

Chinese Traditional Paper- Folding Practices as a Social Aesthetic

*of Baan Saan Community Art, Phuket Old
Town: A Case Study*

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Abstract

This research utilizes an anthropological lens to examine the understanding of social aesthetics within a local market community with a unique traditional heritage. The data for this research was collected during a series of workshops aimed at creating community art in the Baan Saan Community of Phuket, Thailand. The artists and community leaders at first proposed graffiti and wall paintings, which are often found in modern South-East Asian tourist hotspots. However, the community members chose instead to conduct a workshop on traditional methods of folding joss paper. The joss paper is contextualized in this merchant community where the aesthetic value of exchange and Hokkien-Chinese cosmology are commemorated. The research found that the material in everyday life could initiate social aestheticism when it is elevated to an artistic state in the process of the workshop. Thereafter, the social relations of community members are strengthened through the engagement with the traditional material and artistic process.

Keywords: *Community Art, Chinese Practice, Phuket Old Town, Social Aesthetic, Thailand*

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Introduction

This article aims to study the social aesthetic of community art through examining art forms, meanings of art forms, and mechanisms of community participation in artmaking. Community art is a concept that focuses on designing a process for community members to participate in creating artwork. Art is utilized to communicate the story of the community, by allowing the members to express their opinions and convey their thoughts independently (Fortunati, 2005). Throughout the process, each member develops a sense of belonging to the community (Rothenberg, 1998) and expresses their identity to the public (Niziolek, 2018). Art thus becomes a bottom-up tool of expression to communicate social, cultural, and political matters (Niziolek, 2010). In many cities, artforms are represented as the language of people in manifesting cultural, racial, gendered, and religious differences.

The aesthetics become a basis of sociality in which persons interact to each other by seeing and hearing. Through the sensory process, people distinguish their personal sphere (Simmel, 1997; Munday & Anderson, 2016) and unite the social groups with people who has aesthetic perception in common (Simmel, 1968). Therefore, social aesthetics engage in social context (Berleant, 2005) particular to communications, politics, and productions (Carnival & Pinotti, 2021). In the process to create social aesthetics, the center is a material in everyday life whose values are different by the perception based on social background of a person (Olcese & Savage, 2015). This makes the social aesthetics dynamic. When a traditional material faces with transformation, its production and communication are reconstructed to maintain the social aesthetics (Benzecry, 2015). For this reason, researchers raised the question whether it is possible to create social aesthetics by utilizing traditional materials provided by community members.

Phuket is one of the world's most popular tourist destinations. However, there has been a recent trend in rebranding the city image to attract visitors who are interested in Phuket's unique history and cultural traditions. The initiative of Phuket Old Town refurbishment has brought community participation into the municipality's planning of city development. In the past, speedy-paced economic growth has arguably caused the partial abandonment of Phuket Town's cultural identities, and to revivify the city's unique traditions, a bottom-up process is one of the essential methods for sustainable development. The community members were encouraged to appreciate their quotidian practices and cultures, as these would cultivate the sense of belonging among them to protect and conserve their own cultural resources through the restoration of traditional architecture. The first asset in the restorative plan was the residential shophouses in Thalang Road, known as Sino-Portuguese or Sino-European Architecture. They are old buildings that convey the historical significance of town planning and architectural knowledge, influenced by colonially-inspired styles in Penang and Singapore (Sittichoke, 2017). The building owners worked collaboratively with the municipality, consulting with engineers and architects, in renovating the old buildings (Chomsakorn, n.d.). The community members are active players in reviving their cultural heritage in many ways, such as researching traditional clothes and cuisines, organizing Baba wedding events, and revitalizing old customs and religious ceremonies to attract tourists to visit the community. Thus, the motivation of cultural preservation has been supported by a tourism-based economy, as the locals can generate incomes and uphold their traditions in the long term. Phuket Old Town has developed significantly due to the tireless efforts of community members in creating cultural activities.

In 2016, the concepts of street art and graffiti were first introduced to Phuket Old Town by a group of local creators called “So Phuket”. They established the project of “Food Art Old Town” (F.A.T.) by inviting both Thai and international graffiti artists, such as Alex Face, Ludmila Letnikova, Muebon, and Rukkit Kuanhawate, to create street art showing Phuket traditional food at 12 notable locations in the old town (Monk, 2016). Since Phuket was recognized as one of the Creative Cities of Gastronomy in 2015 by UNESCO, the purpose of the street art was not just to uplift the old town community, but to promote the local cuisines as a publicity campaign for tourists.

In this regard, street arts are perceived as one of the strategic tools for communicating local ways of life to the public for the municipal government and community members. The mayor considers that art should be a festive event to attract tourists.¹ However, there is some skepticism about whether street art can represent the art of the community. To what degree can street art involve the participation of community members? Are there any other forms of art more relatable to community members?

To answer these questions, researchers made a collaboration with the members of Baan Saan Market Community to create street art. There had a plan to collect ethnographic data during the art workshop. The selected community is well-known as the oldest and largest market of Phuket Municipality, known as Baan Saan market, selling fresh ingredients for local people and restaurants from 3 am to 11 am every morning. Within the market vicinity, there are shophouses including small grocery shops known *show-hui*,² cash-and-carry, builders’ merchants, draperies, and gold shops located along the main road. This market community was the main economic center and public-transit hub of Phuket from the 1950s to the 1990s. By the intrusion of modern trades since last decade, the shops in Baan Saan Market Community have gradually been less in demand from the locals. Many younger generations chose not to continue their family business.

In 2021, the representatives of Baan Saan Market Community introduced the concept of “reviving community and cultural values through forming a creative district” that has been promoted by Creative Economy Agency (CEA) with the main stakeholders including Phuket Municipality, local artists, community members, and neighbors. Moreover, there were representatives from educational institutions, benevolent foundations, and business coalitions related to the field of cultural and creative sectors involved in the project. It can be noted that many organizations in the world have been utilizing creative-based activities to uplift the community environments through civic engagement as appeared in Youth ARTivism project in Canada (Solanki, Speer, and Huang, 2014) and DIY and DIWO projects in Indonesia (Larasati et al., 2022), to raise the social issue occurred in Africa (Bekoe et al., 2021), or to revitalize old communities by using performance art, for example in Sapparo, Japan (Iwasawa, 2013).

The street art project was introduced to Baan Saan Community. However, after the meeting among community members, they want not to produce street art and propose the idea to conduct the workshop which teaches participants to fold joss paper instead. The researchers and representative team of the community decided to conduct the folding joss paper workshop and utilize the workshop to support the extension of social relations among community members. Moreover, the participant observation had been conducted during

the workshop aim at understanding the social mechanism that support the traditional materials to be a part of the community art.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the cultural means in the process of folding joss paper workshop.
2. To analyze how the folding joss paper activity is interrelated with the conception of social aesthetic.

Theoretical Framework: Aestheticization and Production

Since the colonization, the forms of Western art – painting, sculpting, and printing – have become dominant (Rampley, 2005). This has influenced people in various localities to study and mainly recognize the aesthetic value of Western art. At the same time, the aesthetic value of local arts and crafts and traditional materials seem to be less recognized.

In fact, the perception of aesthetics in each society is varied. Art is created within a cultural system, and exhibits collective formation (Geertz, 1993). Within any cultural system, the interaction between people and objects initiates an aestheticization process whereby the concept of aesthetics is formed (Svašek, 2007). People modify materials and eventually create objects which become symbols. Such symbols communicate values – namely, social norms and ethics – which are the foundation of aesthetics. In this regard, the aesthetic is more subjective. The aesthetic of art is not only from the essence of the art objects, but also from social perception.

Aesthetics are multiple, in accordance with social divisions such as class, gender, nationality, religion, and day-to-day practices of people (Bourdieu, 2010). The multiple aesthetic forms can be observed from the case of art in different societies. Among tribal people, art can become a medium which communicates myths with a belief that its magical power could entail high productivity.³ For working class people, aesthetics is more concerned with morality and ethical standards. Human beings each judge the beauty of art by their own moral standard. Art often portrays religious cosmology. Paintings of deities, mantras, and sacred words are important and included in the environment of daily life.

Outside the domain of Western art, which is dominant in the global artworld, and therefore caters mostly to the aesthetic tastes of the very wealthy, there are art forms for the masses, such as arts and crafts, folk art, primitive art, and popular art. These art forms often relate to production. They tend to be repetitive, functional, and expressive, often with a background of local socioeconomics and politics (Fabian and Szombati-Fabian, 1980).

In the capitalized society, art becomes a part of day-to-day consumption. Art could be reproduced and exchanged in the marketplace. One of the important epitomes is pop art, which became widespread in the early 1960s.⁴ This art represents the beauty, or at times the lack of beauty, of consumption and the consumer lifestyle. This reduces the gap between high art and low art through the expansion of the economic sphere. Since the mid-20th century, commoditization has become the main process whereby art, creativity, and cultures are amalgamated and widely communicated. In such a process, cultures are resources for artists and designers to produce novel products and services.

The marketplace⁵ becomes a space in which the contestation between hegemony and subordinate occurs. The commodities are utilized as symbols to communicate among subordinates (Hebdige, 1988). This phenomenon reveals that humans include everyday objects in their communication process. Such objects become valuable and have power to influence social aesthetics as well. The society therefore encompasses various day-to-day objects in the process of aestheticization.

In sum, aesthetic tastes are multiple. The beauty standards of various cultures, lifestyles, norms, identities, and social classes are contested. The contestation initiates demarcation between groups revealed through the consumption of products in everyday life. The aestheticization then reveals a process in which various commodities and cultures are included in the art realms.

Participation Process and Data Gathering

This research utilizes design anthropology as the main method to examine the interaction of participants during the design process (Otto & Smith, 2017) and activities to produce materials (Drazin, 2021). First, the researchers observed the atmosphere of the market community and its surroundings during the weekdays and weekends of December 2021. Then, the participatory process started on January 9th, 2022, by creating a focus group session to gather cultural resources and inviting 20 stakeholders who are the active community members and are interested in sharing information of the community's history and cultural resources.⁶ As discussed to create the community art, they made decision to conduct workshops of folding joss paper three times. The pilot workshops were held on the Sunday of January 15th and 22nd, and there were 25-30 participants from community members, children of the market sellers, and outsiders who knew the event from the announcement online. Then, the third workshop was held on the Sunday of February 6, 2022, as a session of the Art and Craft Market in the community. It appeared over 80 participants from different parts of Phuket joining in. While conducting the focus groups and workshops on the community art project, an ethnographic approach as part of design anthropology was used to gather data from observing the phenomena as they occurred. The data were collected periodically from December 2021 to February 2022 in Baan Saan Community.

Baan Saan Community

The settlement of Baan Saan Community is generally supposed to have emerged during the reign of King Rama V. However, the formal evidence found from the official map of Phuket City Municipality was delineated circa 1910, appearing in the inauguration year of King Rama VI. It became an old market community, extended from Phuket Old Town, as planned, for the urban development project.

Based on field observations, the economic activities in this community generally continue 24 hours a day. Baan Saan Market, located in the center of the community, is considered the most bustling area especially in the early morning. The market is under the supervision of Phuket City Municipality. Its building consists of four floors with varied choices of local products. Most stall owners inherited businesses from their parents' generation. Myanmar migrants are the main laborers in the market with the wage rate of 400 - 700 baht⁷ per day. The owners usually open their stalls around 3am - 4am to sell fresh products and local ingredients to restaurants, so they can prepare food to sell for breakfast. Then, around 6am is

the peak hour of local sweet-shops in selling sweets wholesale to local retailers and regular customers. Baan Saan Market is the largest market of raw materials and fresh food, flowers, and local sweets in Phuket. Many local customers find it convenient and trustworthy, with relatively low prices and high-quality products. In this regard, Baan Saan Community is considered a heritage market, rich in family histories, culinary cultures, social beliefs, and daily practices.

The Chinese Cultural Inheritance

The practices of Chinese traditions reflect the beliefs of Eastern cosmology. Chinese people believe that the world comprises spirits, nature and humans, and the purpose of life is to seek harmony among these elements (Adair-Toteff, 2014). The Chinese cosmology has been disseminated around the world with the various waves of Chinese diaspora. Moreover, from the research conducted in the various host countries, to some extent, the new generations of Chinese descendants tend to inherit their Chinese culture. Tong (2019) explained that new generations continue traditional practices because the tradition could be included in day-to-day life rather than separated as sacred rituals.⁸ It could be seen that the Chinese descendants can adapt their traditional culture to the modern world where economics and globalizing cultures are significantly concerned. This phenomenon also occurs in the Baan Saan Community, Phuket. However, the perception of Chinese descendants towards traditional practices has changed when contextualizing in modern society. The Chinese descendants' practices have undergone adjustments permitting them to both live in the modern world and maintain Chinese cosmology.

In the Baan Saan Community, many traditional practices can be seen. The community members annually conduct seasonal rituals, such as venerating the deity of the sky for the Chinese New Year celebration in the first month, worshiping ancestral spirits in the fourth month, conducting rituals to feed hungry ghosts in the seventh month, and abstaining from meat products for nine days in the ninth month to worship the Nine Emperor Gods. These rituals are conducted to maintain the balance between heavenly and earthly worlds where the relationship between humans, deities, and ghosts are maintained. The community has four Chinese shrines, called *Jui-Tui*, *Pud-Jor*, *Jeng-Ong*, *Guan-Yin* and *Mah-Jor-Poh*. *Jui-Tui* and *Pud-Jor* are two main shrines of the community and most renowned shrines in Phuket indicated by the numbers of devotees and spirit mediums who participate in annual ceremonies.⁹

The cosmology – earthly world and heavenly world – of Chinese descendants in the Baan Saan Community could be observed from Baan Saan Market and Chinese shrines. The former is a place for socio-economic activities while the latter are for religious activities. The relationship between these two spaces is interconnected. Chinese descendants believe that their good behavior in the earthly world can be perceived by the deities, who will bless them in return to succeed in economic and social life. It implies that the merchants can be rich if they maintain good morality and religious activities. Moreover, the successful merchants who constantly donate to the shrines will have the opportunity to be leaders of the important annual ceremonies.

For this reason, the religious practices – syncretized among Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism – become everyday activities of Baan Saan Community members. Every morning,

they worship the deity of the sky [Hokkien: *Tee-Kong* (天公)] whose small red altar is installed in front of the Chinese shophouses. The first room at the entrance of the house will be a place for the house altar which places the statue of deities and tablets with the name of ancestors. In the kitchen, Chinese descendants place the altar of the stove god who has a duty to report the good and evil of family members to the heavenly emperor at the end of the year.

The local community members thus have a unique worldview influenced by Chinese cosmology. Their worldview creates the symbolic meanings of objects which eventually can become social aesthetics. The members commonly perceive the aesthetic of practices following their morality and traditions which are communicated through the utilization of objects – deity statues, religious paraphernalia, foods, and sweets used for worshiping deities, and so on. This is the reason why the members chose joss paper to be the main subject for their community art when the community leader conducted the focus group activity. The leader proposed the community art project in the community and invited members to share knowledge and ideas. Folding joss paper was chosen to be the main workshop in which other members and outsiders participated (Observation on January 9, 2022).

The next section will be ethnography data collected from the workshops conducted in the Baan Saan Community.

Joss Paper: The Aesthetic of Day-to-Day Rituals

In the focus group conducted by the Baan Saan Community leader, street art with stencil style was proposed to community members. The discussion was needed to develop the art form. The artists initiated the idea by developing the art style from traditional Chinese papercuts. The papercut is usually used to decorate the food offerings for Chinese deities. However, one member who is the *Juitui* shrine's consultant proposed that he could lead a workshop to create art objects if the art style is changed to be folding joss paper, writing calligraphy, and making Chinese papercut rather than making the wall painting with paper cut art style. The other members all agreed to conduct such workshops for two days. Folding joss paper is the main workshop activity, while writing calligraphy and making Chinese paper cuts are the additional activities. The community leader therefore changed the strategy not to make a permanent wall painting art, but to try communicating these art and craft workshops as temporary art activities (Observation on January 9, 2022). In doing so, two shrine members were invited to be speakers in the workshops. The information about the workshops was communicated via the Facebook page of the community to invite everyone who was interested in traditional Chinese arts and crafts.

Joss paper represents the aesthetic of a traditional object which is developed and redesigned to conform with the modern market (Chung & Li, 2017). Joss paper, used for worshiping the spirits of the deceased, is still globally used in Chinese communities. The form of joss paper is developed from the traditional form – a paper with silver or golden foil at the center – to paper miniatures which represent household equipment, vehicles, and other everyday objects. Joss papers in the form of brand name products and technological tools are also available and sold in paraphernalia shops.

Joss paper is also used to worship ancestral spirits. Ancestral spirits who are neglected by descendants could become malevolent spirits. Thus, offering food and burning joss paper became a method to communicate with spirits (Carpenter, 1996). The joss paper could become money for spending in the afterlife. Chinese descendants believe that they could receive prosperity in return and their ancestral spirits could protect their descendants from harmful situations. In this regard, joss paper mediates between living humans and those in the afterlife. The balance between two worlds is a result of conducting ceremonies. Joss paper is thus a material which is connected to the cosmology of Chinese descendants.

In the community, there are two kinds of joss paper – golden and silver. The former will be used in the rituals which venerate deities. The latter is particularly for funerals. The golden joss paper then is appropriate for various occasions when worshiping deities is needed. There are honorable ceremonies conducted every month for venerating different deities. The ceremonies can be conducted in either Phuket shrines or houses. Most Phuket Chinese descendants have their house altars and have belief in spirit mediums. The spirit mediums need to clean themselves before the beginning of the ceremony. They light the joss paper, hold the paper in one hand, and move it along the body from head to legs. After the ceremony, a heap of joss paper will be burnt at the court of the shrines or open space in the houses. In the ceremonies, joss paper thus symbolizes two meanings: first, the paraphernalia for the cleansing process; second, a gift sent to the deities which bestow prosperity to devotees.

Joss paper could be folded as various forms – money ingot, lotus, tortoise, flowers, shirts and pants, black gauze cap for a nobleman (纱帽 Mandarin: sha mào), and so on. Phuket locals like to fold joss paper before burning it. They believe that this practice shows appropriate manners and education. The form of folded joss paper is relevant with the blessing bestowed on devotees when worshiping deities. For example, tortoises are for longevity, money ingots are for prosperity, and flowers are for happiness. Boon, a high school teacher who is one of the consultants of Juitui shrine, explains that the practices of folding joss paper imply cultural values and create specific meanings when burning the paper, for example, folding a paper cap for a noble man to wish for a god luck when taking an exam (Boon. Personal Communication, January 22, 2022).

Joss paper is one of the main objects used in funerals and the Hungry Ghost Festival. Utilizing joss paper can create an extension of the social space among Baan Saan Community members. The merchants in Baan Saan Market cooperatively conduct the festivals every year. They believe that their businesses will be more prosperous if they donate foods and offerings to hungry ghosts. A heap of joss paper is burnt with the paper effigy of the deity at the end of ceremony. On the other hand, joss paper could become an object for celebration. They can be folded as Chinese lanterns for decorating at the entrance of the shop-houses. The Chinese lanterns symbolize the celebration of auspicious events like Chinese New Year and ceremonies to honour deities. Joss paper can take different forms as its use for communicating with community members in various contexts. It is a process to exchange symbolic meanings to inform the community of the occurrence of communal activities. Subsequently, the exchange of social and economic resources transpires. Community members engage in activities related to the ceremonies – cooking auspicious foods and sweets, making religious paraphernalia, and fundraising for conducting ceremonies.



Figure 1. Example of joss paper folded in the forms of tortoises, a lotus surrounded by nuggets, peacock and birds.

Lastly, there are criteria to justify the utilization of joss paper as a social aesthetic practice. First, morality becomes a valuable practice in the perception of community members since the urban lifestyles influences the recession of their cultural norms. Second, joss paper can become a representation of Chinese tradition to emphasize the way to pay gratitude to ancestors, deities, and spirits of the deceased. To burn joss paper means to create harmony among earthly, heavenly, and underworld which is one of the most important duties of humans. Third, the exchange between humans, spirits, and deities results in prosperity, longevity, and luck. Fruitfulness of the family is influenced by personal practices. Joss paper is also an intermediary subject among such exchanges.

Joss Paper as a Material of Social Aesthetic

This section explains how the process to form social relations can be initiated by utilizing joss paper. From the perception of aesthetics towards joss paper, the community members share results of the workshop with their friends, neighbors, and family members in various ways, such as sharing images via social media, giving out joss paper as a gift, and teaching their family members to fold more joss papers. Since the workshop was conducted during the week of Chinese New Year celebration, participants could prepare the folded joss paper for worshipping deities, especially the Goddess *Guan-Yin* who is famously worshiped on this occasion. The community leader decided that the joss papers folded in the workshop would be collected to burn at *Pud-Jor* shrine. It is a way to communally worship the deities which can bestow prosperity on the community.

The instructor of the workshop suggested participants make a pair of Chinese lanterns. The participants could then decorate their houses, and food stalls with such lanterns. To make a lantern, the instructor folded 20 pieces of joss paper and assembled them into one big piece. A yarn was threaded at the center of the lantern as the final step. The instructor recommended that the pattern of a lantern could be more beautiful if using special joss papers bought from Penang or Taiwan, instead of ordinary joss paper. Since there are only two shops in Phuket importing the special joss papers, the staff decided to buy them for their workshop. Moreover, to extend the activity to other community members who could not participate in the workshop, the staff of the workshop brought the lanterns to visit shophouses located nearby (Observation on January 15, 2022).

The community members all agreed that the workshop should be extended to the festive activities. They wanted to promote their community and the traditional culture, so the Art and Craft Market was held on February 6, 2022, by organizing joss paper folding, calligraphy, and paper-cut workshops as one of the main activities. The space in the market and management were provided by a group of community leaders without rental cost. The other members reserved around two square meters of space to sell or share their products.

Before the day of the activity, the leader group of the community brought the joss paper lanterns, which were the products of the workshops, to visit and invite their neighbors to participate in the Art and Craft Market. A pair of lanterns were distributed to various members. The lanterns are a symbol of festivity which could be exhibited before the Chinese New Year ceremony. Some community members hung the lanterns at a small altar in front of their houses, while some members chose to decorate their house entrance. The food stall sellers also received the lanterns (Observation on January 29, 2022). By visiting neighbors, the community leaders had an opportunity to communicate with elderly people who usually quietly stay in the houses. The lanterns were used to initiate conversations among members and symbolize the coming of festive occasions in the community. Additionally, one workshop participant was from a different community and said that she also folded Chinese lanterns and brought them to visit her uncle and nieces.

“My nieces really like these folded papers. Next time, I should try to practice making turtles, rabbits, and emperor caps.” (Bee. Personal Communication, January 28, 2022.).

On February 6, 2022, the Art and Craft Market was conducted as planned. In the market, products made by community members were exhibited. There were foods, desserts, post-cards, clothes, and other hand-made products. The workshop was also conducted with the aim to gather the folded papers communally made by community members. The workshop provided various sizes of joss paper. First, large joss paper, called “Tua-Gim” (大金), was used to make ingot-like paper. Second, the decorated joss papers imported from Taiwan were for making lanterns. Third, normal-size joss papers were used to make various forms as mentioned above. As there were many participants in the activities, the large lantern which needs more than 20 papers per piece could be made. In this case, the lantern then not only showed the art and craft skill of participants but also exhibited the communal spirit among members. After the event, the leader of the community suggested that the all the papers should be brought to the *Pud-Jor* shrine and burnt all at once together, to venerate the Goddess *Guan-Yin*.



Figure 2. The workshop of folding joss paper.



Figure 3. The joss paper folded in the forms of Chinese lanterns and horses.

Apparently, community members extended the joss paper workshop to other activities. They willingly participated in the activities because they shared common values. For this reason, the unity of the community and the expansion of the workshop is possible.



Figure 4. The distribution of paper Chinese lantern to Baan Saan Community members.

Conclusion

By cultural means, the joss paper possibly becomes a representation of Chinese culture in Baan Saan Community because of two reasons. First, the joss paper is related to the culture of Chinese merchants who utilize the process of goods exchange for their sustenance. Baan Saan Community members are also the merchants who venerate Chinese deities in everyday life. At the end of veneration process, joss papers are burnt. Joss papers are called in Hokkien dialect “Gim”, which means gold. This gold can be intermediary to communicate among earthly, heavenly and underworld. Therefore, to burn joss papers means to send the gold to the deities or ancestral spirits and they can bestow prosperity in return. Second, the joss papers can be folded into various forms which represents the materials in the imaginary world of Chinese migrants. Chinese sailing boats, horses, or black gauze caps for a nobleman are not the things in day-to-day life, but the nostalgic symbols of Chinese culture which become meaningful through the form of folded joss papers. Therefore, the joss papers can be contextualized in Baan Saan Community.

The joss paper workshop can initiate social aesthetics. Although the joss paper is an ordinary thing, the workshop transforms the joss paper to be an aesthetic material. Workshop becomes a process to create space-time where the value of joss paper is emphasized. In the workshop, the experts of Chinese culture were invited, the history of Chinese community was reminisced, the historic building was set to be a meeting place, and the Chinese identity was promulgated. Furthermore, the social relations among Chinese descendants could be extended from the workshop place to the whole community when distributing the folded Chinese lanterns. Community members could engage in the reciprocal sharing of their personal and family narratives. It could be seen that there is a process of social aesthetics creation: 1) the status of the traditional material is changed from an ordinary thing to the specific subject for the workshop; 2) the traditional material becomes a center of social engagement; 3) the sociality among workshop participants is reconstructed.

Additionally, the social aesthetics do not only influence the unity of community members, but also distinguish the identity between insiders and outsiders. The Baan Saan Community is surrounded by the modern market context. The local government support artists to create modern art forms like street art and graffiti for promoting tourism. This could be a reason that the community members reject the modern art form and want to utilize their traditional culture as the community art concept. Thus, the meanings of community art entailing cultural identity can be more inclusive in terms of content engagement, community participation, and economic exchange. By the prevalence of street art in touristic areas, the arts and crafts associated with traditional aesthetics are challenged. The meaning of aesthetics becomes multiple due to economic-driven modernity and development. To enhance the engagement of local people through community art, the perceptions and values of traditional aesthetic qualities should be prioritized.

Although joss paper has an ephemeral form, it is the agent of connection between community members, who centralize joss paper in the interrelated activities – joss paper workshops, veneration of the deities, and celebration of festive occasions. The distance between any community member and joss paper in the social space is not far. After this research project ended, the workshop to fold joss paper continued to be conducted several more times by the community members. This shows that this community art is deeply implanted and thriving in the social space of the community. Art is not necessarily a permanent object, but it could continually appear and disappear in the space of community over a period. Furthermore, art is not necessarily created by professional artists. Everyone can be an art creator in the process of community art.

Endotes

- 1 Artists are invited to create their art works to decorate several sites in Phuket City Municipality according to the city's festivals or events, so the creations of sculptures and light art installations are the city decorations that attract visitors to take photos and post them on social media. Some art forms were created by event organizers and their forms were inspired by the illustration from Bangkok Design Week to reproduce for branding Phuket City.
- 2 Show-Hui (Thai: โชห่วย, Mandarin: cu-huò (杂货) means local-retail-grocery store. The root of this term is from Chinese language and is widely used all over Thailand to differentiate local stores from franchise stores like Lotus, 7-11, and Family Mart. In the Baan Saan Community, most grocery store owners are Chinese. They bought various commodities from wholesale shops and increased the sale price in their retail shops in order to receive profit.
- 3 Gell describes a case of canoe paint of Trobriand tribe in Kitava Island, Papua New Guinea (1998). Trobriand artists paint a magical pattern on their canoe-prow board in accordance with the myth of a flying canoe. They believed that the magic could support Trobriand traders to gain high benefits from their product exchange.
- 4 Pop Art is an art form which includes various types of art and liberates the concept of aesthetics through the process of consumption (Marquis, 2013). Pop art aims to reveal the aesthetic of everyday consumption. Thus, artists accept the reproduction, and utilization of day-to-day objects as resources for their art creation. As a result, the art is no longer restricted in the domain of art certified by institutions. The middle class and lower class people have the opportunity to consume art in various public spaces and media – supermarkets, department stores, theaters, parks, and so on.

- 5 The marketplace includes an abstract space in which the commodities are exchanged. The market is also a space where the financial values of commodities are continually re-negotiated in a process involving cultural, social, and economic values.
- 6 This research uses pseudonym to conceal the identity of the informants.
- 7 1 dollar is equal to 35.44 baht as on August, 15th 2022.
- 8 Tong made the argument through the case of death rituals inherited in Singapore. In modern society, Chinese culture has been changed since it is still inherited among Chinese descendants as everyday practices. In the case of Phuket, there are many paraphernalia shops open near to the Chinese shrines. People can buy the necessary paraphernalia from these shops and acquire cultural knowledge to conduct rituals from the shrine's members. The Phuket shrine community is large since there are 34 shrines as members of Phuket Shrine Association (Phuket Shrine Association, 2021).
- 9 Hokkien Chinese descendants have strong belief in spirit mediums. They conduct ceremonies by the lead of ritual specialists and spirit mediums who are in trance. Juitui shrine is the main place in Phuket where the Nine Emperor Gods festival, also known as the Vegetarian Festival, is conducted. There are more than 2,000 spirit mediums participating in the street procession. The Pud-jor shrine's activities are more related to Phuketians' day-to-day life. Phuketians come to the shrine to ask deities to name new-born children and heal their ailments. In doing so, Phuketians pray and shake a bucket of Chinese fortune sticks. After receiving a number of fortune sticks, they can search for a child's name or medicine recipe placed in the wooden drawers tagged with the same number.

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