that fans are open to new things, quickly adapt to new environments, engage technological devices, like to produce creative works, resist pressure from mainstream culture, and generally have fun. Being proud of their status as followers, supporters, advocates, and producers of subcultures, these young fans embrace and cultivate fanspeak which demonstrate their creativity and uniqueness.


More examples are found in appendix 8.

6.3 Positive Value of Informal Public Art in the CCCFC badminton Group and the 227 Incident

In the informal public art sphere, building healthy relationships among individuals, groups, and the public sphere plays a key role in people’s abilities to think, feel, and act in ways they consider appropriate for arts engagement in the social environment. Relationship-building is a dynamic process in which culturally diverse arts populations exercise their uniqueness, and celebrate their differences and similarities (e.g., personal needs, desires, values, interests, and behaviors) through a particular type of arts activity. This research focused not only on how participants engage in informal arts activities, but also on how networks and communities lead to more opportunities to distribute social value that benefits those outside of the chosen cultural cluster. Based on the fieldwork of this research, both internal and external networks—networks within and outside the focused arts groups—proves to be significant for this study of community-oriented informal arts practice to highlight that cooperation among people of different cultures, ideologies, or social norms improves social relationships (e.g., tolerance, trust, and empathy).^406

In the case of the CCCFC badminton team, participants reported an experience of increasing tolerance, empathy, and kindness toward newcomers, less-skilled players (within the badminton group), and other groups who experienced challenges during the pandemic times (e.g., small restaurant owners, medical workers, and people outside of the badminton group).^407 The CCCFC


^407 This information from the interviewees and messages on the CCCFC badminton WeChat group.
players established and developed multiple networks within the badminton group where they reflected on social norms, roles, and values and extended the positive effects beyond intergroup contact and into the uninvolved out-groups.

The social value that emerged from the 227 case resides in how the netizens, as the younger generations in China, realized and defended their cultural freedom through maintaining a social space for people of distinctive cultures. Based on the survey, 29.18% of the respondents agreed that this event centered on fan culture, a subculture, in China. More respondents (22.43%) disagreed with the AO3 blackout, compared to those who agreed (4.63%). Some survey respondents commented on their commitment to building a more tolerant, fairer shared public space for all members. Given a conservative and paternalistic mainstream culture in China, the Internet world has been a vital space for the younger generations engage in various topics that are discouraged or even prohibited in the real world. These Chinese younger generations engage in the virtual spaces, either idol-centered or art-oriented, by creating community-oriented social networks as a form of informal public art, to fulfill their cultural needs and preserve their homogeneity. They even created a new language, the fanspeak, which can be seen as an artifact of informal pubic art.

Simultaneously, fanspeak can be regarded as an approach for the subculture engagers to prevent their cultural engagements from being hobbled by political and sociological dogmas because few outsiders understand this language system without effort. Cultural freedom expressed by the various fan groups in the 227 case can be seen as an integral part of the way toward a free society. The informal arts engagers in the 227 case exhibited their endeavors to maintain their subcultural interests in a fan community and protect their cultural freedom in an authoritarian
culture. This highlights the social value of the younger generations and their social engagements in the informal public art spaces.\textsuperscript{408}

To examine informal arts engagement today, as online contexts drastically broaden worldwide, more and more informal arts communities are relying on geographically dispersed networks. The arts engagers build cohorts online and (or) offline that offer the most convenient and effective communication from around the city, the nation, and (or) the world, combined with rich, fresh, and local information on the arts activity they choose. These arts communities are dispersed around the participants’ neighborhoods and communities. These informal arts groups bring together people from different cultures with varied life experiences and perspectives on participatory creativity, collaborative communication, and organizational strategy to nurture an inclusive environment which accommodates their sociocultural needs. The dialogue about public art must take into account the significant role of the Internet as a communicative means by which culture-makers engage in co-productive and co-creative activities to construct relationships among individuals, groups, and environments.

6.3.1 Regional Networks

As shown in previous chapters of this study, the leadership board of the CCCFC team established regional networks with local recreational centers and professional training centers to provide more opportunities for the CCCFC badminton members to experience a broadened social setting, and to cultivate community-badminton player partnerships. Through regional networks, the players were able to develop new social spaces with others of the same interest.

\textsuperscript{408} Detailed discussions is found in chapter V.
The players were not exclusively or even primarily concerned with badminton; they have created a sense of collective identity out of community-centered social activities. For example, the identity of a Texan is a subject that occasionally appeared in online badminton conversations on WeChat. Some people said they were proud of being a Texan, others claimed that they were satisfied with the state government, and still some others said they liked the public education opportunity provided by the local administration. These amateur arts engagers are more willing to accept others than to care about where others come from. They see Texas as home, just like they see their arts group as home, even though they sometimes expressed frustration with the division they see in politics and long for a more “pure” and “authentic” pastoral Texas. These attitudes and preferences are not limited to the badminton community; they are shared by other amateur arts groups.

In the 227 case, the fan clusters showed informal arts engagers make real their right and ability to construct their own cultural space through social interactions with people within and beyond a fan community in both online and real settings. Regional networks, in this case, refer not only to the virtual fan-group active online but also to the offline activities held by a certain influencer in an airport or a local concert. In forming regional networks, informal public art engagers create various spaces where they can freely exchange ideas about some publicly banned topics related to sexuality and other norms promoted in subculture circles. In turn, these cultural communities as social spaces allow them to become members of a distinct community of worldview and (often) media producers. From the informal art perspective, regional networks is a

409 Conversations of the players in the CCCFC badminton online group between 2018 and 2021.

410 Ibid.

411 This statement is based on the researcher’s observation on various arts communities on the WeChat platform.
process of co-creating new social relations, which enables the community members to be both social engagers and the creator of their own cultural engagements.

This study found networks tied to various arts groups—primarily informal, community-centered groups. As the previous examples illustrate, there are a wide range of communities and networks (e.g., Plano- or Frisco-based networks of music, dance, calligraphy, education, photography, among others) that can be freely and easily accessed. For middle-aged, amateur immigrants of Asian origins, these regionalized, community-based arts groups—frequently ethnic-specific, yet not motivated by exclusion—provide alternative cultural space for people’s specific needs that cannot be adequately met elsewhere. Data of this study illustrates the strength of networks to connect informal arts engagers, in that ways allowing them to build their lives together by creating collective identities, generating opportunities, and facing challenges with the purpose of fostering inclusion, rather than ignoring or reinforcing differences among individuals, neighbors, and communities. So, such networks are also a medium through which the informal arts engagers develop new social relations with others to construct a larger space.

6.3.2 Networking beyond the Group

This research revealed that many informal arts engagers and their groups were proactive in building networks to support vulnerable populations and regions during the pandemic period. In the badminton example, players built a donation pipeline for Covid-19 supplies to medical workers in the Wuhan area (China) when the pandemic first appeared in humans. Then, they organized assistance-groups to donate PPE for local communities, neighborhoods, and small-business owners around the DFW area when Covid-19 descended on the US. Individual players have directly or indirectly engaged in charitable giving; they ordered takeout from local restaurants, delivered
home-made meals to families whose members were infected with the virus, and made masks for neighbors and strangers during shortages in face masks during the coronavirus pandemic.

In the 227 case, the AO3 users, including the fanfiction writers and readers, were the initiators, though they passively got involved in the debate. AO3 is a small subculture group in China. Yet, numerous online communities joined to support the AO3 campaign to defend the right to free expression of literature. This online dispute was between two small groups, one branch of Xiao’s fandom and AO3, but rages became viral in the whole virtual world within several hours. This speedy spread showed how an internal need within the AO3 group resonated across the virtual world. This resonance is neither isolated nor accidental, but shows that informal arts engagements have profound and steady social impacts on individuals and communities in a shared space.

From the informal public art viewpoint, people’s ability to create new social spaces through constructing a broadened social networks does not come to an end, even if the original one is dysfunctional. From the survey respondents’ perspective, fostering an ideal online environment means building a shared space for all instead of for a few privileged groups. This response helps explain why the 227 debate continued on more online social platforms after the shutdown of AO3. More prominent Chinese online communities joined the debate for free expression on the Internet. The debate about free expression, sexuality, government interference, and social responsibility by no means stopped; rather, more discussions about how to promote a better public environment online continued. This factor showed that the possibilities of creating new spaces and new social relations provided by the Internet as an important part of people’s virtual public sphere, for people to participate, create, and social with others, cannot be eliminated.

These values inspired the researcher to search for the answers to two questions that seemed to lead in opposite directions: “What is the centripetal force of informal arts communities?” and
“What is the centrifugal force of informal arts communities?” Both forces are generated from within a social network—the informal arts group—formed by different individuals who are empowered by being connected to this network. Informal arts approach may be appropriate for and essential to understanding the behavior of building networks, and may generate a common answer to both questions. It shows that “organization of living being” as a way people mutually attune to one another to create a shared space.

6.3.3 Quality of Life

Informal arts engagements play a vital role for those pursuing a high-quality social life. Avocational arts activities allow engagers to implement and enact empowerment by facilitating connectedness with others. They recognize themselves as members of a larger community, bound together in various networks of interdependencies, with a particular emphasis on the informal conversations about amateur arts communities. One individual becomes a member of a society whose daily practice reflects a collective responsibility for and a commitment to an inclusive democracy. The role of community-oriented arts engagement was particularly valuable within the


414 Ibid.


circumstances of demographic anxiety caused by anti-immigrant policies and Asian hate crimes in the States. Daily practices of the culture-makers demonstrated the extent to which individuals liberate themselves from societal constraints. Informal arts engagers objectify and realize their agency in actively creating a wide range of social relations, and in turn, patterns of social relations foster different characteristics in agency.  

6.4 Informal Arts Engagement and Social Capital

Robert D. Putnam explains that to explore the idea of social capital involves recognition of “social networks, norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and trustworthiness,” all of which highlight the vital role of cultivating, promoting, sustaining, and supporting healthy interpersonal relationships in terms of two intersecting capacities of the arts engagers. One capacity is that the cultural actors increase the quantity and quality of ideas, information, and knowledge regarding the arts activity; the second is the integration of all things into collective action.

The case studies demonstrated that informal arts activities build social capital in a shared space.

These seemingly opposite forces lead to a transformative process of identity construction. The critical dimensions of daily routine—time, space, interpersonal interactions, self-esteem, and group identity—have been activated by social actors to redefine relationships among people,


419 Ibid.
groups, and spaces.\textsuperscript{420} In the badminton case, the players create possibilities for developing their capacity for healthy communal relationships. Various situations like welcoming a new player to the group, preparing for the seasonal tournament, teaching someone a new techniques for doubles, or training less skilled players to be more competitive are all examples of reshaping relationships. Relationship-building is also a framework for evaluating the efficacy of social engagement across a spectrum of other interrelated categories. Integration and interruption outside of a focused group are two examples of relationship-building.

In this study of community-oriented informal arts engagement, integration is primarily positive to the arts engagers; their co-creation of a shared space unites people from various backgrounds by creating an environment of equity, trust, and altruism. Interruption refers to the actions of people outside a chosen arts group that negatively influence the arts engagers’ satisfaction, performance, and well-being.\textsuperscript{421} However, interruptions are not always negative to the arts engagers or harmful to the arts group, depending on the extent to which interruptions provide opportunities for increasing the arts group’s collaboration and ability to problem-solving. In the case of the CCCFC badminton team, a verbal argument occurred between a player and a church number (not a member of the badminton group) due to the time conflict of using the court in the church.\textsuperscript{422}


\textsuperscript{422} Interviews conducted on December 2019, February and March 2020.
This unusual conflict evoked uneasiness in some badminton players because they felt being excluded. In the WeChat group, the leader of the badminton team facilitated effective discussions involving the recognition of different opinions, and the players demonstrated ability to identify and understand other people’s perspectives, as they had always practiced within this badminton community. A relaxing chat with laughter (emojis) proved to be positive to maintain relationship bonds within the badminton group and to effectively relieve the tension generated from the conflict between the player and the church member. Remarks of the players expressed gratitude for the church who provide cultural services (e.g., the badminton and basketball courts in the church) for those non-church members who live in the peripheries of the church. This verbal conflict ultimately enhanced thankfulness, altruism, and empathy, which play a key role in building relationships among the players, the badminton community, and the church members. Both internal and external functions of informal arts communities demonstrate the value of pursuing high-quality social interactions to achieve cohesion among individuals of a group related to the broader concept of community.

Putnam categorizes two types of social capital: bonding and bridging. The former serves as the social glue for people who are alike and bonded—such as families, ethnic groups, or religious associations—while the latter refers to weaker yet wider-reaching social bonds, such as those with business colleagues or acquaintances who do not know each other intimately.423 The former is more exclusionary because closed networks with strong ties may cause barriers to outsiders, and the latter

is inclusive due to its openness to more people to create more opportunities by including members and also welcoming outsiders.\textsuperscript{424}

Social engagements in cyberspaces are complicated because digital media platforms provide arts groups myriad opportunities for everything to become a product that may be distributed, shared, and exchanged by any participant. Putnam states that technology has been an enabler in moving society away from physical connections to virtual ones, where people can coordinate their tastes and schedules to avoid the pressures of public spaces and enjoyed isolated, private spaces.\textsuperscript{425} Social integration among netizens is more challenging to find, measure, and evaluate in a virtual community linked by a focused arts practice. Words, emojis, images, videos, and gifs replace physical expressions and body languages through which people can feel, see, hear, and discern others and the surroundings in the actual world. This indeterminacy of attributions of feelings and motives makes the notion of individual identity vague and uncertain for outsiders, yet still offers a sense of familiarity and resonance in cyberspaces.

In today’s world, multifunctional, online video and image platforms are filled with the aestheticization of people’s daily regimens as informal arts practices. Fascinating patterns of everyday communication inscribe a sense of place in the cyberworld (e.g., blogs, friend circles, or myriad chat groups), and in real life, to sustain the vitality of society in shared spaces. Informal arts activities construct a bridge for people of different backgrounds, using a variety of languages and living in different regions, to celebrate shared cultural they created. Informal arts communities share the same commitment that Putnam advocates: to reestablish a healthy architecture of social

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\textsuperscript{425} Putnam, \textit{Bowling Alone}, 221.
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capital that can accommodate a multiplicity of relationships and connections among people, communities, and their surroundings. Globally, inequality in various sectors of economy, politics, and culture has caused social fragmentation that polarizes people, groups, and organizations, which erodes social collaboration. A more functional manifestation of public thinking and action has become urgent in society both domestically and globally.

The findings of this study show that cultural actors turn geographical and online places into social spaces by cultivating particular values within the places; lived space involves not only actions and experiences but emotions and feelings. In the case of the badminton team, the stage in the hall (in strictly church-specific terms, the chancel) used to be the focal point for sermons on Sunday mornings. When the pastor gives speeches, the stage symbolizes God’s presence, designating the stage an authoritative place in the church. This authority is bestowed by the audiences’ intellect, imagination, and emotions. The listeners may feel fulfilled in their pursuit of faith. The stage, therefore, is a site to which the audiences unconsciously subordinate to the power of imagined authority evoked by the pastor interpreting God’s words. For these believers and followers living in the modern age, this is a transformation of the psyche. God remains an elusive enigma yet religiosity governs the audiences’ mundane lives.426

Taking inspiration from Lefebvre and other scholars, the findings of this study show that the CCCFC badminton players created a different space of the church hall. The previously authoritative, sacred stage becomes an arena for players to watch badminton practices when they wait for their playing time. Whereas the stage embodies the most sacred aspect of the church for its religious congregation, the same space becomes something very different for the badminton

players: a socializing and organizing spot for placing equipment (bags, shoes, rackets, etc.), greeting others and chatting, and even watching rallies. This is a prime example of the transformative power of arts engagers to reimagine collective social and cultural space.

The different ways of using and employing the stage lead to different nuances of experience for the players: the meaning of a place is linked to the notion of lived space. In this sense, the players construct social spaces by imparting different functions and meanings to the church. Badminton practices transform the presumably spiritual environment into a secular one by shaking people loose from religious behaviors. Relaxed badminton practices, free socialization, and open exchange among the players engender identification with the church hall as a space rich with the secular experiences and feelings of the dwellers.

Cyberspace is a space formed and maintained by people constructing an attachment to the chosen online places. Considering the online place (e.g., Weibo Super Talk 超话) as a site characterized by its potential to generate social relations, this online space functions as a network of various online places such as the influencer’s Weibo, the follower’s Weibo, and the hyperlinks that can direct the reader to more “online locations.” Therefore, the meaning of place (online place) is linked to spatial structures associated with social, emotional, and economic dimensions.

These many attributes of the living body precipitate the links between arts engagers and social space. In this study of transformed public and private places, such as homes (in the Plano-based dancing community’s case), churches (in the badminton teams’ case), and sidewalks (in the dancing community’s case), enabled a wide range of Asian Americans of various background to change the ways in which they live in the world by sharing spaces with others. They contribute to public aesthetics, meet their cultural needs, and claim their sociopolitical identity by engaging in the everyday arts practice.
6.5 Informal Arts Engagement as Social Practice

The findings of this study confirm Lefebvre’s hypothesis: “social space is a social product.” Amateur people built communal relationships within and beyond the chosen arts community and toward an equal society. The findings of this study also validate that social relations exist only through people’s materialization in space and time; their informal arts engagements prove to be a significant process of realizing their rights to cultural, political, environmental, and social justice. The expansion of informal arts relations, the implementation of arts engagers, and increased networks and forms of everyday life in the public sphere constitute the central, historical processes of community-building examined in this study.

6.6 Value of Informal Public Art for a Wider Society

As the findings of this research have claimed, informal arts activities prove to be both symbols and catalysts of the very unity that strengthens a community in which everyone is a member. By exploring the implications of specific human activities, this study elucidates the intrinsic nature of the inhabitant arts engagers as the diversified public, whom public art projects serve. Many people are deeply concerned about social divisiveness and isolation, especially during the pandemic, and the arts engagers attribute profound meanings to their arts communities where people negotiate social-spatial differences with each other. Arts engagers across various boundaries take responsibility for supporting their neighborhoods by enhancing perceptions of their identities as critical contributors to shared environments and lifestyles. The significance of the multidimensional spaces created and transformed by amateur arts engagers enables a new frontier.

427 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 26.
of public space—ranging from geographical sites to digital places—and demonstrating an increasingly crucial function of daily arts activity in society.

“Building networks,” in its broadest sense, means a statement of community-oriented social engagements; it is also an aesthetic motor that transmits its energy into various forms of people’s daily existence.⁴²⁸ Informal arts practices substantially demonstrate how people claim their equal rights to live in the public sphere by creating and sustaining more opportunities for co-existence. Contributions of informal arts, such as strengthening neighborhoods and bridging differences, conspicuously stand out in this research.⁴²⁹ The imposed social distancing due to the Covid-19 pandemic hardly interrupted the connections and “the happening around” among the informal arts engagers, as an amateur dancer stated in the WeChat dancing group. On the contrary, the unexpected disaster has stimulated people’s daily creativity, empathy, and motivation for the wellbeing of society.

As this study revealed, the informal arts engagers actively engaged in social media platforms to encourage each other and reach out to more people who needed support when the unprecedented pandemic profoundly changed people’s public lives. Readers may remember the exponential growth in Covid-19 cases, the severe death rate in some nations, and the helplessness and isolation that confronted most people. The diminishing of services and activities in public

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sectors has resulted in anxiety, stress, and depression.\(^{430}\) In spite of impaired mental and physical wellbeing, the massive global health crisis failed to hamper the humanity of the informal arts engagers. In the badminton fellowship example, the players have consciously improved their communicative skills, cultivated altruism, and exercised communal responsibility during these challenging times. The Chinese women’s dancing community has remained active since March 2020 in spite of the nationwide lockdown: the teacher has updated nearly 300 online classes on the YouTube channel, and the dancers have shared numerous videos of their “homework” in multiple online spaces.\(^{431}\)

These cultural actors utilize technologies and the Internet as an extension of their humanity to keep their lives going and lend a helping hand. McLuhan would say this reality demonstrates people’s ability to foster social space as a crucial site for their communities of lived, public, and sociopolitical co-existence. In the case of the 227 Incident, cyberspace enabled scaled debates, discussions, negotiations, and even language conflicts to occur among individuals and groups. The grassroots’ challenges and inquiries about authorities’ dominant narratives, such as the administrative regulators, cybernetic influencers, and economically elite forces, resulted in the experience of mixed feelings in the cyberspaces. The unresolved Incident highlighted the younger generations’ efforts to articulate their cultural pursuits, identity struggles, and sociopolitical


\(^{431}\) The data “nearly 300 issues” comes from the WeChat group messaged posted by a volunteer dancer helping manage the group affairs on September 25, 2021.
endeavors. The legacy of the 227 Incident has kept fermenting in the netizens’ community: a meditation on the oscillation between responsibility and freedom in cyberspace.

This study has discussed differences such as ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and cultural and political inclinations/preferences, all of which lend themselves to some forms of interpersonal relations. This phenomenon of the arts communities suggests that informal arts activities are powerful enough to overwhelm differences among people of demographic, geographic, and political markers. Both Lefebvre and Ranciere highlight the significance of breaking down barriers for a fairer society with a focus on the theoretical level. This study adopts empirical and intellectual approaches to push forward the examination of daily regimens as social engagements for revitalizing the existing arts sector into a lived space full of consciously cultural and aesthetic actors.

This chapter reiterated the purpose of public art by highlighting how people connect, construct arts communities, and establish various networks to promote a better society. The geographical perspective adopted in this study references the advocacy of scholars in public art field, such as Martin Zebracki who coins the term “artopia” to signify the dynamic relationship between artwork and public space in social, political, and symbolic dimensions primarily from a policy perspective. From the arts engagers’ perspective, the findings of this study echo the existing scholarship of informal arts by tackling today’s more nuanced and complicated arts environments when digital and physical realities are entangled. Supported by empirical data collected in this study, two prominent roles that amateur arts engagers play in their everyday activities have emerged to reveal the relevance to social space: 1) Subjectivity: people are producers of the social

432 An ethnographic study on informal arts activities conducted by scholars in the Chicago metropolitan region in 2002.
space and embodiments of the mental, the social, and the sensory realms when they engage in the chosen arts activities. 2) Objectivity: a specific environment, either the physical or the virtual, can shape people as forms of their existence.

From a multidisciplinary perspective, this study examines informal arts practices as spatial practice and an ongoing process of creating, developing, and transforming social relations. This ongoing process of creating new patterns and networks in a shared space for diverse individuals and groups to claim cultural needs is also a process of cultivating communal relationships and exploring ways of life in a larger community. In light of Lefebvre’s triadic spatial axis and Ranciere’s fusion of aesthetics and politics in everyday life, every aspect of informal arts engagements points to a moment of social and cultural transmission that nurtures demands for democracy. Awareness of shared space is central for the healthy networks of relationships among individuals, groups, and their environments that enable social capital to flourish. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that the richness and dynamics of amateur arts practices invite the scholarship of public art to understand how and why people engage in daily aesthetics by redefining cultural and spatial boundaries.

The study’s findings have revealed how average people transform the seemingly accustomed routine, aesthetic forms that are usually considered “normal” and even unnoticed, into various ways of appreciating arts activities to maintain their lifestyles. These ways of sharing thoughts, feelings, and emotions in public life precipitate the meeting ground of cultural pursuits and political endeavors, Ranciere would agree, which is extrapolated into the future. Conceptual and empirical analysis of cultural engagers and their daily regimens elucidate how human aspirations, passions, and hopes intertwine in socially engaged arts opportunities. In the digital era,
ordinary arts engagers create self-managed, socialized environments as digital media landscapes, enabling a humane society to foster trust and equality.

The space constructed by cultural actors is where they share imagination, emotions, knowledge, and actions; these spaces are full of the potential of social change. In Lefebvre’s sense of social space, it is critical to understand that bodies which inhabit, reproduce, and challenge the space are the pivotal vehicles for “social change,” though in a rhythmic yet often unrecognized manner. Blending different dimensions enables the conversation about informal arts to investigate every aspect of community-based arts activities in routine life related to bodily, emotional, and spatial experiences. These aesthetic experiences of everyday arts activities require perceptual, cognitive, and emotional reactions to various environments, interpersonal relationships, and communal interactions.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have shown how people use their creativity and capacity to create new social spaces by expanding new modes of social interactions in and beyond their original communities toward a broadened social fabric in the face of global pandemic and specific social circumstances. The conception of informal public art refers to the process of both creating social relations and the product of new social spaces and aesthetic activities that demonstrate ordinary people’s multiple needs in daily lives. The findings have also discovered that a sense of attachment to an arts community is the intrinsic catalyst for community-oriented arts engagements. People’s informal arts engagements as seemingly unconscious activities, yet are actually conscious and

433 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 166-7.
practical solutions, with the potential to transform society by means of respect, inclusion, trust, and collaboration in a shared space.

An awareness of difference is fundamental to realize the importance of diversity, aiming to promote healthy social relations in society. As shown in this study, bonding across boundaries is how people construct and reconfigure their social space. In this sense, this study has shown that ordinary people must not merely be seen as passive audiences or actors, but active engagers of social and cultural change at the local, regional, national, and international levels. Whether in reality or virtual settings, people exhibit agency to increase social relationships and fertilize global citizenship consciously. Informal public arts activities connect the experiences, impressions, feelings, and actions of individuals and groups in a meaningful space within the broadening social structure of this mobilized, digital age.
CHAPTER VII

An Ongoing Conversation about Informal Arts Engagement in the Digital Age

7.1 Summary of Conclusion

Ordinary people’s engagement in informal public art is a process of both creating social relationships within new social spaces and aesthetic practices. Informal public art is the co-creation of new social relations, no matter the change of social conditions. Previous analyses showed ordinary people’s ability to vitalize public space in various settings via informal arts engagements. The communities examined in this study have survived during the unprecedented pandemic when the lockdown and social distancing measures have heavily affected formally organized arts sectors worldwide. These informal arts engagers have demonstrated their strength, resilience, and capacity for sustaining their cultural and aesthetic spaces in public settings during times of adversity.

The CCCFC study has shown that people’s actions of promoting sympathy, altruism, and inclusion surpass the superficial level of participating in a chosen activity in daily routines. As shown in the previous chapter, online engagement, such as the 227 conflict, can generate social capital. Whether in cyberspaces or physical places, these cultural actors consciously and persistently create new social relations in various new social spaces they formed to maintain their lifestyles and claim their existence, agency, and dignity that transcend the primary material conditions of life. The two case studies have shown that the dysfunction of their old spaces did nothing to cease their informal arts engagements. An arts group is not merely for sharing and exchanging feelings and actions but is a home, signifying psychological safety, mutual respect, and community trust.

Informal activities are hard to define or categorize because of their elusiveness, spontaneity, and temporality. However, this study has shown the creation of new social relations in the various
public spheres is usually beyond the formally organized, publicly labeled, and “professional” arts settings. A crucial contribution of this discussion about relationships among people, arts groups, and arts spaces is how normal people claim aesthetic values and social rights in creating new social spaces to benefit themselves, others, and communities, which was a prominent issue during the pandemic crisis. The experiences shared, knowledge exchanged, and skills exercised among the arts communities reflect the purpose and function of informal public art.

Building collaborative networks, fostering responsibility, and nurturing the capacity for a healthy society are the study’s other categories of findings, demonstrating the role of informal arts activities in bridging differences and developing social capital. This research found that the co-creation of new modes of social spaces and social interactions has significantly intermingled with people’s daily lives, and the impact has diffused to a larger community in today’s digitalized world. In this research, informal public art proves to be a vehicle leading people to explore identities as autonomous individuals, members of society, and citizens of the world.

7.2 Inclusion, Cooperation, Creativity, and Community Connecting

Informal arts practices exist everywhere and in the digital era are unconfined to geographical restrictions. The Internet and technological developments have upended arts activities worldwide, inspiring re-evaluation of traditions and social, political, and cultural practices moving forward. Based on the exploration of the two groups, the value of amateur arts engagements is visible, illuminating how people transform the arts landscape in a hybrid of online and offline settings.

Community-oriented arts engagements demonstrate people’s ability to transform and maintain the particular arts space as a home base to achieve their social, cultural, and political goals. These cultural actors construct “their own life, their own consciousness, and their own
world”\textsuperscript{434} by “encountering other human beings.”\textsuperscript{435} This study focuses on the physical and online places that shape the ways people establish and maintain interpersonal networks to cultivate social trust. The sustained, recurrent interactions among individual arts engagers and communities forge bonds in local, face-to-face, virtual, and hybrid settings; communal relationships grow especially when people enjoy collective life in their neighborhoods or online clusters.

Mutual support in informal arts communities generates inclusion and comes from normal contact within collective engagements. The awareness of differences—such as demographic markers and cultural backgrounds—proves to be advantageous to enlarge the social circle. The amateur arts engagers embrace cultural interactions from which they benefit and by which they contribute to public life. An informal arts group is the epitome of society while recognizing no authority but respect and altruism among various individuals and sub-groups. In building and maintaining a group through informal public art, people gradually develop effective strategies to balance individual and community needs. Accepting people of different backgrounds is opening doors to forming new groups, which is the starting point of creating and developing integration.

Cooperation takes various forms in an arts community: the mobilizing of volunteers, teamwork, and collaboration. In face-to-face settings, amateur arts engagers come together for common interests, getting to know others, and becoming a more robust and intimate team over time. Online spaces enable strangers motivated by their self-interest to freely exchange ideas about what concerns them the most by exhibiting video, visual, and text content that unlocks the door to achieving common goals. Building trust is an essential characteristic of informal arts engagements

\textsuperscript{434} Henry Lefebvre, \textit{The Production of Space} (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1991), 68.

as a process of broadening respect for individual interests. Social trust is a vital factor in promoting wellness for the amateur individuals who work together on the arts projects through collaboration as a close-knit community.

Creativity generated from people’s daily communication and interactions through their arts activities plays an essential role in conversations about public art. The vitality of informal arts practices resides in people’s varied solutions to their cultural, political, and social needs, which serve as the collective memory of the space created and maintained for their co-existence. As Henri Lefebvre and other scholars have proposed, the triadic concept of space—perceived, conceived, and lived—needs inhabitants to define, reconfigure, and transform. How the informal arts engagers use, modify, and imagine the public sphere brings continuity to the space within a community that accommodates various cultures, personalities, and identities. By generating new ideas throughout daily routines, informal arts engagers put everyday creativity into practice by bonding generations together, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and promoting social networks.

Community connecting is a dynamic process in which daily arts activities are accessible and embraced as essential practices for social cohesion and human development. In various socio-historical settings, ordinary people actualize and claim their aesthetic needs through numerous arts engagements to foster community connections. People form and are formed by the shared space—in both physical and virtual environments—to establish networks of interpersonal and communal relations. This ongoing process undertaken by the cultural actors forges community connections through collaborations within and outside the arts cluster. By contributing their creativity, knowledge, and actions to a larger community, the arts engagers foster social cohesion and community building. Informal arts engagements demonstrate normal people’s capacity to co-create
and maintain a healthy community that makes a positive impact on individual and collective wellbeing.

7.3 Theoretical Implications of this Study

As Lefebvre points out, understanding human relations is central to understanding the relationship between human bodies and the space produced by themselves. These social relations, for Lefebvre, are the power to revolutionize the world into a better space. By arguing that everyday activities serve as ways to enact social agency, Lefebvre emphasizes the role of daily activity as the embodiment of social structures. Yet, he elaborates little on the relationship between art and life as his ideas on art are still confined to the traditional, outcome-centered, artistic world standards.

Drawing on the scholarship of public art, this study reveals that social life, cultures, images, symbols, and a wide variety of forms of the fusion of art and life need to be included in the conversation about public art as the process of creating new modes of social relations in public life. In Ranciere’s view, the details of daily regimens need to be examined as the process of deciphering the constellation of aesthetics in everyday settings and how these aesthetic experiences are distributed should be analyzed. Understanding the significance of ordinary people’s rights to life that is both aesthetic and politic creates the condition of possibility for perception, feelings, ideas, and activities. This study has taken the discourse initiated by Lefebvre and Ranciere further by examining the role of informal arts engagements in community building and thus contributes to the foundations of a critical theory of public art.

Using the concept of lived space, one may concretize lived space within an organization. In the case of the CCCFC WeChat group, it consists of first, the abstract space of interpretive quantities, such as the name designed for this group (e.g., the language used, how many members
included), organizational rules and symbols (e.g., no advertisement, no politics), and so forth.\textsuperscript{436} Second, the virtual space consists of the exchange of information, dialogue, and sharing of short articles, videos, and pictures. Third, there is the in-between space that is full of human experience: feelings, imaginations, creativity, and interconnections.\textsuperscript{437} In this lived space, the virtual community embodies both perceived and conceived spaces, without being reducible to either of the two spaces.

In the case of the CCCFC badminton community, the lived space is a social space that consists of organizational participants’ spatial engagements that make sense of people’s role, value, and purpose.\textsuperscript{438} Because the lived space proves to be both an aspect of convergence and a mediating agency for the interwoven strands in Lefebvre’s triadic space model, how the participants expect, think about, and make use of both physical (e.g., the playing and resting site in the church) and virtual spaces (e.g., the WeChat group) of the arts field have the potential to reshape the space (e.g., transforming the site from the transcendent to the secular, at least temporarily). The reshaped space is in line with the ultimate goal claimed in Lefebvre’s space theory, which suggests “a different society, a different mode of production, where social practice would be governed by different conceptual determinations.”\textsuperscript{439} For the CCCFC badminton group, the offline and online groups are overlapping and bond different participants together through multidimensional everyday


\textsuperscript{438} Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 40.

\textsuperscript{439} Ibid, 219.
interactions to produce space, rather than merely conceive or perceive space. The hobby-based, shared bond among the participants shape and renew one’s identity and sense of belonging as a member of this arts community.

Furthermore, the spheres of belonging grow larger: the badminton group has extended personal and family relationships and friendships (some husbands and wives participate together, and some parents bring their children to the group); different restaurants and homes (to have dining parties after the seasonal tournaments or celebrate traditional holidays); commercial badminton facilities or recreational centers (to arrange to play badminton together); other organizations. Notably, following the model of the CCCFC badminton project, another Chinese church, (FCBC) in Frisco, facilitated a badminton project open to all at low cost in March 2020. The person who launched the FCBC badminton group has been a member of the CCCFC badminton and the FCBC church. He spent years communicating with the FCBC church leaders and different members, setting up a clear and focused plan for doing public service, building the project team and acquiring official permissions to reconstruct the church, and finally laying out three standard badminton courts and the rest area in the FCBC church. These roles and relationships come with responsibilities of being a member of different levels of society (badminton group, family, church, social cluster, neighborhoods, and even one’s city and state) and imbue life with meaning and purpose. The patterns of attachment to various groups make up identities of individuals and communities.

Amateur-based arts communities usually rely on volunteers (members or non-members) for effectively organizing routine activities (e.g., badminton practices, trainings, and games in the CCCFC case). These identified needs served by participants, volunteers, and leaders give and affect every individual’s sense of being a member. Being a part of the group also forms an important
aspect of an individual’s sense of self. In the CCCFC team, who are the decision makers that create the mechanism for the group to advocate on their own behalf? How do groups facilitate group action to avoid negative behaviors in places (e.g., the church kitchen) shared with the church members? How do they sustain the service for people through coordinating with the church? All these questions are relevant to an intersected relationship between politics and aesthetics in the realm of the everyday briefly discussed in earlier chapters.

7.4 Strength and Limitation of the Research

This research benefits from the use of multiple methods, the case study approach, and interdisciplinary analysis. The combination of theoretical investigation and empirical examination enables pragmatic findings that pave the way for detailed, interdisciplinary elaborations on everyday community activities. Given the reality that everyday activities of average people are often neglected when discussing the value of public art, this study revealed how community members engaged in social and spatial practices in daily life from the arts participants’ perspective.

By using mixed methods, including the field observation, the survey, and the one-on-one interview methods, this researcher gathered a considerable amount of information to reveal how people engaged with public life through the chosen arts activity to establish meaningful social connections with a particular place, online or on-site. This empirical examination has showcased the potentiality and capacity of arts-based, collective engagements occurring in people’s everyday lives. Additionally, this study supplemented theories of spatial reproduction as an ongoing process. The mixed-method approach helped readers capture the complexity, subtlety, and essential nature of people’s existence in the public sphere. By analyzing data gathered from multiple methods, this study has brought to light how people nurture respect, trust, social responsibility, and community spirit in long-term arts activities.
The case study approach makes the study compelling and reliable by obtaining and analyzing multiple data sources to support its findings. The validation of primary data resulted from people’s deep-seated passion for the process of socializing with others for both individual and collective wellbeing. The case study approach is essential for community-oriented arts exploration because it investigates the public settings where amateur participants naturally behave, communicate, and interact with others. The researcher does not need to interfere with the circumstances but observe, listen to, and speak with the arts engagers to acquire relevant interpretations and ideas regarding their everyday arts engagements. Whether in real or online settings, the case study method invites contemplation of the nature of informal arts engagement in regular citizens’ communities and neighborhoods. Theory-building and theory-testing research can both employ the case study approach to good effect.

Interdisciplinary analysis undertaken for this study was utilized in the synthesis of ideas and characteristics from various fields to examine the complexity of informal arts activities. This study centers around “how,” “where,” and “why” community-centered arts occur, related to social, aesthetic, historiographical, and ethnographical fields. Because informal arts activities are ordinary people’s daily regimens, fundamental rights to life, and interpersonal relationships, this study recognizes how people interweave complex, nuanced, and multilevel characters into personal and public lives. An integration of diversified civil society actors, cultural engagers, and local communities was necessary in this research to foster social responsibility in the scholarship of public art because informal arts projects make sense to almost anyone and any community in the digital age.

The subtleties and intricacies of complex social situations require identifying common priorities in neighborhoods; informal arts projects proved to be robust catalyst for people’s capacity
to build community and forge connections in various settings. Interdisciplinary discussions functioned in both theory-building and theory-testing processes to reveal that community-oriented arts engagements catalyzed transformational change by building healthy, shared communities. The examination of the fusion of everyday creativity and aesthetic proactiveness in real and virtual spaces has translated the dynamic social landscape in contemporary reality. Multilevel, integrated analysis unraveled the interrelationships among contributions of the different fields. Thus, a broadened scope of research disciplines increased the chance to argue that informal arts activity is the driving force for the social good. The interdisciplinary research method enabled this study to elaborate on who the cultural actors are, how and where amateur arts engagements occur, and why the arts communities thrive.

Various approaches increased the strength of this study when integrating, synthesizing, and investigating varied informal arts communities; they aided in the exploration of historical, contextual, and sociopolitical aspects of public life in people’s daily interactions; they provided valuable lessons for improving the impacts of amateur arts engagements. Informal arts engagements are not new forms of public art but forms of network building, relationship-driven activities everywhere in the public sphere. Mixed methods provided helpful information on how people create, transform, and maintain the shared space, through which this study revealed that the substance of informal arts engagements is a process of cognitive, behavioral, and symbolic interactions.

One limitation of this study is that this research failed to conduct a new visual matrix exercise due to the public health crisis in 2020. The visual matrix exercise would have been

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helpful for this study to collect data on the imaginative and affective capacities of the arts participants in a group setting. The researcher planned to apply this method in the CCCFC badminton group after its annual spring tournament; the projected photographs and videos of the participants would be used as the electronic stimulus to promote visual thinking. The matrix exercise would have helped explore how arts activities engage the public in an emotional way that is intangible and non-cognitive, and detect what would be most likely the best way to evaluate the process of affective engagement with specific cultural events (e.g., the seasonal tournament) on both the collective and individual levels. As a functional instrument displayed in other studies, this practical methodology should be also utilized to collect data in the cyber space to investigate the impact of perceptible material online.441

The national shutdown caused by Coronavirus had adverse effects on all public gatherings and planned events, including the local badminton and other arts communities. This research was designed to obtain valid and scientifically sound results; the matrix methodology was proved to be an effective instrument to reveal the complex interrelations between citizen engagements and research knowledge through viewing the visual materials as the sensory stimulus. Without utilizing the matrix method, this study missed an opportunity to add credibility to its findings by gathering data from a shared verbal communication. Lacking the support of the matrix method, the researcher modified the research plan by minimizing the psychological analysis of the amateur arts groups, which remains a limitation of this empirical research.

7.5 Implications for Public Art Policy, Artists, and Art Institutions

This study suggests the importance of informal public art for public art policy, artists, and art institutions in examining the significance of everyday arts activities from the arts engagers’ perspective. First, the conversation about public art needs to focus on the people who create dialogue among themselves, their communities, and the environment, rather than merely centering on specific artworks posited in public. As reiterated through this research, the commitment of public art projects should be for the public rather than a small, privileged group. The lasting value of informal arts projects should be recognized and stressed by more people and organizations because public space symbolizes a neighborhood’s vitality and character to spur community spirit in society.

Dialogue about public art should center more on social impacts than artistic outcomes of a public art project by putting “the people” back into public life. In terms of “public,” “network,” and “community building,” understanding “the social space” created and maintained by ordinary individuals and informal communities is necessary for public art policy, artists, and art institutions. When examining the quality of public art policies or projects, sufficient knowledge of the targeted arts community, such as its cultural, historical, and sociopolitical contexts, should be the preliminary principle set to which policymakers, artists, and art institutions aspire. Public art research needs to be based on the long-term social impacts of a specific project on the corresponding community, rather than merely short-term artistic, reputational, and economic benefits for the art professionals and practitioners. This study alone cannot generate a criteria that can be applied to all formal and (or) informal public art projects because they vary by region and community. However, cultivating the responsibility to configure the shared space for all, instead of a small group of the privileged, is vital for arts practitioners and administrators.
### 7.6 Further Research

Further research is needed to expand the investigation of amateur arts engagements from the policy perspective. This research exclusively examines informal arts projects which were unofficially initiated and sustained by the engagers. Such informal public art projects are neither soundly documented nationally nor widely included in regional policies. This study’s findings reveal informal arts engagements to be more significant to the existence of people, social cohesion, and community building than art arrangements which occur in formally organized settings. The considerably growing body of literature on public art emphasizes the understanding of art held by formal practitioners and administrators, yet this virtually exclusive focus on artists and art administrators belies the complexity of the grassroots engagement’s ethos. Creativity and cooperation generated, promoted, demonstrated, and eventually realized by the amateur participants has not yet been sufficiently explored to gain a realistic conception of community-engaged public life. A strong need emerges in contexts that are insufficiently examined by this study to answer the following questions: What are strategies that need to be implemented to promote the sustainability of the informal cultural space on the policy level? How can national, regional, and (or) local urban (and rural) designers, policymakers, and public art administrators help informal arts communities to improve the safety, accessibility, and aesthetics of their daily activities?

More research is needed to examine informal arts engagements as processes of creating, maintaining, and transforming the social climate of a wide variety of communities, places, and regions, because informal arts engagements can take countless forms, styles, and media of expression as people engage with arts in different cultures and locations. More academic discourse concerning informal arts will be helpful to conceptualize amateur arts practices to illuminate people’s aspirations in public life, capacities to navigate cultural spaces, and rights to aesthetic
expression in physical and virtual settings. Rooted in contemplations about daily existence, consciously or unconsciously, informal arts activities are associated with all aspects of life and deserve a broader framework for the exploration of arts participation in various cultural sectors that contribute to social inclusion and community connection. Cultivating a genuinely democratic society requires more research on informal arts engagement to gain a nuanced understanding of the increasingly powerful and influential forces generated by the people. Further explorations will continue expanding the conversation about informal arts and bolster healthy relationships among citizens, groups, and places.
Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Part 1
SMU Exempt Level Participation Explanation and Consent Script

We are conducting a research study to learn more about the public art program, especially as a non-art form. The CCCFC badminton fellowship is one of my cases. The purpose of the study is to explore how ordinary people engage their ideas, feelings, and actions with this project.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to take part and then change your mind, you can withdraw for any reason. There are no penalties if you withdraw, decline to participate, or skip any parts of the study. If you agree to participate, you will have a conversation with me. I will have some questions for you regarding your experiences of playing badminton and interacting with the CCCFC badminton fellowship.

Your participation should take about fifteen to thirty minutes.
Audio recording will occur upon your permission. These recordings will not be shared with other participants.
The study does not put individuals at more risk than that which is ordinarily encountered in daily life. Potential risks associated with participation may include conflicts related to other persons or organizations, such as the authority or other participants in the public art project. To mitigate this risk, I will keep their sharing private and not pass on each other's words.

This research will contribute to study on the role of the arts-based practice in daily life of the participants, who are the subject and purpose of the public art project. This research will also expand the potential of evaluating the audience’s engagement with public art - which are often-neglected topics in public-art scholarship - to reiterate the value of trustworthiness, cooperation, and community-building.

The potential benefits to participants and to society is to build landscapes, discover human creativity, which are compositions of both expression and need of public art-especially as an informal and socially engaged activity to fulfill the needs of a human ecology. Trustworthiness between individuals is the base upon which society harmoniously develops. If a public art project became an important part of a community's landscape, the enhancement will boost the vitality of the community. As a member of the community, every participant matters.

Would you like to participate in this research study?
Part 2
Interview Questions

1. In seeking to identify the appeal and utility of an everyday arts activity, the interviewer should ask questions about the participants’ level of engagement in the activity and the rewards they experience as a result of it. The focus of questions should be, “How do the participants take actions to voice/portray their issues and concerns?”

The central question for the CCCFC case: How can badminton be used as a means of understanding Asian Americans’ perspectives on public arts in daily life?

Question pool:

- When did you begin playing badminton?
- How long have you been playing badminton (in CCCFC)?
- How many times do you play badminton per week?
- Where do you play badminton in the DFW area?
- How often do you come to CCCFC to play badminton per week?
- Can you describe how playing badminton with the CCCFC group impacts your life?
- Do your spouse/other family members come with you to play badminton at CCCFC?

2. In order to identify the nuances of participants’ use of group-oriented arts to engage with their communities, the questions should request information regarding how the arts process improves participants’ quality of life on cultural and psychological levels.

The central question for the CCCFC case: How does the group engagement that is required of this activity’s participants affect them?

Question pool:

- What do you expect from badminton playing?
- Do the seasonal tournaments affect your exercise plan at CCCFC, and how?
- What are your major concerns regarding (not) attending the tournaments?
- Are you interested in reading messages in the CCCFC badminton WeChat group during the game-preparation period?
- What interests you the most in the CCCFC badminton WeChat group?
- What is the aspect you dislike most about the group chat online?
- What would you suggest as a member-player to improve the CCCFC fellowship?
- In your opinion, what is the core of the CCCFC badminton group?

3. How to select the interview questions?

First, the main interview questions should be broad and closely aligned to the research questions (chapter I). The interview questions should introduce the main focus and remain consistent with the structure of the interview.442

1) Who are the participants engaging in the arts?
2) Where do people engage in the arts?
3) Why do people engage in a certain kind of arts in a specific place?
4) How do people engage in the arts by making, practicing, and sharing arts?

Second, the interview questions should be conducive to creating an ideal interactive atmosphere. In order to set the stage for the interview, the initial question is essential. For the researcher, listening, displaying interest in what is being communicated, and showing respect are vital in the acquisition of the interviewees’ experiences.443

Third, the interview questions do not necessarily follow a set order, but are flexibly adjusted according to the personalities of different respondents. To acquire a respondent’s description in as much detail as possible, the researcher needs to facilitate the interview process by following the participant’s response to the question being asked.444

Fourth, the main interview questions should provide the researcher opportunities to investigate the research topic from several angles or to elicit holistic descriptions of experience. Follow-up questions in the interviews are necessary to achieve the above goals. This researcher developed follow-up questions tailored to various participants within a specific interview.445 Examples of follow-up questions:

- What happened? How did you feel about it?
- What do you think about it?
- What is your opinion of the event?
- How do you remember it?
- Did you mean that…?

Fifth, all the face-to-face interviews occurred in a public area, such as the CCCFC church, a restaurant near the participant’s workplace, or a club house in a residential community based on the

443 John W. Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches, second edition (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2007), available from https://d1wqtxs1xzle7.cloowdfront.net/55010759/creswell_Qualitative_Inquiry_2nd_edition-with-cover-page-v2.pdf?Expires=1646719957&Signature=BEzY8Rq6yGARjx7eWocGiF8nJywSPkZGtxVH8bmHtt7xRAP9cRJt8eVqjd5NSnRx7091f2p85pY1XiuJOD8YoZX6w9oJzPwtGMJ9oYylYw3eP2A5lH9zLHg57caEeCG5rkbRdbFZ7xTzdiAitYz1TbA7LCij2-bAicNBVbaSDs6yGfjm0i1ULeYraHL83KEYGRIyv8vqNRSRiYYrTBT--GqPYH57XcwrpJyNR1x2ZS7N-pNWGYPejHcrVflVm8iD5poDZ9G-HVBPETZaQQdChfLBAXXLa8wNYny3yoLyWPmeFd9DGDM8KsBFgZg59Lg9NbuLr-7-5HfcTOTEoEbDg__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAI0HF55GSLRBBV4ZA; accessed on March 7, 2022.


participant’s choice. A safe place is necessary for a comfortable interview, allowing the participant the freedom to communicate and the researcher to obtain rich descriptions.446

With the above considerations in mind, the researcher designed seven to nine interview questions as the main ones to elicit vivid, rich, and detailed responses of the participant based on the research focus and goal of the study.

1) Would you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2) When did you begin playing badminton?
3) Where are the places you usually go to play badminton?
4) Do you enjoy playing badminton with the CCCFC team? Why?
5) How does badminton contribute to your quality of life?
6) Do you consider badminton playing to be an art? Why or why not?
7) How do you feel about the WeChat badminton group?
8) What do you think of this group’s seasonal tournaments? Any ideas for improving this group?
9) What do you think is the core of the CCCFC badminton group?

Part 3
Responses to Interview Questions

There were about 50 players who would regularly play at the CCCFC church. This researcher communicated with the largest possible number of players. This researcher failed to interview all the players due to the pandemic, yet managed to accomplish 45 interviews with 45 players. Based on the participant willingness, twenty interviews were recorded in face-to-face settings, including the church, a local library, the club house, and the recreational center; twenty three interviews were recorded via phone call or social media; two interviews occurred via texts on WeChat. An appointment was scheduled for each interview.

The researcher transcribed 43 face-to-face and audio-only interviews into a transcript, and copied two text-based interviews. There are 34 hours and 25 minutes of recording, transcribed into 473,086 or so words. See below for sample interview excerpts.

The following excerpts have been reproduced as accurately as possible to maintain the unique, conversational grammar and tone of each individual, with only minor adjustments [in brackets] for purposes of clarity.

1) Would you tell me a little bit about yourself?
   Answers are omitted here for privacy reasons. The demographical results appear in chapter V (p196-197), the section on “participants.”

2) When did you begin playing badminton?
   Most interviewees started playing badminton in their early life, during childhood or college. They recalled time with their parents, friends, and alumni when talking about badminton.

   “Dating back to 2000, a Malaysian colleague from Britain asked if I would go and play badminton with her … So, my husband and I went [to] a middle school in Plano to play badminton every weekend. The double-playing badminton activity was attractive because it was great for socializing with friends. We ate and played cards with other players after the playing; [the badminton playing for us] is equivalent to a relatively social activity” (Face-to-face interview: January 29, 2020).

   “I have been playing badminton for quite a long time. I was in college as a sophomore or a junior, maybe a junior. [I had] never played badminton before that” (Face-to-face interview: January 31st, 2020).

   “[I started to] play badminton about two and a half years ago; that was July [in 2017] when I moved to Plano [from another state]” (Face-to-face interview: February 23, 2020).

   “It used to be in the process of schooling. Before the earliest college life, there was no contact [with badminton] at all, uh, almost none. …Yes, there were badminton activities in colleges, but I played little… until many years after my graduation when I began playing with Korean neighbors in my [residential] community” (Phone interview: March 1, 2020).
"I have a fear with the balls because my dad fractured his ring finger when playing cricket, and I had never seen my dad crying. And, I was really young, maybe like 10 or 11 age, when I saw him crying after his surgery, I just said that: I don’t want to play any game that has a ball there because [of] just the fear that I had. And badminton was very accessible because where I lived we had a place where all kids were playing badminton. So since childhood, I started [playing badminton]” (Face-to-face interview: February 8, 2020)

“Yeah, I played badminton, umm, maybe, how many years…maybe ten to twelve years, umm, after I started. I feel like this is my passion, so I like it a lot” (Face-to-face interview: January 21, 2020).

“I started playing badminton eight years ago. Compared with the nearly twenty years I have played basketball, badminton [playing] is less scrambling and prone to get injured.” (An interview via text occurred on March 13rd, 2020.)

“I have played badminton here for half a year, following my husband, who teaches me with tremendous patience…” (Face-to-face interview: January 14, 2020).

“I grew up in China, xx (omit the city for privacy). And we used to play during the, um, in the [junior high] school during breaks. After lunch, we just play [badminton] a little bit, and summertime, or spring, maybe in spare time, so we go home, and we just play without the nets and play on the street” (Phone interview: March 12, 2020).

“I was the least athletic [among my coworkers]. I was always working hard before I retired… I was busy working from morning till night, and I would take a nap at noon. Anyway, I got to the workplace at ten am and came out from there at ten pm. I just did no exercise. I did not have time to exercise, and I had no interest. I think my body type is really bad at exercising. [laughing], yes, with such a small figure, when you play basketball and get beaten, [giggling]… and then, play billiards, when you often run to the corner to get the ball, your hands are not long enough, and you are knocked down by the sharp corners, you know…So, I have tried a lot of ball games, and it is not suitable for short people like me. So, I probably retired in 2010, [when I started playing badminton]. How old was I? Fifty-five years old” (Face-to-face interview: February 2, 2020).

3) Where are the places you usually go to play badminton?
Most participants said they would play in regional recreational centers (e.g., Oak Point, Carpenter), professional badminton facilities (e.g., PBC, FBA), and the CCCFC church. These member-players usually participate in the CCCFC badminton activity twice to three times a week.

4) Do you enjoy playing badminton in the CCCFC team? Why?
Surprisingly, all participants replied positively.

“It is a little bit far away for me—it is like thirty miles … so, it takes, uh, like forty minutes—I still stick to this group. After all, I know all these people. I mean, I like them, and I can talk to them, and I can, umm. Playtime is not that much, but between the
playtime[s], I can talk to them and socialize [with] people here…I like to play mixed double, [so,] I can play a bit more [here]. Other places [do] not have hard players, and they [do not] play mix doubles. So, this is the only place where [there] has a lot of hard players, and they play mixed doubles[s]. So, yeah, I mean this is the only place I saw. They play [badminton] with, yeah, everybody, so I wanted to play with them. I play [in] other places; they have their own partner[s], and all kinds of them do not often play with everybody. So, here, everybody play[s] with everybody. So, this is a good environment for [all to have] fun. And, I still play here” (Face-to-face interview: January 21, 2020).

“I think the CCCFC [badminton group] is very open. Like, usually, when I go to the recreational center, I notice, like, men, like to play [badminton] with men. And, yeah, they do not like to play [badminton] with women because the sport is softer [when it] is in a game. But, I think in CCCFC [team], it does not have much discrimination and gender racism. If you go to other places, they have a lot of, you know, mentality about either not playing with you or like, [treating] you just being rude, which I know, this is not…in CCCFC” (Face-to-face interview: February 8, 2020).

“For me, for fun is important, and, really important also is to get sweaty, [laughing]…You cannot win, really. Who is gonna remember ten seconds later you won or lose, ok? Am I right? By that time, you walk out of the court, you assign the name, you told yourself… I would not remember who won the game …Umm, I remember a few players here, not to get it a whole lot better. Um, I guess the sort of, you know, have to figure out why. Hey, come on, you do not have a coach, who cares...Figure out yourself no matter how smart you are. …Anyway, that [was] too much I talked about it. I will say, you have fun, and that really gives yourself into a cheerful moment. That is something you do not get that easily when you go climbing or you go hiking. It’s different. You do not have a goal [that you] have to accomplish here. I have no goals; that’s good! Why would I have a goal for? I mean, you have goals, enough goals in life already. You do not really have to have a goal here. That’s nice. So, relax” (Face-to-face interview: March 3, 2020)!

“The development here is actually like this, you know, [people could go to play badminton] in many places. But, eventually, people come here because it’s more accessible than other churches. [They] are more narrow-minded. It is the openest among all these places. I have been to those [churches], um, there are at least six churches, and I have tried all of them. So, I think CCCFC is the most open one” (Face-to-face interview: March 21, 2020).

“Our starting point of running this team was pretty simple: it [was] for beginners to get involved [rather than excluded]. I had the [unpleasant] experience as a beginner [before]; I was left out, so I don’t want others to feel the same…There are eight to ten badminton teams [like us CCCFC] around this area, but, no other team has such a good relationship [among the members as our team]. The main reason why people come to CCCFC is not because the low price [two dollars per person per time], but because of such a comfortable interpersonal relationship. And, players can quickly find [partners or] opponents regardless of their skill level. [Here is] unlike [those] ordinary [commercial courts], where [there] will be high-level discrimination against low-skilled players or new-comers. In addition, no other
team like this one: healthy interactions among members or even [their] families” (Face-to-face interview: December 16, 2019).

5) How does badminton contribute to your quality of life?
   “If I am in good health, I think [the badminton playing] is quite enjoyable. Because, ah, there is a social part in it, and everyone can communicate with each other, and during the playing period, there can also be some competition…That is, there can also be some competition, small excitement, wining…because everyone [here] likes playing with others [in the game format]. In other words, it can also make you less serious [about winning or losing the game]…you can always do it better [than last time], you can do it more professionally, but, you can simultaneously be more relaxed, ah, umm, that is, you can advance or retreat.
   So, [badminton playing here in the CCCFC] can give you a more relaxed environment, and psychologically, you will compare; ah, you just need to accept yourself and your state. That’s it. In fact, this goal is set by yourself, in your heart. For those with higher [self-] requirements, she may think better about the technique [to improve], and for those with lower requirements, she also thinks: ‘hey, I come for merely a bit of exercise.’ So, these ideas are all possible. It [the badminton practice] is more flexible [than one thinks]” (Face-to-face interview: March 20, 2020).

   “So, how I look at this—commitment, also, being in the moment, and, ah, community. These are three things I link to the most important point. So, let me explain, I think the most important point [is]: when I am playing, I am more. I’m totally enjoying [it] when we are all four playing together, not against each other. So when all four of us [are] smiling, we are having an excellent match; that [which] is my best memory of badminton. And even outside. Verses when I play in a tournament, and it is about having to either win or die, kind of, I don’t enjoy that much. And the same I like more relationship also, catching on more people. It is more about spending the time together, happily verses having some sort of risk” (Face-to-face interview: January 11, 2020).

   “To me, I think it’s very important now. [Badminton playing] is basically one of my main activities—the primary type of exercise. Eighty percent of the activities are through badminton, and about one third of social interaction is also through badminton [in my life]. So, badminton playing is profoundly important for my life” (Face-to-face interview: March 21, 2020).

6) Do you consider badminton playing to be an art? Why or why not?
   “I feel like art and badminton are very similar because in dance and in badminton, you need to have, uh, very strong footwork. So, when I am learning that form of dance, so they always tell me [to] forget about the hand actions. First, you get the footwork. And, I noticed when I was learning badminton from my coach, he would always say first is the footwork. So, it has so many similarities, even in dance, like having badminton, after they see that you come back to your home position all the time. If you take a back shot you come back to [a] home position, then launch to take the French shuttle, after you learn you go back again to the home position, so [the] home position is very important. So, same, I know this is art, every time you do any action in dance, uh, or music, you always come back to your home
position. So, it has a lot of similarities. And of course, practice is important. So how art needs practice, same in badminton. Sports and art I think it’s hand in hand” (Face-to-face interview: February 8, 2020).

“Public art? Well, for art, I have the impression that art should be some static things, more like art, displayed there…um, [this is] more like my concept [of art]. The idea of taking motion as dynamic is more subtle. I have not accepted it yet, yes. It always feels like a static thing” (Face-to-face interview: February 11, 2020).

“Um, yes, it is that. It [the badminton playing] expresses a kind of beauty in the way of sports. I believe art generally means that it is a direct way of representing aesthetic feeling, right? Say, when your movements are more coordinated on the court, the birdy you hit is more beautiful. This is one aspect. Another is how players dress [to play]. One’s choice of jersey [styles and colors]… you can be very professionally dressed, or just a T-shirt in casual, right? I think that [the outfit] gives folks a sense of aesthetic feeling, also a kind of enjoyment. I think this [kind of feeling] is influential in the public space, no matter genders” (Face-to-face interview: March 20, 2020)

“I think public art is vague. If you are just doing a painting, the skill can be art itself. People, who take in public art by being part of the community, right? [We're] having to, um, [have] the similar rules [in] relation to the full area. I think that’s part of [public art]. Doing the tournament; that is the art. Why? Doing that full thing without getting money or expecting other than friendship that attract[s] these folks to do it, that’s public art. It takes a lot to do that. I think the skill is definitely an art. Yeah, that is surely an art. You look at them playing, that’s art when you see him driving to the court is one thing we are doing to achieve that. That is a form of art. How effortless they are…Yes, we are artists, we are talented artists. So, when you are playing badminton, you are constantly for improvement to learn something better. So, it is an art when playing badminton. For me, art is something that is about creativity. Or something like, I’m not doing any calculations, I’m in the moment, and I’m doing some expressions. In some shape or form-whether, you’re dancing, whether you’re actually doing art like drawing, whether you’re playing an excellent trick shot from [behind] the back, that’s all art. I think [art is] a process, always process” (Face-to-face interview occurred on January 11, 2020)!

“Public art, you mean like sculptures, or [something else]? You know, art sometimes has a history, I enjoy going to Europe to see all the sculptures and learn some history behind that, you know the landscaping, um, I guess art, I feel it’s like, it depends on the people’s background and also how they interpret the art. Some people, you interpret it in one way, others interpret differently” (Phone interview: March 12, 2020).

“Um, personally, I think that art is an act that can bring people a sense of beauty. Whether a kind of behavior, an object, or anything… I mean, anything can bring a sense of beauty to people. For example, if you regarded the management [of this team] as an art, it can be said to be an art, right? After all, [this group] has been established for so long, and there are so many people involved, right? Every one came with joy, most of the time, and left happily.
The same thing as we did. From this point of view, this is an art. The main thing is that the aesthetic sense of many folks means a kind of happiness, right? Since [badminton playing] can bring people happiness, we can regard it as an art. Because this kind of definition comes from different opinions, of course, everyone has one’s own opinion, right?” (Phone interview: March 21, 2020).

7) How do you feel about the WeChat badminton group?
“The badminton team, I think, is a platform for Chinese immigrants in the US to exchange ideas and emotions. Um, there are some considerations about the living environment, politics, public life, and us, Asian Americans. It provides a platform where we have some opportunities to express ourselves. It is actually a social platform, I think. Of course, [badminton] playing is a half, I think, a half of it, for physical well-being. Um, what about playing? Sixty percent; the rest [40%] are for psychological needs of the community and communication. What about this feature is that CCCFC [church] provides the courts for free, um, actually is not entirely free. It is about a minimum fee, and then, a service for the community” (Face-to-face interview: March 21, 2020).

“What respect and humility…in this group, for me, are the most valuable characteristics. [These] two features, actually, um, lay the foundation for being a human and forming a community. Without these two points, a group would be quarreling all day long, right? There is no way to live in peace. If the interpersonal relationship breaks down, doing anything is in vain. …No matter whether one plays well or not, you should give certain respect [to them]. Just like no matter what industry, as long as a person earns a living by her own labor, she deserves the most basic respect [for what she did]. The same goes for the relationships among the players” (Face-to-face interview: March 20, 2020).

Um, something, yeah…And people, you know, you can read the ballot, you can learn the information from people sharing in the WeChat [group]. They may hear, they may get some information from somewhere or someone else, [and] they’ll post there and let people know. And sometimes [the message] is useful, like, in this case, the virus. Uh, they found some cases there, and they got to post something like information [about] how to prevent it and how to take care of…This is all good information. Sometimes people, maybe, you know, try to post what they believe to other people. You know, they argue about the political things, elections, and those things may not be helpful. And, so then, you know, somebody in the chat may say, hey, this is provocative and not helpful for this group, so they stop to argue about it. Maybe, [they] can discuss it in different groups, so some info is good, some info…You have to, you know, read yourselves and, um, take the one info [that] you think is good for you. Don’t take it personally, and some people take [it] personally and may feel bad” (Phone interview: March 12, 2020).

“Ah, personally I’m not fond of this WeChat group very much because many of us have a bad habit: we cannot control ourselves well. This kind of scattered and fragmented information, a lot of inaccurate information, and, um, you often read it once in a [social media] group, then in the second group, then the third one. That’s to say, everyone has a market [to spread and receive information], and a [social media] group may quickly become a venue [of misinformation]. So, everyone gets into the habit of posting and listening to
[unverified information] at will. I don’t know. People typically would not go to research and determine the reliability [of the information]. With the convenience of spreading information online, it is very bad for people’s habit and social behavior after they have cultivated this habit[s] for a long time. Everyone should be able to calm down and think carefully and read well. But, because WeChat is fast-paced and has a large amount of information, under certain circumstances, most people cannot settle down to make good and in-depth judgments. So, I don’t, particularly in favor of the widespread use of this online chat group” (Face-to-face interview: March 21, 2020).

8) What do you think of this group’s seasonal tournaments? Any ideas for improving this group?
“This kind of competition can really improve our understanding of each other and then coordinate with each other. The more people there are, the more people there are. So, I will feel that this [seasonal tournament organizing] is what I like [about] CCCFC [badminton group] very much, and their [game arrangement] has made everyone happy [especially] after the tournament. It is not about competition among individuals or the teams. The [seasonal] tournaments have genuinely revitalized the entire organization, and people become very familiar with each other.
So, I like this, [and the tournaments] enabled me to have trophies! When I got the trophy, I am really happy and have [had] a sense of accomplishment… Yes, as a member of the group, the sense of belonging makes me feel that I have so many friends here. Um, of course, I have the privilege of receiving so many friends, and they tolerate a relatively weak person like me, so I must do my best to help clean the courts [after playing]. That is to say, let me think, how should I put this…What I can give back is to do my best [to do whatever I can be helpful to them]… [Cleaning.] This is the help that I can give back to my friends. They have been playing badminton with me and teaching me [to improve my badminton skill]. Everyone tolerates each other. Yes, so, I think this whole thing makes me quite like it, [the CCCFC group]” (Face-to-face interview: February 20, 2020).

“Anyway, the main thing is to promote [this team] because the reason why the CCCFC group is distinct from other [badminton groups] is that we have two [seasonal tournaments] a year. Every time, we attract more newcomers through these activities. That is, we encourage newcomers to participate, and players boost their interests [in playing badminton] after they participated in one or two tournaments, and they would become more active in daily practicing and learning, and so forth. So, there are advantages [for the players]. Another important aspect is that we promote the relationship[s] among many people through the tournaments.
…The first time when I played in a tournament, I found out that I had never spoken to a player who I had played with for three or four years. Then after we became teammates, we started talking, and he took the initiative to teach me how to play and what to do. At that time, I thought it was great to be in a team. It was about building the relationship among people. So, I have insisted to hold this kind of team competition. Well, the con of having the tournaments is that, because it’s competitive, it is inevitable that some folks would, um, sometimes, take the gain and loss very seriously. This is the only [downside]. Sometimes, it is difficult for you to balance this…because everyone would try their best to fight as hard as possible. But, if you failed to let them focus on something
[other than winning or losing]…sometimes it is just hard to explain to the individual player what’s going on, yes, yes, this is a drawback and sometimes causes some conflicts [among players]. But, that is for sure that the positive impact weighs more [in the tournaments]. That is for sure” (Face-to-face interview: March 21, 2020).

9) What do you think is the core of the CCCFC badminton group?

“The structure of the game is the core. I mean, um, I do not know what can draw people together to capture the attractive[ness], the fun of the game. For me, it is [the core]…Other [recreational centers] do not have that system just like ours: free play[ing]. You are not allowed to skip someone, which is fair…I just feel that is a fair system; I like the system too…I think the way the game [is] structured is attractive to a lot of people. People probably do not realize it but come to play. Somebody set up the structure for you, you [are] here to follow rules, you know, that’s the thing. The whole form, the score structure the structure of the game, it’s a core… to draw people here” (Face-to-face interview: March 3, 2020).

“I think the core is that people are very nice, and people enjoy going there, not just because they play badminton, I think. They also [build] the friendship [with] the people [who are] nice to each other. And, then, they enjoy being there and playing, if the location, you know, if you don’t know anybody, they just go and play. They then may not have much fun, but if you are more engaging and get to know people there, you know, that’s why you might go back more and more” (Phone interview: March 12, 2020).

“The core [of this badminton group] is a group of friends who love to play badminton, right? Well, it just so happens that there is a church, and it is a combination of the church’s needs of preaching the gospel, um, evangelism. That is why the existence of this CCCFC [badminton group]. Both are imperatives for the existence of this badminton team; there cannot be one without the other” (Phone interview: March 21, 2020).
Discussion
In this case study, the researcher adopted a more straightforward and more functional definition of qualitative research framed by Nkwi, Nyamongo, and Ryan: “Qualitative research involves any research that uses data that does not indicate ordinal values.” As of March 2022, there is a scarcity of qualitative studies on ordinary Asian-Americans’ experiences within amateur arts practices. The CCCFC badminton team is an exploratory study involving one-on-one, open-ended, and semi-structured qualitative interviews with member-players to investigate their experiences and attitudes toward the relationships among individuals, communities, and the environment. The analysis focused on meanings and actions with a broader view to identify the interplay between participants’ narratives and social implications.

It is important to acknowledge this researcher’s theoretical positions and values in regard to qualitative research on this badminton case. The themes/patterns cannot “emerge” from the data unless this research takes an active role to “discover” from the participants’ conversations and report to the readers. The researcher must have brought her own experiences, beliefs, values, and understanding of the world to the research process. First, the researcher designed and guided the interview process. Second, this researcher positioned herself as a learner and the interviewee as a teacher in each interview. Third, this researcher consciously reflected on the data and analyzed the data throughout the research process. Fourth, the researcher needed to figure out what was implied in the participants’ conversations and then represent those findings through analysis. Therefore, this researcher and the interviewees co-created the reflected knowledge, and the epistemological framework was inevitably subjective.

Data Analysis
Because of a dearth of qualitative studies on informal arts factors, this researcher regarded this study as exploratory research. This researcher did not expect a theoretical framework to be generated from this initial study. She positioned the interview method as an exploratory approach to understand and describe ordinary people’s arts engagements.

This researcher used thematic analysis to interpret the member-players’ lived experiences, meaning-making processes, and the socio-cultural needs that influence their amateur arts activities. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, reporting, and analyzing themes (patterns) within

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In this badminton case, the researcher used the thematic analysis method to understand, organize, and interpret a richly detailed, yet nuanced account of data to reveal various aspects of the research topic. The researcher needed to locate particular themes or patterns across the entire data set, rather than within a data item, such as from a specific interview or remarks from one participant.

This researcher constantly moved within the entire data set which consisted of more than 473,000 words. Through seven phases, the researcher used thematic analysis as a “flexible tool” to explore how and why the Asian-American group engaged with badminton practices in a church setting. “Flexible” means that this analytic method is not a set of rules or a linear process; it involves multiple steps that can be as needed. The logical process develops over time. In the badminton case, the researcher conducted seven processes of analyzing to extract meaning from the participants’ badminton engagements based on the research questions.

### Phase 1: Keeping Accuracy

In identifying patterns of meaning and issues of the research interest, the researcher first immersed herself within the data. The time consumed to transcribe the verbal data dramatically surpassed her expectation. She needed to repeatedly listen and write down every word of the various conversations with the awareness of not simply regarding the tedious process as a simple mechanical act. Transcription is an interpretive and meaning-generating process. Keeping a verbatim account of all verbal utterance in complete conversational detail, including pauses, interjections, repetition, incomplete thoughts, and awkward diction. “Maintaining accuracy” was the first and foremost requirement of this analytic process.

### Phase 2: Generating Codes

Coding is a process of organizing data collected from the interviews and other kinds of fieldwork applied to the CCCFC badminton team. Listening, reading, and revisiting with the data, this researcher was able to generate some initial codes from the data set. “Codes refer to the most basic

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453 Ely, al et., On Writing Qualitative Research: Living by Words, 87-93.

454 Ibid.
segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon.”

There were two considerations in the researcher’s mind for generating codes: one was made up to research questions: “who,” “where,” “how,” and “why” (see part 2.3 above), and another was this study’s theoretical framework driven by the triadic space theory. Given these considerations and the huge account of transcripts, this researcher decided to manually code to identify particular, limited features of the data set, instead of coding the content of the entire data set. The researcher recognized that plenty of transcripts relevant, yet sometimes contradictory to many different “themes,” such as “home-like,” “more friendly environment,” “internal disputes,” “build trustworthiness,” and “purpose of socializing,” and managed to conceptualize the data patterns and discern relationships between the codes. In this process, the researcher paid particular attention to the inconsistencies and tensions across data items.

**Phase 3: Theme Hunting**

With the coded data, this researcher began to search for the units of analysis: themes. Themes are different from codes; they refer to a process of analyzing the initial codes extracted from the data and reaching an overarching idea associated with the relationships among individual players, the community, and the environment.

In this process of identifying themes of this study, the researcher took into account the relationships between codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes. For example, the main focus of this study was how the amateur players built social spaces for themselves and their peers. Sub-themes appeared, such as how a member-player described feelings of respect, pleasure, and satisfaction gained/not gained in the team. The researcher realized that carefully keeping the themes (related to community-building) was vital because it remained uncertain whether the themes held as they were or needed to be combined, refined, or discarded at this stage.

**Phase 4: Theme Reviewing**

To avoid missing meaningful themes, this researcher needed to review the themes extracted at the previous phase by resorting and regrouping the themes and subthemes. The theme reviewing process included questions such as,

- “What are the features of this badminton fellowship?”
- “How have the arts engagers created and sustained the public space for their social and cultural needs?”
- “What are the social and cultural needs for these Asian badminton players?”
- “To what extent do they engage with the badminton practice, and why?”
- “To what extent do they connect their badminton hobby with individual, collective, and communal experiences?”

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455 Boyatzis, Transforming Qualitative Information, 63.

456 Ibid.
• “What is the relationship between the online chat group and the on-site badminton group in building social connections within and beyond the CCCFC badminton fellowship?”
• “What are the most important elements for maintaining a community full of respect, safety, and collaboration?”
• “How does a member-players become a positive team member?”
• “Does a member-player consciously boost happiness, creativity, productivity, engagement, and motivation in this group?”

With these questions in mind, this researcher repeatedly read the entire data set to ensure that the themes correlated with the participants’ accounts and that no meaningful data was missed. Coding and recoding occurred throughout this process. Finally, the researcher came up with the thematic map, involving reworking the themes, creating new themes, and disregarding already-existing themes.

For example, the researcher removed the theme concerning “how male and female member-players contribute to this team” from the candidate thematic map because insufficient data existed to develop this theme. However, the researcher found out that this disregarded theme could be reshaped into “a home-like community” in terms of the participants' accounts. Some interviewees used an old saying: “Men are breadwinners [outside a home], and women are homemakers [inside a home].” They used this phrase to analogize the different social roles played by the male and female member-players, like a husband and wife in a family: “Of course, the male members do a lot of physical work, such as repairing the grids and pulleys, buying tools, setting up the nets, and so forth. Females players play an essential role in promoting socializing, such as holding family parties, organizing feasts in restaurants, and even having the cheerleading and dancing for the [seasonal] tournament.” In this badminton group, this analogized the fact that the male players are responsible for laboring and management, while the female players’ role is a social lubricant. The candidate thematic map needed to accurately reflect the meanings evident in the data set.

**Phase 5: Theme Defining**

This process of analysis aimed to define and redefine the substantial “essence” of each theme. At the last stage, sub-themes turned out to be useful for scaffolding a particularly broad, complex theme, paving the way for the meaning-making of the data.

An example was one of the researcher’s analyses of the participants’ reactions to the seasonal tournaments. She identified two overarching themes in the accounts: the tournaments as the bridge to bring people closer and the tournaments as the sparks of disagreement. Within each theme, three sub-themes were identified: for the bridge, the sub-themes were “familiarity,” “inclusion,” and

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457 This face-to-face interview occurred on January 11, 2020.
458 Ibid.
459 This face-to-face interview occurred on March 20, 2020.
460 Ibid.
“friendship”; for the sparks, the sub-themes were “anxiety,” “anger,” and “power.” These final themes and sub-themes resulted from a refinement process, centering on whether the purpose of the tournaments was to promote competition or friendship. This analytic process helped cultivate understanding the amateur players’ experiences and decision-making when interacting with others in a broader socio-cultural context (see 5.1.6).

Ascertaining whether the themes would make sense for this research was more of a struggle than the researcher expected. The researcher needed to constantly gain insights about herself as a researcher and to figure out what she was trying to understand and convey, and to create versions of the data that aimed to construct meaning from this badminton case. Four primary themes resulted from this analytical process: “trust-building interpersonal relationships,” “respect-sustaining within a healthy community,” “safety-ensuring individual well-being in public life,” and “capacity-transforming the public space into a home for all.”

**Phase 6: Report Producing**

The researcher analyzed the badminton case in chapter five, from 5.1.3 to 5.1.6. After carefully working out a set of themes concerning the cultural and social contexts that shaped the narratives, this researcher configured a thematic analysis written primarily for the committee readers. The researcher’s report in chapter five reflected what the researcher transcribed from the participants’ description and what this researcher captured. It was inspired by the participants’ accounts. In addition to the transcripts, the researcher’s keen awareness of the participants’ body language, gestures, and facial expressions during the interviews contributed positively to the quality of this research analysis.
Part 5
Challenges

Interviewing people in different cultures and languages about their arts experiences and everyday lives challenged this researcher. Nevertheless, the interviews resulted in a rich data set that produced knowledge about informal arts engagements in a community. The process of interviewing and thematic analysis took nearly a year, which was three times longer than expected. There are two significant challenges for assessing and evaluating the analysis process: translation and teamwork.

Translation

Paraphrasing was the main method used by the researcher to interpret the data. The quoted material in the text and appendix was this researcher’s translation, except when the interviewees offered the accounts in English. This researcher chose in-depth, open-ended, qualitative interviews as the method for this badminton case because this method ensured that the member players would share their experiences in their own words. However, translations sometimes undercut the authenticity of the original meaning when the participants chose to respond in Chinese. As a native speaker in Chinese, this researcher realized that there are many words in Chinese that cannot be directly translated into English, and vice versa.

Vocabulary exchange was challenging for some participants with regard to diction, connotation and denotation of words, and difficulties in expressing themselves when exposed to certain unfamiliar concepts or terms (e.g., public art). For example, a Chinese word for “engagement” does not exist, nor for similar yet nuanced expressions in English, such as “involvement” and “participation.” When a participant wanted to elaborate on arts engagement, she might only use one Chinese word meaning “taking part in.” Then, the researcher would transcribe the accounts into English according to her understanding of the context.

Addressing specific vocabulary challenges is important because understanding the cultural meaning of different languages required more complex consideration beyond solely linguistic matters. For example, English does not have honorifics. This researcher could scarcely convey this context by using quotes in the text when an interviewee used a pronoun, “you,” with an honorific (您). When an interviewee used idiomatic phrases in Chinese without an English equivalence, a word-for-word translation would cause misunderstandings. Therefore, this researcher paraphrased the meaning extracted from the data as simply and clearly as possible, enhancing readability. Some of the original quotes appeared in the footnotes and appendix in order to make the interview process as transparent as possible.

Teamwork
Ideally, teamwork utilized in a qualitative study can increase the research quality by situating the findings within a broader context.\textsuperscript{461} Collaborative partnership allows for a more robust contribution from different researchers from various perspectives and meaningful interventions incorporating experts for various related fields.\textsuperscript{462} This research would have benefitted from broadened understandings if teamwork was available for the data collection and analysis. This researcher planned to invite other researchers to conduct the mixed method in this case. However, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic made this researcher’s effort in vain. This researcher independently worked through the exploratory process.


Appendix 2: Survey Questions for the case study of the 227 Incident

Part 1
The incident of the fans of the actor, Xiao-zhan, blocked fan-fiction site, AO3
(The survey is used for non-commercial, academic research)

This anonymous survey invites adult participants above 18 years old. No privacy of participants will be released. Participation in this survey is purely voluntary. Completing this survey will approximately take 3-5 minutes. Thank you for your time.

This survey encompasses questions regarding the 227 Incident (the fans of Xiao had AO3 site blocked in February 2020) occurred earlier this year. Your support provides exhaustible motivation for our research on the public space. Many thanks again.

1. Your gender
   * Female
   * Male
   * Other

2. The highest level of education you currently have
   * Junior high school graduated
   * High school graduated
   * College/university (current student or graduated)
   * Graduate school or above (current student or graduated)

3. You live in
   * Cities
   * Countryside

4. What is your relationship with the 227 Incident?
   * I am a fan of Xiao-zhan
   * I am a writer on AO3 site
   * I am an audience of AO3 site
   * I am a bystander of the 227 Incident

5. How much time do you usually spend on idol-related (or AO3 site), if you are a fan of Xiao-zhan (or belong to the fandom)?
   * More than 3-5 hours per day
   * Less than 3-5 hours per day
   * More than 15-20 hours per week
   * Less than 15-20 hours per week
   * Other (a blank area to put down your opinion)
6. Your opinion on the final result of the 227 Incident
* It is just a farce involving fan-groups from different stances
* It is a battle between different users in cyberspace, but it cannot be simplified as one between the justice and the injustice
* The result of AO3’s being banned is unreasonable
* The result of AO3’s being banned is reasonable
* I have something to say (a blank area to put down your opinion)

7. Do you think the core conflicts in the 227 Incident result from the following aspects?
* Conflicts between the Xiao fans’ right to maintain Xiao's image and authors' right to create fanfictions
* Conflicts between Individual Freedom and responsibility in shared spaces
* Netizens’ failure to achieve consensus on building a more tolerant cyberspace

8. Have you ever participated in the 227 Incident directly or indirectly (including helping either party)?
* No
* Yes, directly involved
* Yes, indirectly participated

9. Your age
* 18-25 years old
* 26-35 years old
* 36-45 years old
* 46-55 years old
* 55-65 years old
* 65 years old and above

10. Thoughts on the 227 Incident: your hope of the internet environment as a public space
(The number of words is not limited)

You have finished this survey.

Thank you again for your cooperation and support!
Part 2

About This Survey
Secondary data was the primary information collected from personal sources, websites, online blogs, and journals to investigate the 227 case, including the context and details of the online controversy. It was hard to examine the sources’ and authors’ credentials and affiliations on the internet, despite the insights drawn from the digitized sources. This researcher, therefore, designed the online survey to look for more “solid” sources in which respondents were identified by region, age, and gender. The survey was designed to be as short and accessible as possible, and to target specific populations such as university students. Seven hundred and sixty-nine (769) individuals responded to the survey questionnaire. There was no follow-up on non-respondents.

This online survey occurred from April 9-23, 2021. As reported in chapter four (p 167-168), this researcher asked university faculties living in different regions of China to distribute the online survey; the WeChat platform turned out to be the most popular online survey distribution method. Those university teachers primarily distributed the survey to the students in their classes, departments, and schools. The cities where the university teachers live and work include Shanghai, Beijing, Hangzhou, Guangzhou, Xi’an, Lanzhou, Xuzhou, Wuxi, Zhenjiang, Taiyuan, Chengdu, Changchun, and Shenyang, representing the Northeast, Southwest, Southeast, and Middle West China to avoid sampling bias.463

The researcher took into account the probability of the researcher’s influence on the data when designing the collection procedure. This researcher hardly took part in the data collection process. A series of data was automatically produced by the website https://www.wenjuan.com/.

The researcher used pie charts and bar charts to showcase the data set in chapter five. Each chart has a title, labels, and a brief summary of its contents to indicate precision, either in the main body text or part of the title. Using the “minimum amount of ink for the maximized information,”464 this researcher attempted to ensure that readers could interpret the data as efficiently as possible. For example, Figure 5.4 displays the highest level of the participants’ education; each segment of the pie chart represents the proportion of the population included in the highest level of education category.

463 This online survey covered four Chinese municipalities: Shanghai, Beijing, Chongqing, and Tianjin; eleven cities in seven provinces: Jiangsu province (including cities of Wuxi, Zhenjiang, and Xuzhou), Shandong province (Jinan city), Jilin (Changchun and Shenyang cities), Sichuan (Chengdu city), Guangdong (Guangzhou city), Hainan (Haikou city), and Gansu (Lanzhou city).

The past statistics in the literature of informal arts was scarce. This researcher used descriptive analysis to interpret samples of her dissertation.\textsuperscript{465} The main purpose of using descriptive analysis was to answer questions about who, where, what, and to what extent the netizens engaged in the event. The researcher used descriptive statistics to present quantitative description of the given set of data.

Using this systematic approach helped reduce the chance of presenting misleading results. For example, charts generated from the online survey (Fig. 5.5) and the secondary resources (Fig. 5.6) displayed the consistency of the survey results: the range of ages in Xiao’s fan group was in line with that of the survey respondents, 26-35 years old. This comparison of the two charts suggests the reliability of online data collection, thus reinforcing the quality of this research.

Part 3
Xiao’s Fans

The average age of Xiao’s fandom is 31.6 years old, which does not align with the public expectation that young teenage girls are always the biggest fan group (6.4% of male and 93.6% of female fans). According to online data, 64.82% of Xiao’s fans are between 25 and 34 years old; 17.86% are between 38 and 44 years old; 13.19% are between 18 and 24 years old; less than 2% are under 18 and above 45 years old. Other data collected from 1,493 fans out of 38,260 fans of Xiao’s fandom suggests that Xiao’s fans are primarily either under 18 years old, college students, or people within 10 years of having graduated from college. Xiao’s fans engage in online discussions and on-site meetings, publish fanfiction and fanart, post supportive comments on related websites, join movie clubs, buy products Xiao endorses, and so forth.


468 Ibid.

Appendix 3: Ethical Approval of the Institutional Research Board at SMU

From: IRB Committee
To: Ying Chen, Ph.D.
Date: February 20, 2020

Dear Dr. Chen,

The IRB Committee has completed review of your application and granted approval on 2/10/2020. Your study has been approved as Exempt. You are therefore authorized to begin the research immediately.

Any proposed changes in the protocol must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment prior to implementation (45 CFR Part 46.108). Please be advised that as the principal investigator, you are required to report unanticipated adverse events to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies within 24 hours of the occurrence or upon acknowledgement of the occurrence (45 CFR Part 46.108).

All investigators and key personnel identified in the protocol must have documented Human Subjects Research training on file with this office. Certificates are valid for 3 years from completion date.

This study may be selected for a random audit under the Research Compliance Audit Program. These compliance audits maintain a comprehensive compliance program for the SMU research community and provide assurance that research is being conducted ethically and in accordance with an approved protocol.

Southern Methodist University’s Office of Research and Graduate Studies appreciates your continued commitment to the protection of human subjects in research. Should you have questions, or need to report completion of study procedures, please contact the Office of Research and Graduate Studies at 214-768-2033 or researchcompliance@smu.edu.

Thank You,

IRB Designated Reviewer

IRB Designated Reviewer

Southern Methodist University Office of Research and Graduate Studies
PO Box 750240 Dallas TX 75275-0240 Office: 214-768-2033 | Fax: 214-768-1079
Appendix 4: Human Subjects Research Submission Approval Letter

Human Subjects Research Submission Approval Letter

Date: 3/15/2021
Form: IRB Committee
To: Sophia Chen

The IRB Committee has reviewed and approved your submitted human subjects research proposal. You are therefore authorized to begin or continue the research immediately.

Study ID: H10-0131-CHES
Study Title: Reaffirming Space: Informal Arts Engagement and Social Practice in the Digital Generation
Level of Review: Exempt
Date of Submission: 3/8/2021
Type of Submission: Amendment
Approval Date: 3/15/2021
Continuing Review Due: N/A

Please be advised of the following:

1. If a Continuing Review Date is shown above, a Continuing Review Report must be submitted to the IRB prior to that date in order to continue the research.

2. Any proposed changes to the protocol must be submitted to the IRB via an Amendment Form prior to implementation. Approval of an amendment does NOT change Continuing Review due dates.

3. Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events must be reported to the IRB via an Unanticipated Problem / Adverse Event Form within 24 hours of the occurrence or upon acknowledgement of the occurrence.

4. All investigators and key personnel identified in the protocol must have documented Human Subjects Research training on file with this office. Certificates are valid for 3 years from completion date.

5. This study may be selected for a random audit under the Research Compliance Audit Program. These compliance audits maintain a comprehensive compliance program for the SMU research community and provide assurance that research is being conducted ethically, safely, and in accordance with an approved protocol.

Thank you,

IRB Committee

Office of Research
research@smu.edu
214-768-0055 | smu.edu/research
Appendix 5: An Extended Reading of Chapter Three - Asian American Then and Now

As a diverse racial group consisting of over thirty ethnic subgroups from various Asian countries, Asian Americans have been an invisible minority. They are perpetual foreigners and aliens as opposed to their white or black counterparts within the American imagination, although they are not recent immigrants in the contemporary era. For example, studies show that both white and African Americans in the South position Asian Americans in a discourse of being excluded, expelled, and marginalized. Three historical considerations are necessary for explicating the mechanisms that worked to construct and maintain Asian Americans’ racial formation. The first historical stage is that early Asian immigrants existed as a source of “voluntary” labor that succeeded the slave system within the United States, as well as in the Caribbean, Latin America, and Atlantic worlds. The second historical stage is that a deep-rooted perception of Asian Americans as foreigners-within has been maintained since the Cold War era. The third historical stage is what is happening today when hate crimes against Asian Americans continue to rise amid the pandemic; the elderly and women are the main victims. New York City had an 867% increase in Asian hate crime victims compared to the year before.


471 Khyati Y. Joshi, New Roots in America’s Sacred Ground: Religion, Race, and Ethnicity in Indian America (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 95-6.


477 Ibid.
Early experiences in the United States.

Serving as a vital strand of Asian immigrant patterns of facing violence and discrimination from 1849 in the American West and South, the Chinese in America worked for the gold rush in California, cotton production and sugar refining in the South, and transcontinental railroads construction. Chinese laborers contributed to the economy and industry in the American West and South; their social life, community organizations, customs, and family life have been described in various ways but always as exotic, if they have not been totally ignored. Disturbing experiences of Asian immigrants since their arrival to the United States have been largely ignored. Taking ethnic Chinese as an example, this section demonstrates the significance of how these historical figures have been positioned in the complicated, racial paradigm.

The history of anti-Chinese prejudice was labeled as a “negative history,” the denial and blindness to the humanity of them in the economic, political, and academic fields. Chinese immigrants were overtly expropriated, discriminated, murdered, abused, and lynched, all of which were linked to the larger racism disfiguring American life. In addition, no Chinese could testify in court against whites. This rule violated the truths “all men are created equal” and “endowed” with


481 Robert Seto Quan, Lotus among the Magnolias: The Mississippi Chinese: From the Gold Rush to the Present (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1982).

482 Daniels, Asian America: Chinese and Japanese, 4.


485 People v. Hall, 4 Cal. 309 (1854), available from https://studylib.net/doc/8726435/people-v.-hall; accessed on March 3, 2021. This California Supreme Court case ruled that the testimony of a Chinese man who witnessed a murder by a white man was inadmissible, denying Chinese alongside Native and African Americans the status to testify in courts against whites.
“certain unalienable rights.” The inhumane treatment toward the Chinese laborers was a national rather than an endemic phenomenon. Those Chinese immigrants were curiously described as “silent sojourners” (which explicitly differentiated them from other immigrations) in American history (if not the White American history), and they were not given the chance to describe their lives that were full of murderous violence, social ostracism, and discriminatory legislation.488–489

Drawing on two Chinese words, “coolie” and “shanghai,” one may better catch a glimpse of the big picture of Chinese immigrants’ mistreatment. In Chinese, the term “coolie” (苦力) has referred to those who sell labor power (as opposed to those who use mental, or both physical and mental powers) for a living. “Coolie” was recorded as early as the Southern dynasty (南朝) in the 5th century AD, and literally meant “hard worker,” with the same pronunciation as in contemporary English. Chinese coolies were depicted as “free workers” who were transported to South America and other Western countries.490–491 These Chinese contract laborers were cheaper and more “docile” than the African slave labor, and the coolie trade transformed the white-black racial and slavery


490 Moon Ho Jung, Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 18. The origin of the word “coolie” is debatable. In the Oxford Dictionary, the term “coolie” was originated from mid-17th century from Hindu probably meant “slave,” available from Lexico, https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/coolie; accessed on February 27, 2021. The origin of the term “coolie” was in Yan Jiang (444-505 AD), Autobiography, “One should enjoy life while it lasts, rather than working as hard as a coolie for a fame after life.” 江淹 (444-505 AD), 自序传, “人生当适性为乐，安能精益苦力，求身后之名哉!”

binary into a multiracial formation in the South.\textsuperscript{492-493} There were some 300,000 Chinese coolies working in America from 1849 to 1882, and the “Chinese coolie trade” spanned from 1806 when the first Chinese labor was brought to Trinidad until after World War I.\textsuperscript{494} A vast majority of the Chinese laborers were abducted or even kidnapped from the Southeast coastal area of China (e.g., Guangdong, Fujian provinces and Shanghai) to supplement enslaved Africans in Southern America.\textsuperscript{495}

A change of the connotation of the word “shanghai”—transformed from a colorful, or at least neutral noun in Chinese to a wicked, even immoral verb in English—represents how the “pig-tailed coolies” fell victim to racial discrimination and various exploitations.\textsuperscript{496} Ruthless evidence related to the term “Shanghai” showcases that the early Chinese immigrants encountered violence and discrimination throughout the American West in the 1870s and 1880s.\textsuperscript{497} Shanghai has been a prosperous place beside the Yangzi River for thousands of years and is now one of the biggest and richest metropolises in China.\textsuperscript{498} Because of China’s (the Qing dynasty) military failure in the First Opium War (1839-1842), China was forced to open to outside trade and political domination. An unequal treaty, the Treaty of Nanjing made Shanghai an International Settlement in 1845 (ended in 1943).\textsuperscript{499} Shanghai became a “gold land” for businessmen of the imperial West in the 1850s and

\begin{footnotesize}

\item[493] Jung, \textit{Coolies and Cane}.


\item[496] Shanghai, Pearl of the Orient, was an important colonial metropolis in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries.

\item[497] Nokes, \textit{Massacred for Gold}, 3.


\item[499] Susanna Hoe and Derek Roebuck, \textit{The Taking of Hong Kong: Charles and Clara Elliot in China Waters} (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), 203.
\end{footnotesize}
later, “the paradise of adventurers” until the 20th century.\textsuperscript{500-501} By then, the word “Shanghai,” had transformed into a verb in English for “kidnapping, stealing, or taking without permission” by means of fraud, intimidation, or violence.\textsuperscript{502} In one decade between 1849 and 1859, more than a thousand Chinese people were shanghaied from Shanghai (more labors from Southeast China, such as Guangdong and Fujian provinces) to America, Australia, and Africa as seamen or contract coolies for the profit of the boarding masters, mining corporations, and many other industries.\textsuperscript{503-504}


Despite the Chinese workers’ contributions to the economic infrastructure of America, what this ethnic group had gained was the heathen stereotype rather than respect and gratitude. In the 1860s, eighty percent of some 12,000 to 14,000 Chinese coolies hired by the Central Pacific demonstrated remarkable capability, effectiveness, and instrumentality to accomplish the western end of the Central Pacific Railroad line, which made little progress due to its dangers and difficulty. Rare records reveal how many Chinese laborers lost their lives in constructing the railroad, including but not limited to the roadbeds carved through towering cliffs 1,400 feet above rivers, drilling holes and lighting explosives in wicker baskets on cliffs, and the threat of snow slides and avalanches. In late 1870, the Sacramento Reporter estimated that 1,200 Chinese railroad workers died based on the weight of the remains that were shipped back to China.

These early Chinese coolies, however, were stereotyped as evil aliens or eave beasts. An 1882 political cartoon titled “What Shall We Do with Our Boys?” vilifies Chinese workers in the image of as a monster with a hideous face, a flying tail behind his head (it is obviously originated from the characteristic of a Chinese coolie who is male), a twisted body with many arms seizing different tools for a living and sending his earnings back to China; white young men stand idly by. This image explicitly targeted the Chinese coolies as the competitive opposition to the white juveniles when a popular hostility in American society toward Chinese migrants prevailed in the late-nineteenth-century West merely because their appearance, outfits, and social norms were too different from the westerners. As discrimination, hostility, and expulsion become increasingly common, the Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which prohibited immigration from China, naturalizing discrimination on the basis of race. In the 1910s and 1920s, racist attitudes, policies, and activities at multiple levels in society sought to prevent the Chinese from

508 Ibid. Also see Judy Yung, Gordon H. Chang, and Him Mark Lai, ed., Chinese American Voices, 3.
509 Chang, Ghosts of Gold Mountain, 227.
settling down, becoming naturalized citizens, owning land, intermarrying, and so forth, all of which prevented this ethnic group from integrating into mainstream society in the US.\textsuperscript{512}

The Cold War era

The historical trajectory of US racism against Asian immigrants constantly modified the racial landscape, demonstrating how people of Asian ancestry struggled to unpack their “self-identity,” which was shaped by the values and attitudes of the ruling white class.\textsuperscript{513} In the 1920s and 1930s, lawmakers codified Asian immigrants as external to American polity and society, and the perception of social consensus regarded them as outsiders wholly incapable of assimilation.\textsuperscript{514} Being racially and culturally different from white Americans, the excluded immigrants from Japan and China were subjected to discriminatory and dehumanizing restrictions nationwide (e.g., bars to naturalization, residential segregation, and occupational discrimination).\textsuperscript{515} In the 1930s and 1940s, US-born, second-generation Japanese and Chinese populations began to vie with the immigrant elite for opportunities for leadership positions and self-representation in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{516}

After World War II, the American way of life was explicitly divided in two: the life based on the will of the majority who were “free people” defined as citizens and the life based on the will of the minority who were “outsiders” defined as non-citizens.\textsuperscript{517} In the mid-twentieth century, the federal government framed this nation as the leader of the free world and needed to showcase its


\textsuperscript{517} President’s Committee on Civil Right, To Secure These Rights (New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947), 30-2, 146-8.
democratic principles. Its ideological antagonist, the Soviet Union, attacked US democracy as “an empty fraud” by disseminating various stories. The federal government realized that the integration of all citizens, particularly the racialized Asian and black groups, was the right strategy to maintain its democratic leadership position in the world.

On one side, the rise of nationalism resulted in excluding disloyal outsiders, and loyalty became the touchstone of being a “qualified” citizen of America. The US Cold War policy of internationalism and communist containment established dual standards that categorized people as “loyal citizens” to be integrated into a dominant society or “alien subversives” to be deported. On the other side, the Civil Rights movements became essential for America and all citizens. Liberalism, with freedom, rationality, and a belief in human development at its core, challenged white supremacy and called for the protection and equality of all individuals and social groups. The emerging of the majority-minority binary mingled with pro-war patriotism, anti-Communism, and liberal assimilation, necessitated new ways of assimilating and integrating non-whites within America’s racial order to pursue the country’s racial diversity and improved national identity.

518 Ibid.


520 See footnote 55.

521 See footnote 55.


As silenced people and aliens ineligible for citizenship in previous decades, the Asian-ethnic populations were suddenly transformed into the most exceptional people of color, the “model minority,” in the mid-1960s.\(^{525}\) This seemingly flattering description highlights a subtle yet profound metamorphosis of Asian populations’ identity formation. The transformation from unassimilated aliens to the exemplars of colored citizens seemed to empower economic and political mobility of the minority and a lifting of the racial “stigma” for global legitimacy to display the nation’s ability to amend its racist past.\(^{526}\) In fact, racial segregation in the US has never been fundamentally solved. Basically, this racial invention represents nothing but a strategy of assimilating the Other under the cloak of racial liberalism by telling stories about race and US democracy in the face of Soviet propaganda to win the allegiance of newly decolonized non-Western countries.\(^{527-528}\)

The racial taxonomy of Asian groups has intertwined with the black-white conflict that has prevailed in America for centuries.\(^{529}\) A detailed comparison among non-whites—Native Americans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans—reveals anything but a humanitarian, judicial path to


achieve racial equality.\textsuperscript{530} For the black-white conflict, the abolition of slavery and apartheid had little effect on a balanced distribution of incomes, employment, housing, and education between black and white citizens.\textsuperscript{531} On the other hand, the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Right Act—a culmination of racial liberalism aiming to alter the multifaceted disparities between black and white Americans—encountered critique from both the progressive and conservative powers.\textsuperscript{532} Unnerved by the wide-ranging, radical challenges of black power that endangered the conventional white privilege and a particular version of the American way of life, campaigns of postwar racial liberalism and political-cultural conservatism felt an imperative to validate the assimilation of minorities while ultimately maintaining white supremacy.\textsuperscript{533} Attempting to stop the decline of “law and order” supposedly threatened by black and brown peoples and to convince black Americans of the credibility and possibility of the ethnic integration, authorities sought to portray Asians as upstanding citizens capable of assimilating into mainstream culture.\textsuperscript{534}

The stereotype of being intelligent, family-centered, hardworking, and successful fails to account for the diversity of people and cultures within and outside the Asiatic communities. In the cold-war atmosphere of the 1950s, other Asian groups including Filipinos, Indians, and Koreans actively promoted themselves as “good” and “loyal” citizens, but they failed to gain the same attention as Chinese and Japanese people received from the government, academia, the mainstream media, and the general population.\textsuperscript{535} Other populations of color experienced little advantage from this racial measurement and remained vulnerable to poverty and social isolation.\textsuperscript{536} The model minority themselves suffered from problems of self-determination, largely influenced by values

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid.
\item Henry Yu, Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), viii.
\item For example, Mexican workers.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
defined by the white middle class as well as from being a political tool utilized by the authority to justify the Black population’s position by showing the “successful” adaptation to the system.537 While serving as a wedge separating Asian Americans from other minority communities, the false narrative of model minority did nothing to foster trust and dignity among the general public.

In 1968, the term “Asian American” was coined by an American historian and civil rights activist, Yuji Ichioka, aiming to create a collective identity for people of Asian descent in the U. S., including diverse populations.538 This term represented ethnic-consciousness, rejecting the Western-imposed oriental stereotypes, promoting civil rights, and strengthening connection between Asian groups.539 Today, “Asian American” has become a term for American-born and immigrated peoples who trace their roots to Asia. Asian Americans remain a “reticent” minority group and there is insufficient acknowledgment of the racism, teasing, bullying, and violence that they face in society. They were deemed the “model minority,” yet never model “American.”540 Generally, the community of Asian Americans is posed as a panethnic racial and political classification and has been superficially and similarly racialized as people of an “oriental face,” despite the complexity inherent in this community encompassing more than thirty ethnic groups and many more cultural segments.541

Various exclusions continue to plague Asian Americans. Asian American identity formation has proved to be a remarkably complex paradigm that prevails in America’s history of race and played a key role in their struggle for dignity. What they have gained from the glorified label of model minority is not prosperity but hardship. In 2018, Asian Americans had the most significant rate of income inequality in the States, and research shows that they have high rates of suicide, depression, and anxiety associated with self-esteem, collective attachment, and discrimination.542-543


539 Ibid, 9-13, 116-7, 139.


For Asian Americans, the forms of discrimination, violence, and hostility in society are neither disappearing nor static, but change over time and vary across space.

The Pandemic Era.

A glimpse of the history of Asian Americans’ immigration and identity transformation is relevant with an examination of the approaches through which they create a space full of potentiality, possibility, and safety in everyday life. Historically, the mistreatment facing Asian minorities in the U. S. has been either condoned by mainstream society or insufficiently condemned. Asian Americans suffer tremendously in their desire to be understood, known, and accepted as American citizens rather than “deemed foreigners” and “perpetual outsiders.” For Asians in America, the scenario of racism, discrimination, violence, and disparities against them has never changed, but gets worse when they become scapegoats for a problem facing America.

The arrival of the pandemic in 2020 made the stressful experiences for Asian Americans as a normal part of life. Since the coronavirus pandemic began in early 2020, Asians in America have become targets of verbal harassment, physical assault, and even deadly attacks. Asians in the U. S. reported being spit on in grocery stores, robbed in their cars, yelled at on their jogs, called racist names while waiting in line, slashed in the face on their way home, violently knocked to the ground, shoved to the ground on casual walks, among many other severely harmful situations. Individual Asian Americans and their families, and Asian businesses and properties have been vandalized with racist tags. Any one, at any age, who is Asian or perceived to be Asian at all, can


be a victim. Wearing a face mask, a gesture that is associated with Asians, or even not doing anything “wrong,” could be enough to provoke a racist attack or public hysteria.549-550-551-552

This increase in racist incidents nationwide has resulted in a deep fear among Asian communities of xenophobic rhetoric and racist attacks.553 When the pandemic spread across China last December and disinformation reigned, the political leadership planted seeds of hatred and stereotypes of Asian Americans in exclusionary national polity (e.g., the Chinese Exclusion Act and Japanese Internment) as well as public speeches (e.g., governmental officials repeatedly referred to Covid-19 as the “China Virus”).554-555-556 Simultaneously, media support disproved conspiracy theories (e.g., Covid-19 originated from a Chinese lab) to attract attention and stir tensions among the public. Consequently, popular culture that perpetuates Asian stereotypes was exacerbated, and the America racial climate during the pandemic harkened back to the decades of state-sanctioned discrimination against Asian Americans. The Asian American community continues to endure the


fear and pain resulting from relentlessly violent attacks, and seniors and women of oriental faces are the main targets.\textsuperscript{557}

**A Geographical Perspective**

From the Lefebvrian perspective, spaces change over time according to how people use, imagine, and symbolize them.\textsuperscript{558-559} When considering the United States as a physical place and, more importantly, as a specific, conceptualized space generated by the actions and imaginations of the dwellers, one may understand space as both real and imagined.\textsuperscript{560-561} For Asian American immigrants, this nation (the US) means “home,” and it is filled with generational memories, social relations, and cultural activities. Their informal arts practices make sense of a particular place at a local, regional, or national level. For these immigrants, the sense of home is a shifting idea which stresses meanings of places (e.g., Texas, as a particular geographical region in which Asian Americans inhabit), and combines the social notions of having a home and a feeling of being-at-home embedded in political, economic, and cultural dimensions. A geographical view is useful for examining space created by and for a marginalized group aiming to construct “a different society”—fairer, more just, and more productive—as the ultimate goal of public-art.\textsuperscript{562}

From a geographical perspective, history can be seen as a “site” modified by the human body through a multi-faceted process involving psychological, emotional, and practical activities, such as interacting with the place, establishing an attachment to the place, and exploring the identities of the place. Understanding people and their experiences serves as a medium for elucidating the notion of space, which is a concrete abstraction constructed by and for amateur arts engagers. Drawing on Lefebvre’s work on the production of space, the informal arts engagers of diverse backgrounds create collective spaces as the site of ongoing interactions of social relations rather than the mere result of such interactions.\textsuperscript{563}


\textsuperscript{558} Many people would frame the sort of space creation or meaning-making that the author of this study is discussing through a Foucauldian power lens. Even someone like de Certeau talks about tactics, which is a form of subtle challenges by marginalized groups to those in power. One could easily apply that type of power lens to this project though the researcher of this study has decided to eschew a reduction of cultural processes to power. Because this study is more focused on the community construction and within the Asian culture, the Foucauldian power lens is not the best fit for this research.

\textsuperscript{559} Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.


\textsuperscript{563} Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 38-9.
The space of historical experiences is not a neutral background for humans, but a site filled with aspirations, imaginations, and activities of its dwellers. In light of Lefebvre’s work on social space, the notion of “body” and the transformative concept of “place” are instrumental to validate social and political struggles of the Asian American community in history.\textsuperscript{564} The notion of “body” refers to historical figures as a diversified public. The difference between people (e.g., economic, social, racial classifications) is the key to understanding the significance of building space for and by the cultural engagers themselves. This significance is also the central theme of this study.

The understanding of the conception of body as a medium for defining and transforming places. Empirically, because community-oriented informal arts engagements demonstrate the social reality of each group that pursues cultural fulfillment, a rigorous examination of the realities, especially social inequality, created through people’s everyday experiences becomes necessary for amateur arts engagements. Social movements influence how ethnic groups find identities for themselves and their communities; confusions appears when misunderstandings and miscommunications in the sociopolitical space generate reactions in specific groups.\textsuperscript{565} The community consciousness in space created by and for informal arts engagers likely underlies the historical, material reality of being excluded. The “excluded,” in Lefebvre’s sense, result from the production of differences in space.\textsuperscript{566} The study of informal arts hopes to transform social inequality rather than merely reform the existing paradigm, which is in line with what Lefebvre advocates (e.g., “the political action of minorities”).\textsuperscript{567} Informal arts practices are the means by which these common people construct and sustain the social space in which they gain knowledge, exchange experience, and share feelings about the arts activity, their material constraints, and cultural sensibilities.

The ethnographic and sociopolitical analysis of the Asian American community assesses the validity of the relationships among various theoretical concepts of social space in a cross-cultural setting. 1) Taking concepts from Lefebvre’s work on spatial practice, this research analyzes the macro-political, social, and economic contexts of marginalized people that provide the opportunity for collective activity (the arts engagement) to take place. 2) This study utilizes the concept of Ranciere’s everyday aesthetics to investigate how informal arts groups’ structure, networks, and commitment are linked to the arts participants. 3) Within the particular generation of meaning approaches, this study examines how the particular community uses cultural-specific symbols and norms to create, explore, and struggle for a collective identity. In the Lefebvrian sense of social space, Asian American communities’ informal arts practices can be seen as representations of their community space and interactive social activities, which help them find meanings in their everyday lives.\textsuperscript{568}

\textsuperscript{564} Henri Lefebvre, \textit{The Production of Space}, 194.


\textsuperscript{566} Lefebvre, \textit{The Production of Space}, 373.

\textsuperscript{567} Lefebvre, \textit{The Production of Space}, 55.

\textsuperscript{568} Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 373-5.
Lefebvre stresses the importance of considering space as both concrete and abstract, though he is limited in elaborating on the complex relationships among the conceived, the perceived, and the lived space in practical ways. From the perspective of informal arts, lived space serves as a mediator of the relationship between different elements of space because this space is filled with living bodies and how they imagine the space. Another term “thirdspace,” coined by Soja, helps decipher the concept that space is both real and imagined.569 According to Soja, “thirdspace” provides a method of thinking about and interpreting space from spatial, historical, and social perspectives by juxtaposing ways by which to analyze space and time employed by Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault. Borrowing from Lefebvre’s “triple dialect,” Soja suggests a “Thirdspace perspective,” supplementing the dialectic relation between history and society into a triple dialectic among people/bodies, social relations, and environments.570-571

The notion of “spatial practice” is central to understanding a synthetic relationship between perception of a place and meaningful action of the “living body” within the public sphere in the context of the everyday experience related to historiographical, sociopolitical, and philosophical dimensions.572 As discussed in chapter two, the spatial practice alludes to the perceived space associated with any symbolism specific to the individual, experiences in the environment, and how an individual perceives the environment. The term “body” therefore emphasizes the importance of the connections between power and place, meaning “image,” “representation,” and “discourse.”573 From an informal arts perspective, the notion of “body” denotes both the subject who determines the direction in which one governs social activities to configure the space and the object influenced by various conceptual determinations. The concept of “body” is neither an entirely concrete nor abstract concept in power relations as discussed in the early chapter, but a set of multifaceted social-spatial relationships in conceptual, historical, political dimensions.574 Both notions of body and space are critical themes relevant to dialogue about informal arts engagement. Bodies are “repositories” of histories and experiences of humans as actors engaging in arts activities; space refers to historically organized and patterned capacities, ideas, and values of the dwellers.575


572 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 38.

573 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 194-5. Simply put, in this study, “image,” “representation,” and “discourse” refer to concrete experiences of the chosen group of people and their conscious exploration of their environment.


575 Ibid.
The historical change and continuity result from actions of concrete individuals and groups; it is also the history of everyday behaviors and experiences in the Asian American community. To date, such life experiences have moved into the realms of neighborhoods and public attitudes; this trend suggests a shift from historical inquiry about ethnic-specific inequality to their social practices as everyday arts activities which are relevant to this study. The pivotal role of community-oriented arts study lies in how the immigrant residents search their individual and community identities generated in and through the web of social relations, which in turn serves as the vehicle of connecting people with the places where they live, establishing mutual trust, exhibiting the ability to create dialogue, and promote new, larger communities.

This research views informal arts as spatial practices and routine ways of life by drawing on Lefebvre’s ideas of social space. The conversation about informal arts centers on people’s opportunity and dignity instead of a narrow set of references. Understanding the Asian American experience in American history serves a significant role in making sense of the grassroots’ capacity to achieve their fullest potential in public life. People’s everyday existence explored in this study is the basic form of living, the highest form of democracy in the public sphere. Because public spaces, such as cities, plazas, parks, and even cyberspaces, have become increasingly aestheticized, these shared spaces provide more opportunities for everyone—especially those belonging to unrepresented, marginalized communities—to express cultural needs, to explore identities as residents, and to claim the right as sociopolitical actors. Drawing on the brief history of Asian Americans, this section highlights how the slippage between the categories of neighbor and citizen, and between perceived space and conceived space, functions in everyday politics, and historical geography—as the potentiality for transformation from the merely “occupied” place to the “shared” space.

In the realm of informal arts practice, Asian Americans as a marginalized group, in space and in social relations, need to be examined within the transformative space. This perspective brings Asian Americans into the public sphere associated with cultural, sociopolitical, and historiographical forms of the nation. As little work has yet acknowledged informal arts experiences of Asian Americans, this research centers on literature and history in Asian American studies to examine their expressive activities in everyday life functioning as strategic responses to “historically differentiated forms of disempowerment” that usually impact social relationship and community building. The historiographical discussion positions informal arts activities within a broadened context and expands on Lefebvre’s construction of social space, where creating cultural possibility is necessary for social transformation.

Appendix 6: About the CCCFC badminton WeChat group

Founded in 2012, the CCCFC badminton WeChat group is a free social networking platform with 384 members as of April 16, 2022, where every participant can send and receive information. This online group serves as a part of daily communication and an extension of the badminton group for social interactions and networking. Information extracted from this online platform served as supplemental data for the analysis of the central themes: cohesion, belonging and collaboration in this community.

This researcher joined the CCCFC online chat group in December 2020 to conduct participant observation. She observed how the participants developed various relationships within (and outside) this badminton community, such as the ways they “talked” to each other, how they worked together to achieve common goals (e.g., hosting seasonal tournaments), how they provided information to help other members, and how they organized other online groups to help medical staff during the pandemic, and more. The data, obtained by this researcher from this online chat group were discussed in different chapters of this study depending on the context.

This online chat group helped disseminate information about its weekly activities (e.g., schedule changes of an arranged badminton practice, “lost and found” information after a practice, the need for volunteers before a tournament). Sharing interesting videos, international badminton tournaments, and even some jokes helped create a social space for all the members to relieve stress and depression during quarantine. This online chat group became a shelter in times of trouble, according to the interviews.

This researcher counted the number of messages that appeared in this online group each day from January 1, 2020 to June 1, 2021. She used the 18 months of the daily conversation data to analyze the relationship between conversation volume and the group dynamics. This researcher counted one by one how many messages were presented each day, which were preserved on both her cellphone and laptop. She checked the number and content of messages sent and received each day, with careful attention to accuracy. The counting process involved multiple times, in different orders, to maintain accuracy. As revealed in the interviews, most member users acknowledged that they would check the group chat at least once a day, regardless of whether they replied to the messages.

Data of the daily messages from January 1, 2020 to June 1, 2021, is shown below.
Table 1. Daily conversation in the CCCFC online group from January 1 – December 31, 2020
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Table 2. Daily conversation in the CCCFC online group from January 1 – May 31, 2021
Appendix 7: Some questions important to this study

“Why do the author choose Lefebvre and Ranciere as the main theorists in this study?”

Compared to discussions of artist-audience or policymaker-audience relationships that prevail in public art literature, this study provides a unique perspective from participants’ expressive experiences and backgrounds. This exploratory conversation needs a theoretical framework composed of a critical space theory and aesthetic theory to examine the multi-layered relationships among space, groups, and daily life. The connections between art and everyday life examined in this research require a fusion of social activity and new aesthetic understanding in order to explore the crossroads of people, space, and environment outside of the strictly artistic context.

Lefebvre opens up new ways to understand the process of social practices; any scholar who discusses critical space theory at the very least must acknowledge his philosophy in the sociological field. His insights into the spatial triad, everyday life, and social construction have made him a leading figure in philosophy and social theory, and have vitalized cultural studies. Of the numerous concepts in Lefebvre’s contributions, this research uses three concepts to examine informal arts engagers in the context of everyday life. First, place becomes space through people who give meaning to the place. Second, constructing social relations is a process instead of a final product. Third, the daily routines illuminate social relations.

A contemporary French philosopher, Ranciere has become one of the most influential voices in art history, literary, and art criticism. His theme of aesthetics is useful for this research that centers on the connections between art and everyday life and challenges the outcome-centered classification of art. Ranciere explores the relationships between aesthetic perceptions and daily lives of ordinary people in a broad historical context, which align with Lefebvre’s space theory. Ranciere emphasizes ordinary people’s capacity to discover, express, and create aesthetic space for their existence by reassessing the divisions between art and politics as life experiences.

Theories of Lefebvre and Ranciere provide a strong impetus for this new conceptualization of social space in the public art arena. Both scholars emphasize the right to life; in Lefebvre, the right to space; in Ranciere, the right to aesthetics. Both center on the process of vitalizing a mundane environment. Both see ordinary people as creators and beneficiaries of social space. A theoretical framework that combines the ideas of Lefebvre and Ranciere paves the way for this research to examine how ordinary people transform the social space and make sense of their lives through avocational arts practices in daily routines. It also enables this research to employ daily life as the meeting ground where the right to aesthetics and social relations meet.

“Why the author add the 227 conflict as a complementary case study to this research?”

This second case study adds breadth to the present research by providing a completely online example of informal arts as subcultural activities. It also broadens the sample of individuals in relationship to geography, as it was difficult to do fieldwork during the global pandemic. Additionally, it widens the average age of individuals as a research sample, which is exceptionally important given the generational difference in China and the historical context, which is a central point in space theory and analyzed in chapters V and VI.

“What does “diversity” mean in this study?”
There are many ways to understand diversity in different settings or with different participants. This thesis considers “diversity” from three positions related to the two Asian case studies: racial diversity (from an external position), cultural diversity (from an internal position), and interests (capacity) diversity (within the informal art group). The researcher discussed these considerations in chapter one associated with identity.

1) Racial Diversity – from an external position

Asian American communities are historically regarded as “invisible,” “silent aliens,” and “perpetual foreigners” (discussed in chapter 3 and appendix 5). It is important to speak for the Asian community who discover their ability and need for social life and aesthetic practices through collectively creating new social interactions in their daily routine. It is also important to highlight the historically marginalized group of people for whom public art serves. These Asian people co-create new social spaces for the new structure of social relations to improve their quality of life in a shared environment.

Understanding “public” as a collection of various participants is central to understanding the goal of public art. Based on the theoretical framework, this thesis emphasizes the importance of understanding what concerns people most in their everyday activities. The CCCFC badminton group in both real and virtual settings provides a social space of safety, respect, and friendliness, formed by and for the players, especially during the pandemic crisis when the Covid hate crimes against Asian Americans were on the rise. One of this thesis’ main tenets is to raise awareness and give voice to marginalized populations by exploring Asian Americans’ informal art engagements. These Asian people’s informal arts engagements demonstrate their ability to cultivate respect, trust, and altruism within and beyond their group, thus contributing to a broadened community beneficial from their co-creation of healthy social relations.

2) Cultural Diversity – from an internal position

Race is primarily a biological construct, while culture is tied to a shared environment. Based on this researcher’s participant observation, daily communication, and interviews in the targeted informal arts community, two Asian or even two players from the same country (e.g., China or Malaysia) don’t necessarily share the same culture. It’s very likely they don’t. Such assumptions can be the basis for widespread casual discrimination in daily life.

The Asian community should not be seen as monolithic but as a group of people with rich cultural diversity in our conversation about public art. Whether someone of Asian descent considers themself American, Texan, Indian, Malaysian, or Chinese is not discernible based on their race alone, though it does play a large part in how they are perceived by the outside world. From the participants’ perspective, this study investigated how people create new social spaces for the new structure of social relations to maintain their lifestyle during the pandemic crisis. Based on this researcher’s observation, an informal public art engager’s cultural background can reflect her or his heritage, manner, language(s), speaking style, culinary tastes, and world views. Understanding these aspects of an informal art community is essential to understanding why this thesis emphasizes “public” as a diversified collection of people, thus expanding public art research. This study thus deeply values how the informal art engagers of cultural differences in one Asian community collectively construct a shared social space.
3) Diversity in Interests – from the new aesthetic perspective

Understanding the arts members’ various personal interests is important to understand how they perceive the individual sense of belonging and communal identities. The CCCFC case showed that a group of people from different backgrounds, personal experiences, and interests could foster engagement and productivity in and beyond the badminton group. The Xiao fans in the 227 case demonstrate diverse interests through co-creating multiple fan groups and a language system, fanspeak, to pursue their freedom of expression. Positive impacts generated from a wide variety of their social interactions that benefited the given informal public art community and its outside entities.

Understanding the diversity in the interests of informal arts engagers is critical for understanding the variety of informal arts engagers. Through exploring people’s everyday activities as social and aesthetic practices in a community, this thesis emphasizes the various ways each informal public art engager has a part in the distribution of the sensory experience. Understanding diversity in this thesis is essential for understanding equality as a start point rather than a destination in the dialogue about informal public art, which resonates with the theoretical framework discussed in chapters two and three.

Drawing on the theoretical framework, this study aims to promote a new conceptual diversity in public life which is simple: every individual as an informal public art engager is diverse and unique. The researcher also considers other types of diversity—religion, age, physical conditions, political orientation, gender identity, and socio-economic status—when selecting case studies for this study. The critical point is that every informal public art community should be seen as a collection of different people with sensory, cognitive, emotional, and physical experiences to engage in the co-creation of a shared space for themselves and others.

Based on long-term participant/non participant observation on various Asian informal (and formal) arts communities in the DFW area, this researcher found that although many informal arts groups are racially homogeneous, those with a stronger sense of inclusion, openness, and diversity tend to foster more cross-culture interactions than most other informal arts groups. In these Asian informal art communities, the church-based informal art groups seem have higher levels of awareness of seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially those in need. This could be a long-term direction for further exploration.

In sum, diversity in this thesis highlights the commonness of participation in collectively constructing a better social space.
Appendix 8: More examples of fanspeak

For the convenience of input and (or) to avoid being recognized by outsiders (non-fans), fans use some acronyms or abbreviations associated with fans’ behaviors or emotions in the fan circle. For example, Bi-Chong (闭崇, an abbreviation stands for Bi-Zui-Chong-Bai, 闭嘴崇拜, meaning “shut up and adore, concentrate on worshipping your idol”), Li-Tao (李涛, a homophonaous abbreviation which stands for Li-Xing-Tao-Lun, 理性讨论, meaning “rational discussion”), BLX (an acronym for Bo-Li-Xin, 玻璃心, meaning snowflake, for those easily upset or offended), and Tang-Ping-Ren-Chao (躺平任嘲, abbreviated from “being open to acknowledgments of the idol’s black spots and candidly accepting criticism and comments from others”). These creative and interesting terms function as semiotic nuances and narration to evoke other fans’ emotions within a focused group.577

On the other side, fans are depicted as overly obsessive, irrational, and even antisocial, especially by non-fans or by the opposing fan group.578 Some fans self-identify as “diehard-fans” (铁粉) and even “idiotic-fans” (脑残粉), while some others are reluctant to accept such titles. “Single-mindedness,” “intolerance,” and “stubbornness” are the terms categorizing fans and their groups on various social media platforms.579 Such unflattering terms either have a connection to poor mental health (e.g., Nao Can-fans, 脑残粉, meaning mentally disabled or idiotic fans) or even curse fans to a vicious degree (e.g., “two hundred yards out,” 两百码外, literally meaning to curse a fan to be hit by a car, instigating the person’s death). Despite the uncomplimentary denotations of these fan terms, one needs to notice that these terms usually aim to add levity to the identification of fans (and their groups) in a playful, humorous manner, rather than attempting to condemn fans.

The unflattering fan terms increase the interest of fans by separating some fans from others and signaling a type of strongly affective commitment, which produces greater visibility of fan groups (or the opposing ones) and emphasizes the identification of fans as “part of a community” instead of “isolated individuals.”580 Simultaneously, fanspeak, as an attractive communication tool created and used by fans, provides individual fans with “a sense of individual identity or style” because an individual fan needs a voice to claim and maintain one’s position within the group.581

577 Ibid, 205-6.


Fanspeak functions as the representation of fans’ personal and collective identities to reinforce the notion of informal arts engagers as those showing highly fan-related enthusiasm and behavior.
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**CHAPTER 2**


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**CHAPTER 3**


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**CHAPTER 4**


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CHAPTER 5


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**CHAPTER 6**


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**CHAPTER 7**


**APPENDIX 1 & 2**


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