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Place-Based Arts Education for Rural Revitalization: A Case of the “She” Ethnic Minority Theater in Ningde, China

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of China's national rural revitalisation strategy, the protection and inheritance of ethnic minority cultures have become an important component of sustainable rural development. This study takes the “She” ethnic theatre in Ningde City, Fujian Province, as the research object. In the current new media era, it explores the combination of cultural heritage, community identity, and educational innovation as key elements in the theatre to construct a new model and path for art education based on regional characteristics. The theatre, based on traditional music, dance, and ritual performances of the “She” ethnic culture, plays a vital role as a living classroom, promoting experiential and participatory learning. This study employs qualitative research methods, comprehensively utilising field observations, semi-structured interviews, and literature analyses to collect and analyse data. This study explores new methods for the “She” ethnic theatre to integrate local culture into teaching practice, promote intergenerational learning and inheritance, and enhance students' sense of ethnic identity. The results show that the theater is not only a creative and extensible educational space but also enhances community cohesion through cultural activities and promotes local tourism. Therefore, arts education grounded in regional characteristics has the potential to connect traditional education with community learning, promote individual development, and sustain cultural legacies. Future research should explore how to strengthen new models of local-based arts education and better integrate digital innovation, intergenerational transmission, policy support, and cross-regional comparisons so that rural communities become a dynamic system that links cultural sustainability, community identity, and rural revitalisation.

Keywords: “She” Ethnic Minority, Place-based Education, Arts Education, Identity, Rural Revitalization

Introduction

The “She” ethnic group is one of the 55 officially recognized ethnic minorities in China, established in 1956. They are mainly distributed in the four provinces of Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangxi and Guangdong. Ningde City in Fujian Province is the most important “She”-populated area in China, boasting the largest She population in the country. The “She” people call themselves “Shan Ha,” meaning “mountain people.” Historically, their ancestors lived in mountainous areas, leading agricultural lifestyles and engaging in hunting and farming activities. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the “She” people gradually interacted and integrated with the neighbouring Han and Hakka people, forming a diverse and unique cultural identity. Historical documents such as the “Taiping Huanyu Ji” and “Yuanhe Junxian Zhi” record that the “She” people originated from the Baiyue people of southern China and shared a common ancestor with the Yao and Zhuang ethnic groups. From the