

Exploring the Difference in Art Education between China and Western Countries through a Lens of the Attitudes towards Street Art

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Abstract—This essay examines the contrasting approaches to art education in China and Western countries, with a specific focus on perceptions of street art. Street art, particularly graffiti, is perceived differently across these cultural contexts. In Western nations, such as the United States, street art has evolved from a frowned-upon activity to an accepted form of artistic expression, often celebrated for its creativity and social commentary. Conversely, in China, street art is commonly viewed as vandalism, reflecting a less accepting attitude towards this form of expression. The research involves an extensive review of literature and case studies on street art, education, and cultural values. It reveals that Western art education places a strong emphasis on encouraging individual creativity and experimentation. Western teaching methodologies often foster personal artistic development, allowing students to explore various mediums and styles. In contrast, Chinese art education is characterized by a focus on traditional techniques and adherence to established artistic norms, deeply influenced by cultural values such as respect for history and order. The essay also explores the pedagogical approaches and student-teacher dynamics in art education within these cultural frameworks. Chinese art education tends to be more teacher-led, emphasizing skill acquisition and historical knowledge. Western art education, however, adopts a more facilitative approach, promoting self-exploration and independent artistic growth in students. The comparative analysis highlights how these divergent approaches to art education reflect the broader cultural and societal values of China and Western countries. It underscores the importance of understanding these differences for a comprehensive appreciation of global art education practices, suggesting that an awareness of these diverse educational philosophies can enhance the richness and diversity of artistic education globally.

Keywords—art education, comparative analysis, Chinese art education, Western art education

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background Introduction

The distinctions in art education between China and Western countries have deep historical and cultural roots, reflecting broader differences in values, aesthetics, and educational methodologies. These differences are particularly evident in attitudes towards street art, a form of artistic expression that has historically been mired in controversy and debate.

In the West, the emergence of street art can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s, when it began as an underground movement in urban neighborhoods. Initially seen as a form of vandalism, it gradually gained acceptance as a legitimate form of artistic expression, particularly in the context of social and political commentary. This acceptance is partly

attributed to the Western emphasis on individualism and freedom of expression, which resonates with the rebellious and often subversive nature of street art.

In contrast, the art education system in China, deeply influenced by Confucian principles, places great emphasis on traditional techniques, respect for historical art forms, and the preservation of cultural heritage. This perspective views street art, particularly when unsanctioned, as a disruptive element that challenges social harmony and order. The Chinese approach to art, which traditionally values meticulous craftsmanship and adherence to classical standards, often finds the spontaneity and unpredictability of street art at odds with its cultural and aesthetic norms.

These differences in attitudes towards street art are not merely superficial; they reveal underlying disparities in art education between China and Western countries. This article aims to explore the factors that contribute to these differences, delving into areas such as education, art, sociology, psychology, economic development, and historical culture. Specifically, the article will examine how these various elements shape attitudes towards graffiti in both regions, and it will consider the impacts on students and various societal sectors. The study of graffiti as an art form presents a compelling lens to examine the significant differences in the recognition of art between the East and the West. In Western countries, graffiti is often celebrated as a vibrant expression of individuality, creativity, and dissent. Various artworks grace park walls and building facades, encompassing a wide range of content from nicknames and slogans to intricate patterns and political statements. Governments in the West rarely restrict this artistic expression, allowing public spaces to become platforms for free speech and creativity.

In contrast, China's approach to graffiti often categorizes it as vandalism, a behavior seen as tarnishing the city's image and environment. The government's perspective on graffiti leads to regulation and enforcement, restricting artistic creation to designated, limited areas where themes might also be controlled. This stark difference in attitudes reflects broader cultural perspectives on what constitutes art. While Western cultures often value individual artistic expression and freedom of speech, Eastern cultures like China may emphasize order, conformity, and the preservation of public aesthetics.

B. Research Questions and Objectives

There are three research questions and the corresponding objectives for the study on the differences in art education between China and Western countries through the lens of attitudes toward street art:

Research Questions:

- What are the fundamental differences in attitudes towards street art between China and Western countries?
- How do the differences in attitudes towards street art influence the teaching methods and practices in art education in China and Western countries?
- What are the implications of these differences in attitudes towards street art for the assessment and outcomes in art education in China and Western countries?

Objectives:

- To conduct a comprehensive review of literature on attitudes towards street art, with a focus on both Western and Chinese perspectives.
- To investigate the teaching methods and practices in art education in China and Western countries.
- To examine the role of cultural attitudes towards street art in shaping pedagogical approaches.

C. Overview of the Paper's Structure

This paper starts by looking at the history of street art, especially focusing on graffiti, to understand how it's seen differently in China and Western countries. It shows the big differences between education, laws, and culture in these places and how these have led to different views on this kind of art. The next parts of the paper are about art education in China and the West. These sections talk about what art education aims to do, how the education systems work, the role of teachers, and how we decide if art education is successful. It's interesting to see how history, culture, and traditional thinking have shaped art education differently in these two parts of the world.

Subsequently, the paper uses a lot of research from books and articles to talk about these topics in detail. It looks at sources that talk about street art, graffiti, education, and other related topics to make sure the information is correct and useful. Later, the paper compares how art is taught in China and Western countries. It looks at how teachers teach, how students learn about art, and how people decide what good art is in these different places. It's clear that the way people think about street art has a big impact on how art is taught and learned. The paper ends by talking about what all these differences mean for art education and how they show the different cultures and values in China and the West. It also thinks about what this could mean for the future of art education around the world.

This paper offers a narrative that weaves together the intricate relationship between street art and art education, culminating in a nuanced understanding of the cultural and educational dynamics at play in China and Western countries.

II. SUMMARY OF LITERATURE

The methodology employed in this paper relies on a comprehensive review of relevant literature. This approach is grounded in the analysis of secondary sources, predominantly drawn from scholarly databases such as Google Scholar and the China National Knowledge Infrastructure. This search includes street art, graffiti, education, history, and related terminology, ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of the information and data. Every

source included in this research has been rigorously vetted to ensure its authority and precision [1].

To ensure a balanced and thorough investigation, the literature review is complemented by an analysis of various case studies. These case studies involve specific examples of art educational institutions in both China and Western countries, examining their curricula, teaching methods, and student outcomes. The aim is to provide real-world insights into how theoretical perspectives on art education manifest in practical settings. In addition to the literature review, this article undertakes a comparative analysis of the strengths and weaknesses inherent in Chinese and Western art education. It seeks to identify the underlying reasons for these distinctions and offers recommendations for bridging the educational gap [2]. Moreover, this study provides forward-looking insights into the future developments of art education.

A systematic approach is adopted to guarantee the reliability of all selected sources. This involves an exhaustive search of documents through various reputable online repositories. Subsequently, a meticulous evaluation of the relevance and quality of the identified literature is conducted, leading to the inclusion of the most pertinent and reliable sources in the review [3]. For instance, when searching for literature on the chosen topic, key terms are entered into Google Scholar, and the author's background, professional credentials, publisher, and authority are scrutinized to ensure the scholarly credibility of the material [4].

The literature review commences by exploring the evolution of graffiti culture, serving as the foundational point of the investigation. It examines the historical roots of street art and charts its development over time. The subsequent sections of the review compare Chinese and Western street art across multiple dimensions, including style, creative processes, historical context, and cultural significance. These comparisons reveal distinctions that extend into the realm of art education, ultimately illuminating the varying perspectives on graffiti art between these two cultural spheres [5].

This analysis encompasses a thorough exploration of the theories and methodologies employed in existing research, while also discussing the implications of the findings. Furthermore, the literature review critically evaluates the strengths and limitations of the research, acknowledging any inherent constraints due to the limited availability of relevant literature on this topic. To address this scarcity, a comprehensive approach is employed, gathering pertinent sentences from multiple sources and subsequently collating and analyzing the overarching information they provide.

Following the literature review, the research questions and assumptions for the paper are formulated. The primary research findings are synthesized and integrated for use in the subsequent discussion section, providing a structured narrative flow that enhances clarity and comprehension. This step ensures that the insights gained from the collected literature are presented in a coherent and logically structured manner. Hence, by employing this comprehensive approach, the research aims to draw a nuanced picture of the art educational landscape, highlighting the intricate interplay between cultural attitudes, educational practices, and societal values.

Investigating the intricate interplay between the

microcosm and macrocosm, this literature review delves into an analysis of diverse perspectives on street art as a means to gain deeper insights into the broader landscape of Western and Chinese Art Education Systems. This exploration will ultimately lead us to a reflective examination of the underlying causes of these disparities.

A. The Different Attitudes towards Street Art

Chinese and Western countries exhibit distinct attitudes towards street art, which reflect contrasting historical and cultural perspectives on this unique art form.

In Western countries, particularly in the United States, graffiti gained prominence in urban neighborhoods during the 1960s and 1970s, with early taggers like Vic and Taki 183 leaving their marks on buses and subways. Over time, graffiti evolved into a recognized art form, exemplified by artists such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose works graced galleries in the 1980s [6]. Western nations also witnessed the emergence of wildstyle graffiti in the 1980s, characterized by intricate, interwoven lettering and cultural references [7]. The perception of graffiti as either art or vandalism often depends on its location. In the Western context, some educational institutions have started to appreciate graffiti as a legitimate art form. They view it as a channel for students to showcase their creativity while maintaining a safe learning environment. Organizations now offer graffiti art lessons that encompass practical training, historical context, and various graffiti styles [8]. Conversely, in Asian countries like China, graffiti created in public spaces is generally not recognized as art but is considered vandalism. Government regulations often strictly control where graffiti is allowed, leading to severe penalties for violators [9]. Graffiti's perception in Asian societies revolves more around its impact on the environment than its artistic value.

Furthermore, graffiti can serve as a sociological phenomenon. It may represent the expression of individuals with low socioeconomic status seeking recognition or gang members marking territory and communicating with rivals [10]. In contrast, some European and American regions embrace street art as a form of self-expression and cultural attraction, resulting in increased tourism and revenue [11].

These varying attitudes towards street art shape the educational, legal, and cultural landscapes in China and Western countries, emphasizing the need for a deeper exploration of their impact on art education systems.

B. Overview of Western and Chinese Art Education Systems

Art education in foreign countries mainly includes two aspects: theoretical understanding and practice, theoretical understanding plays an important role during the development of human art education [12]. German scholar Arnheim points out that: people's perception, especially visual perception, can think. However, most educators in China still have a one-sided understanding in this respect. They consider perception as a low-level cognition and separate it from thinking, they figure thinking is a type of rational high-level cognition. Therefore, Chinese educationalists pay attention to the study of words and numbers, not consider art as an important performance of thinking, which is not scientific at all [12]. These lead to the lack of attention to art education in most of China's high

schools. Especially when there are some important texts such as the entrance exam for senior government service posts, the art lessons will be viewed as a subject that is a waste of time. The United States put the original concept in the first place. The aim of their art education is improving the quality of citizens, but not creating some real talented artists. The things they want their children to express are thinking and motion, skills are secondary. However Chinese art education regards 'human' as the object of art education. They put most of their attention on study and the cultivation of art skills [12].

C. The Reflection of the Cause of the Difference

The differences between Chinese and Western art education can be attributed to a variety of historical, cultural, and philosophical factors. Art education in China has a long history, like wash painting and calligraphy, these traditional art forms usually obey the skill and style that were set during ancient times. 'With the influence of Confucianism, which places importance on respect for tradition, hierarchy, and maintaining harmony. Skills and repeats will be emphasized during the art training [13].

Art education, from ancient to modern art in Western countries, usually pays more attention to the experiment and personal expression. Under the influence of individualism and self-expression, the artists are supported to explore their special view and create skills. Mostly, the Chinese art education system obeys a master-apprentice model, students imitate or copy traditional art skills from famous artists and masters. However, modern Western art education tends to emphasize critical thinking, conceptual development, and the exploration of new materials and techniques. It may involve more open-ended projects and self-directed learning. The Chinese education system can create a large number of excellent art students, but they will be quite the same in painting skills or using the material, as they were learning from the same artist and being trained in the same ways. They also have to pass a rigorous standardized examination, such as the National College Entrance Examination, which may influence the students' career prospects, all Chinese art students have to obey the established norms and prepare some artworks they do not like just for the text. In the West countries, although every art academy has its enter standard, the emphasis may be more on the evaluation of portfolio assessment and personal creativity, instead of the standardized texts.

III. DEBATE

A. Contrasting Teaching Methods and Practices

1) Teaching methods in art education (Western and Chinese)

Chinese and Western art education systems have large differences in imparting artistic skills. In Chinese art education, traditional Chinese art has a history of thousands of years, it often gives priority to meticulous painting, freestyle painting, and traditional mediums [14]. Most students in China are required to receive intensive training in these basic skills. This structured approach ensures that students have a firm foundation in the technical aspect, enabling them to copy the traditional styles correctly. By contrast, Western art education pays less attention to

students' skills. Instead, it tends to foster individual expression and experimentation. While skills are still taught, they focus on personal development and creativity. Western art students are encouraged to explore all types of mediums, materials, and techniques, allowing them to find their unique artistic style [13].

The role of theory in art education is also different between Chinese and Western art education. In Chinese, theory is connected with practice and history [15]. Students are often required to study traditional Chinese aesthetics and art history, which can provide a strong theoretical foundation. This deep understanding of cultural context enriches their artistic expression and allows them to connect with their cultural heritage [16].

Conversely, Western art education often separates theory from practice, placing a greater emphasis on art theories and concepts [13]. Students explore critical theories and different cultural influences, which encourages a broader perspective on art. This theoretical orientation fosters a sense of innovation and encourages students to challenge traditional artistic standards [13].

In China, people consider that man and nature are mutually unified, consciousness is a part of nature, Taoists believe that 'man is an integral part of nature', and 'as the sky remains unchanged, so does the way' is a true embodiment of Chinese thought. Chuang Tzu once said that 'the heavens and the earth coexist with me, and all things are one with me', based on the heavens, considering humans as part of the whole nature, these perceptions create China's unique way of thinking with emotions. This is the 'artistic conception' in Chinese painting [17]. Western painting keeps searching for rules from 'reality', the strict use of proportions, perspective, form, and color, among other elements, brought the Western painting into a realm of "realistic" representation of three-dimensional space within a two-dimensional space.

Traditional Chinese art pays more attention to the humanistic spirit, painters usually perform their spirits and moods in their artworks, so we can know the society that artists face and the influence on themselves from the art they created. Western artworks under the influence of church and court were once entirely in service of religion. After the Renaissance, with the development of technology, the art of painting has undergone significant changes. Painting entered the spring of color emotions after the Industrial Revolution, Impressionism opened the door to the artistic soul of Western painting. Under the different social forms, Both Chinese and Western painting express their respective visual experiences in different ways. Even today, people continue to use painting to showcase various societal conditions [17].

Additionally, Chinese and Western art education systems also have different on cultivating creativity and critical thinking. Historically, Chinese art education leaned towards rote learning and copying, which can limit students' creativity. However, recent policy reform has introduced more flexibility and room for individual expression [17]. In the urban private primary Montessori school of China, rooftop gardens and open-air play spaces helped complete this environment. Vegetables and fruits were provided with children as dishes, and the children who played in the kitchen area could learn some culinary skills. Hands-on connections linked the table and planet with the sources of their

meals [18].

On the other hand, Western education tends to emphasize nurturing children's creativity, imagination, and hands-on skills [19]. Students are encouraged to experience new techniques and learn to take risks to produce the most creative and innovative pieces. This approach fosters a culture of innovation and risk-taking, allowing students to develop their unique artistic visions [20]. They are encouraged to develop an interest in arts and participate actively in arts and cultural activities, they are also supported to express their rights and freedom through arts.

2) Teacher roles and student engagement (Western and Chinese)

Teacher-student relationships and student engagement further highlight the distinctions between Chinese and Western art education systems. In the Chinese context, Chinese teachers emphasize "equal exchange" and the concept of "learning through teaching" in their specific teaching methods [19]. They highlight the importance of foundational courses in undergraduate education. During class, they inspire and guide students, emphasize communication, respect students' individuality, and discover students' strengths. They encourage students to excel in practical experiences and are skilled at motivating students' enthusiasm for learning. Teachers also lead students in participating in artistic practice activities and mural creation to guide and develop students' professional practical skills.

In contrast, Western professors tend to guide students toward independent exploration [19]. They organize group activities in class, allowing students to seek answers to questions on their own. Instead of being seen as "both teachers and friends", they are more like "guides" and "assistants" to students [19]. This implies a lesser degree of direct assistance compared to their Chinese counterparts. Western teachers pose questions and make conscious efforts to stimulate students' thinking. They deliberately cultivate students' problem-solving and hands-on skills, not by directly providing answers but by encouraging them to think within the context of the question, seek solutions through critical thinking, and apply the same thought process to independently address similar problems in the future. They place a stronger emphasis on empowering students to explore the world and experience it for themselves, both mentally and physically [19].

These educational distinctions, whether in teaching methods. This approach reflects the respect for Chinese cultural heritage and the importance of preserving traditional artistic practices. However, Western art education pays more attention to originality and innovation. Students are encouraged to explore their unique art style; their work is evaluated based the creativity and conceptual depth. While technical skill is still valued, it is viewed as a method of completing their work, instead of a primary focus [13].

B. Comparison of Assessment and Outcomes

In a comparison of the differences between Chinese and Western art education, the creative output stands out as a significant area. In China, with the influence of Confucian culture, the evaluation of student artwork is frequently prioritized the technical skill, precision, and the ability to replicate traditional styles.

How to grade students' work is different between China and the West. In China, the evaluation process is often formalized and centralized, it has a standardized grading system. There are some art competitions held in China regularly, these provide students with a chance to do their work and get recognition from the masters. Academic institutions often play an important role in organizing these events, academic achievement and honors from these competitions are very important for most Chinese art students, it means their artworks have been affirmed to be excellent. The honor they get from the competitions will be of great help to enter a better university [13]. Conversely, in Western art education, the evaluation process tends to be more decentralized and flexible. Grading can be more subjective, whether the grade is high depends a lot on the judges' personal opinions. While some competitions still be held sometimes, they may not be as closely tied to academic institutions, they do not need to obey a certain standard. China measures the success of education by ensuring that students who initially have difficulties no longer encounter problems and understand all the material. Therefore, in China, as students grow older and advance in grade levels, they tend to encounter fewer difficulties. In contrast, the United States measures the success of education by challenging even students without apparent issues. If teachers are unable to answer the questions posed by students, it is considered a sign of a highly successful education. As a result, in the United States, students tend to become more creative and prone to thinking outside the box as they progress to higher grade levels [19].

The achievements students get from the competitions play a very important role in the Chinese art system. Academic performance is closely linked to a student's honors and awards. High-achieving students often have access to famous art colleges. This competitive environment encourages students to try their best to achieve excellent academic performance. Under this phenomenon, most Chinese students have much bigger academic stress than Western children. In Western art education, while academic achievements are valued, they are not usually treated as central to a student's artistic identity. Success is often measured more by the quality and impact of one's artwork. Honors and awards may be available, but they tend to focus more on artistic merit and potential instead of pure academic performance.

C. Influence of Cultural and Societal Context

The differences between Chinese and Western art education can be attributed to their unique cultural backgrounds. In Chinese culture, art has traditionally held a revered and deeply integrated position. Throughout its long history, art has often been seen as a means of transmitting cultural values, it has been seen as a reflection of the connection of art and Confucianism. However, the emphasis on respect for tradition, hierarchical structures, and harmonious society has permeated art education, leading to a focus on preserving and mastering traditional art techniques [13].

In contrast, in Western culture, especially nowadays, has valued individualism, innovation, and self-expression. Art is often seen as a medium for challenging conventions and expressing people's opinions. The rise of movements such as

Romanticism, Impressionism, and later Modernism, which emphasized personal vision and breaking away from traditional norms, reflects this cultural shift. Consequently, this cultural background shaped Western art education to pay more attention to students' creativity and the development of their art style, they allow and support students to question and even subvert established norms [13].

Moreover, the impact of social factors further illuminates the disparities in Chinese and Western art education [13]. These factors encompass the social functions of art education and its alignment with societal values. In China, however, art education has often been closely intertwined with societal expectations and economic demands. Historically, artistic pursuits were seen as a path to cultural refinement and social mobility. Today, the emphasis on art education is partially driven by the government's recognition of the creative economy's potential economic impact. This utilitarian approach aligns art education with economic priorities, potentially influencing curriculum and funding decisions. In contrast, in Western societies, the social functions of art education are diverse and often prioritize personal development and cultural enrichment. While economic considerations are not absent, art education is frequently viewed as a means to foster critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and cultural literacy. It serves to enrich the lives of individuals and communities, emphasizing the intrinsic value of art in fostering a well-rounded education.

Beyond the classroom, the social implications of differing art education philosophies are profound. As discussed above by Liang [13], in China, the collective orientation of society, deeply rooted in Confucian ideals, aligns with the educational emphasis on mastering traditional techniques and respecting established norms. It could be argued that this collective mindset influences not only educational approaches but also the way art is consumed and appreciated in society. Chinese art, with its focus on harmony and balance, often serves as a reflection of societal values and a means of reinforcing social cohesion [13].

In contrast, Western societies, characterized by a greater emphasis on individualism, tend to foster an environment where art is seen as a medium for personal expression and social critique. This individualistic approach is evident not only in educational settings but also in how art is displayed, discussed, and critiqued in the public domain [17]. In Western countries, art often becomes a platform for challenging societal norms, pushing the boundaries of conventional thinking, and sparking public dialogue.

The evolution of street art in both regions exemplifies these cultural differences. In Western societies, street art has evolved into a celebrated form of public discourse, often used to address social and political issues. This form of art becomes a canvas for public sentiment, a space where artists and communities can engage in a dialogue. In contrast, the controlled and regulated approach to street art in China reflects a broader societal emphasis on maintaining order and harmony.

D. Future Trends in Art Education

Looking towards the future, the convergence of global cultures and the increasing interconnectedness of societies suggest that art education in both China and Western

countries may undergo significant changes. As the world becomes more globalized, there is a growing opportunity for cross-cultural exchange and learning in the realm of art education. This could lead to a blending of educational methodologies, where the strengths of both systems are integrated to create a more holistic approach to art education.

For instance, Chinese art education might gradually incorporate more elements of creativity and personal expression, recognizing the importance of individuality in the artistic process. Conversely, Western art education could benefit from a deeper engagement with historical and traditional art forms, appreciating the value of cultural heritage and technical mastery.

Such integration would not only enrich art education but also prepare students to engage with a globalized art world, where understanding and appreciating different cultural perspectives become crucial. As art continues to be a powerful medium for expressing and understanding the human experience, the evolution of art education will play a significant role in shaping how future generations perceive, engage with, and influence the world around them.

IV. CONCLUSION

The exploration of art education reveals significant differences between Chinese and Western approaches. Influenced by distinct legal systems and cultural values, these differences manifest in various aspects of learning methodologies. In China, there is a strong emphasis on preserving traditional culture, where students often begin by learning about history and mastering techniques from past masters. Conversely, in Western countries, the focus leans more towards nurturing creativity and innovation, encouraging students to engage in independent, autonomous practices.

The role of teachers also varies considerably. In the Chinese context, teachers often adopt a dual role of being both educators and mentors, deeply involved in their students' learning journey. They aim to impart their extensive knowledge and life experiences. On the other hand, Western educators tend to assume the role of facilitators or guides, promoting self-discovery among students and intervening mainly when complex challenges arise, as noted in Li's research.

Art is perceived differently in these cultural spheres. In China, art serves as a conduit for conveying cultural values and traditions, whereas in Western societies, it is viewed as a medium for individual expression and challenging conventional norms. Social factors also play a pivotal role in shaping the form and nature of art education in both regions. Looking ahead, it is expected that as Chinese and Western art education systems continue to evolve, there will be an increasing focus on enhancing students' cultural and artistic capabilities in respective governments.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has claimed that no conflict of interest exists.

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