

A Study from the Perspective of Sociology of Art on Core Concepts and Practical Strategies of Civilian Art: Taking Liu Hsiu-Mei as an Example

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Summary

The content of art education in Taiwan is grossly disjointed from the social and historical context of Taiwanese society as well as from the daily lives of common people. This is a result of art education's long-term marginalization. The focus of this study is on Liu Hsiu-Mei and an analysis of the core concepts and practices of her "civilian art". Ms. Liu is an artist-teacher hailing from the art world here in Taiwan. She has always had concern for society, culture and the vicissitudes of daily life for the ordinary people.

The analytical framework and main research method employed here is narrative analysis. First, the major events in Liu Hsiu-Mei's life that happened during the various stages of her maturation process are examined both in detail and in light of the historical periods in which they occurred. Through this discussion, Ms. Liu's contributions to civilian art are brought to the forefront, including her core concepts and practices. Next, in order to determine how Ms. Liu was able to become an artist-teacher and what socio-cultural factors allowed her civilian art related concepts and practices to develop and flourish in Taiwan, her narrative will be dissected using a theoretical framework comprised of Norbert Elias' concept of "social figuration" and Pierre Bourdieu's "art field" concept. The end goal is for the results of this study to be made available as a reference to those within the field of art education here in Taiwan.

Utilizing the research method and analytical framework described above, the following results were obtained:

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1. Liu Hsiu-Mei's Concept of Civilian Art and its Formation

Ms. Liu's mother had a vivid imagination and had experience with art. As a child, Ms. Liu suffered from both hunger and low self-esteem due to her family's financial problems. Her mother made up for this by nourishing her and stimulating her to both express the multi-dimensional emotions and to cultivate her desire for artistic expression. After entering elementary school, the demarcation between home and school started to blur, to the point that the link to her social figuration began to recoil. This allowed her to begin thinking about the rationality of social values and various life styles.

During middle school, under the influence of her fine arts teachers and her reading of translations of the classic works of world literature, Ms. Liu started to enter into mainstream art field. She continually worked on improving her skills, giving her the ability to acquire both cultural and economic capital. During this phase of her life, she realized that in order to safeguard one's rights and desire to create, it was necessary to minimize the amount of money spent on learning and artistic creation.

After leaving school, Ms. Liu went through many things, such as working, getting married and the life-changing experience of losing a daughter. Through all of these things, she persevered in the acquisition of a diverse spectrum of materials for artistic creativity and education and gained the ability to be emotionally strong and to be socially critical.

After her daughter's passing, she was able to obtain the space and courage necessary to take control of her art. Many factors were involved in this process, such as the emotional growth by her 2nd marriage, the economic stability resulting from her having her own business, the diversification and democratization within artistic culture as well as within the Taiwanese government and society of that time.

2. Practical Strategies behind Liu Hsiu-Mei's Civilian Art

Upon entering her second marriage, Ms. Liu began to use artistic creativity as a way to look back on the difficulties in her life and her experiences. It was also a way to reflect on difficult topics like her family's economic hardships, the friction between employers and their employees, conflicts between married women and their mothers-in-law, broken husband-and-wife relationships, and the pain of losing of her daughter. She began to be much more meticulous in her observations and depictions of life and the world around her. As a result, reflections of real life situations, the tough vitality of the world's downtrodden aspect and the

tenacious spirit of the local people are usually discernible within her “civilian art”.

Though she faced many difficult events in her life, Ms. Liu still tenaciously held on to hope for her dream of becoming an art teacher. She was finally able to make good use of the democratization of Taiwanese society, government expenditures on the social welfare of disadvantaged groups and policy trends which aimed at making education and culture more community oriented. The changing social trend thereby empowers all types of disadvantaged groups to participate in the creation and teaching of “civilian art”. She was therefore in comparatively advantageous social figurations

The results of this research also reveal that Ms. Liu’s purpose for promoting civilian art is to recognize the aesthetic values of everyone’s experience. At the same time, she also wants to provide the ordinary people with the basic right to create. In order to achieve this goal, she employs strategies of art teaching such as equalizing the teacher-student relations, organizing the Painting Club, providing a dignified, yet low-cost space for art exhibition, and designing an art curriculum close to daily life. Only in this way can the emotions and desires of common people be set free from the constraints of an unequal society and by way of creation with subjectivity, reconstruct the dynamic relationship between the self and society in order to achieve the creativity of diverse groups in society.

Keywords: social art education, civilian art, Liu Hsiu-Mei, sociology of art

