

Creative Economy and Local Government: Policy Tools for Multi-Ethnic Integration in Community Development

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Abstract This study explores the role of local governments and autonomous institutions in implementing creative economic policies to promote multi-ethnic integration in community development. Through an in-depth analysis of two design workshop cases in northern and southern Thailand, the research reveals how local authorities can create non-political, non-confrontational platforms for economic cooperation and cultural exchange. The study finds that co-creative design activities and the development of handicraft creative economies not only cultivate participants' cross-cultural abilities but also create economic momentum for multi-ethnic communities to collectively face the market. Local governments play a crucial role in facilitating these processes, balancing economic development with cultural preservation, and fostering inclusive community governance. Based on case analysis, this study constructs a theoretical model of creative economy-driven "soft" integration for multi-ethnic communities, emphasizing the role of local public administration. The research points out that while this policy approach demonstrates unique advantages in promoting economic development and cultural integration, it still faces challenges such as ensuring equal participation and balancing economic benefits with cultural diversity protection. The purpose of this study is to bring enlightenment to the managers of other multi-ethnic areas, so that they can make correct decisions in the process of community construction and development. In the next stage of research, we should evaluate the long-term economic impact, formulate reasonable policy guidelines in a cross-cultural way, and use innovative thinking to solve specific problems.

Keywords: • community governance • ethnic integration • creative economy • local government • community development

1 Introduction

The accelerating process of globalization has brought infinite possibilities for the development and strength of multi-ethnic countries, and more and more countries are under pressure for development. The "rigid" integration policy has implemented pluralism, but it can not better meet the development needs of a multicultural society, and may stimulate contradictions. Therefore, it is necessary to achieve integration through "soft" means in practice, fully reflect the advantages of various national cultures, and build a harmonious society, which has become a problem that must be solved by theoretical and practical circles.

The development of a creative economy is relatively short, which requires enhancing creativity and developing the advantages of knowledge and culture in economic construction, thus attracting the attention of multi-ethnic countries and bringing infinite possibilities for faster and better development [United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2018]. Collaborative design can interweave multiple disciplines, require multiple parties to create together, deal with complex social problems, and fully demonstrate their advantages (Sanders & Stappers, 2008).

The development of creative economy in multi-ethnic countries and regions puts forward higher requirements for community governance. Local governments should have the courage to take responsibility, develop their own advantages in this regard, accurately grasp the requirements of community development, solve more community problems, and deal with various practical challenges (Howkins, 2010).

In recent years, academia has gradually realized that local governance is of great significance in the process of cultural integration and the development of creative economy. Pratt (2015) said that local governments should play an important role in the process of cultural and economic development. According to Flew (2010), community governance is a crucial issue in the development of creative industries. At the same time, Bradford (2004) suggests that local governments should formulate reasonable cultural policies to ensure that communities achieve faster and better results and contribute to urban regeneration.

Thailand is a typical representative of multi-ethnic countries. From the recent development of the country, it has developed creative economy in border areas and created "design workshops". It has accumulated valuable experience in this regard and many excellent cases have emerged. Such projects emphasize the importance of handicraft and creative industries in the promotion, and improve the design effect in the way of multi-ethnic integration, which can not only promote regional development, but also enhance multi-ethnic cooperation, with outstanding achievements (Pratt, 2009). More critically, local governments provide strong

support in the implementation of this initiative to achieve development through effective local governance (Yusuf & Nabeshima, 2005).

In this study, Thailand is taken as an important case to analyze how to achieve multi-ethnic integration and development through a "soft" way to promote the sustainable development of creative economy.

Through systematic analysis of Thailand's experience, the research team hopes to provide useful references for other multi-ethnic countries, especially for the economic policies, cultural governance, and local administration strategies of developing countries.

This study adopts a combination of literature analysis, case studies, and field investigations, striving to comprehensively and objectively present the theory and practice of creative economy and co-design in promoting multi-ethnic integration, while highlighting the crucial role of local governance. By examining how local governments navigate the complex interplay between economic development, cultural preservation, and social cohesion, this research aims to contribute to both the theoretical understanding of multi-ethnic integration and the practical implementation of inclusive local governance strategies.

2 Literature review

2.1 Creative economy and multicultural society development

The concept of creative economy was first proposed by Howkins (2001), who emphasized the important role of creative industries in driving economic growth and social development. Subsequently, Florida's (2002) "creative class" theory further elaborated on how the creative economy drives urban and regional development. In the context of multicultural societies, Yúdice (2003) proposed the view of culture as a resource, emphasizing the dual role of culture in economic development and social integration.

However, existing research mainly focuses on the impact of the creative economy on urban development and national competitiveness, with relatively scarce research on its role in multi-ethnic social integration. Although scholars like Pratt (2015) have begun to pay attention to the potential of creative industries in promoting social inclusivity, systematic research is still lacking. Particularly in terms of how to promote multi-ethnic "soft" integration through creative economy policies, existing research has not yet formed a clear theoretical framework and practical model.

Through this research, it is further realized that the development of creative economy can promote national integration, which is an effective way of "soft

integration". The theoretical foundation of this concept can be traced back to Sen's (1999) capability approach, emphasizing that economic development should enhance human freedom and capabilities. Multi-ethnic integration has become an inevitable trend, which should provide favorable conditions for the development of creative economy, provide opportunities for the development of more economic entities, and enhance the links between different ethnic groups.

The role of creative economy in multi-ethnic integration manifests through several key mechanisms:

Economic empowerment: The development of creative industries enables all ethnic groups to gain opportunities in economic development, enhance confidence in development and have a higher social status.

Reflect cultural value: The development of creative products and the market-oriented development of creative economy can further highlight the advantages of traditional culture and reflect its value.

Promoting cross-cultural exchanges: In the process of multi-ethnic integration and development, creative industries can play an important role in providing favorable conditions for multicultural dialogue on an equal footing.

Clear market orientation: grasp the market demand of each nation, build it into a huge community of interests, and provide favorable conditions for mutual cooperation.

2.2 Co-design in social practice and multi-ethnic integration

Co-design originated from the participatory design movement in the 1970s, initially mainly applied in industrial design and human-computer interaction fields. Sanders and Stappers (2008) systematically sorted out the concept of co-design, emphasizing the importance of users participating as "experts" in the design process. Manzini (2015) discussed how design promotes social innovation, providing a theoretical framework for the application of co-design in social fields. In the field of social practice, co-design has been widely applied in community development, public service improvement, and social problem-solving. DiSalvo, Lodato, Fries, Schechter, and Barnwell (2011) focused on the role of co-design in solving complex social problems, emphasizing the importance of multi-stakeholder participation. However, research on the application of co-design in promoting multi-ethnic integration is still relatively scarce, especially in terms of how to combine co-design with creative economy policies to promote multi-ethnic "soft" integration, existing research has not yet formed a systematic theory and practical model.

Social technology can be used to enhance design synergy, which has a strong sense of innovation. Björgvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren (2012) put forward the idea

of "designing things" to build a broad platform for the common development of multi-ethnic groups, to strive for a broader social space for them, and to continuously enhance the ability of cross-cultural innovation.

For the purpose of multi-ethnic integration and development, collaborative design demonstrates several distinctive characteristics:

Equal participation: In the design process, all ethnic groups can put forward their opinions and express their demands equally.

Knowledge co-creation: In the process of co-design, multi-cultures will interweave and permeate together.

Emotional ties: Different ethnic groups communicate with each other to create good emotional ties.

Cultivate innovative thinking: All participants can understand the importance of cross-cultural communication and enhance their innovative ability in this regard.

2.3 Theoretical framework for multi-ethnic integration

2.3.1 Evolution of integration theory

Research on multi-ethnic integration theory can be traced back to the early 20th century, and with the acceleration of globalization, related research has entered a new stage. Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) proposed the cross-cultural adaptation theory, emphasizing the importance of individual strategy choices in the integration process. Kymlicka (2018) proposed the theory of multiculturalism, emphasizing that the state should recognize and support the cultural rights of minority groups while maintaining common values.

However, existing research still has some shortcomings. First, theoretical research has not provided support for the formulation of reasonable economic policies, and many research results have not yet been empirically supported. Secondly, only some groups are investigated. Researchers pay too much attention to the development of urban areas, but ignore the needs of ethnic minorities, and do not study the development of remote areas. Thirdly, only quantitative analysis is carried out in the study, but no in-depth exploration is carried out of the details.

2.3.2 "Soft" integration framework

The statement of "soft" integration is an important innovation and breakthrough in the research of this subject. In the process of the development of many nationalities, non-compulsory means should be adopted to deepen cultural understanding. The reason why this study puts forward this concept is related to Granovetter's (1973) understanding of weak ties and Allport's (1954) pointing out

that in the process of economic development, we should build a platform for the cooperation of multiple economic entities and eliminate racial discrimination.

"Soft" integration has the following characteristics:

Non-mandatory: respect for the choices of all peoples and individuals, and no blind demand for consistency.

Gradual: Integration cannot be achieved in a short period of time, but in a step-by-step and planned way.

Mutual benefit: Creative economy should achieve win-win results in its development.

Creativity: In the face of problems caused by cultural differences, innovative ways and means should be used to solve them.

Market orientation: Constantly makes up for the shortcomings of the market mechanism and provide favorable conditions for economic cooperation and cultural exchanges.

The proposal of this theory requires the active development of creative economy, the formulation of reasonable policies and guidelines, and the guidance of "soft" integration between different nationalities from the theoretical level. It can not only build a perfect theoretical system for multi-ethnic integration, but also promote the development of creative economy theory and bring reference to decision makers.

2.4 Local government's role and governance theory

2.4.1 Contemporary research on local government role

From the recent academic research situation, multi-ethnic integration, creative economy and so on are important research topics, more and more scholars clearly pointed out that in the above aspects, local governments can play an important role. Comunian and England (2020) conducted an analysis in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic, focusing on the relationship between local governments and the creative economy, and clarifying the importance of innovation for community development. Through the study, it is found that in the face of crisis, local governments should respond quickly to provide support and protection for the development of marginal groups.

On this basis, Toros (2021) constructed a perfect collaborative governance model in the study, and with the help of this model, analyzed the development of community creative economy and formulated a reasonable development plan. In the course of the study, the model considers that it is necessary to provide support for diverse economic agents, enhance the links between different ethnic groups,

and clearly point out that digital platforms can play an important role in the process of local governance. Through this study, local governments have further realized that in the process of developing creative economy, local governments should make inclusive decisions.

In recent years, experts and scholars have expressed concern about local governance and regarded cultural planning as a key content. Duconseille and Saner (2020) focus on the role of creative economy in the process of sustainable development of cities, and call for its promotion to the strategic level to build inclusive cities and promote cultural diversity. These scholars further feel the importance of creative economy in the process of research, and suggest that local governments should take it as an important support for cohesion and urban revival, and multi-ethnic communities should pay more attention to it.

The situation of each community is different, and it faces certain challenges in the process of developing creative economy. In order to promote the development of creative economy, Richardson and Thieme (2022) studied the practices adopted by local governments in the process of enhancing social cohesion and maintaining social equity, and pointed out the problems encountered by local governments in reality. These scholars further realized the importance of cultural protection, promoted economic growth in this way, and pointed out the importance of local governments in resolving conflicts of interest.

2.4.2 Theoretical foundations of local governance

From the theoretical point of view, the development of multi-ethnic integration and creative economy cannot be separated from the strong support of local governments. This paper focuses on the following concepts.

Cooperative Governance Theory. Through the theoretical research results of Ansell and Gash (2008), we can further feel that local governments can play an important role in the development of creative economy. The construction and development of multi-ethnic communities require local governments to provide favorable conditions for the communication and cooperation of all stakeholders, and to formulate reasonable plans for the purpose of promoting cultural integration and economic development.

Creative Economy Theory. Pratt (2009) clearly pointed out that creative economy is based on the place, which means that local governments should give full play to the advantages of regional environment when formulating policies for the development of creative economy, and each community should formulate reasonable strategic policies according to its own economic, cultural and social development. The acquisition of this theoretical achievement can make us more

aware of the unique advantages of multi-ethnic communities in the development of creative economy.

Cultural Planning Theory. Mercer (2006) clearly points out that cultural planning is of great significance and requires local governments to take culture as an important part of strategic planning, which should be paid enough attention to by multi-ethnic communities. Through this theory, we know that creative economy is an important support in the development of community cultural diversity.

Network Governance Theory. Klijn and Koppenjan (2012) pointed out that local governments should play a good role as network managers in the process of developing creative economy. Through this theoretical achievement, we can accurately grasp the relationship among enterprises, creative economy practitioners and multi-ethnic communities, establish a correct understanding of the complex relationship network, promote economic development, and achieve development through in-depth cooperation.

Adaptive Governance Theory. Multiracial communities are in the process of development, and it is necessary to deepen the understanding of the advantages of creative economy. Folke, Hahn, Olsson, and Norberg (2005) put forward the term "adaptive governance". In his view, local governments should adopt flexible ways and means to govern communities, take learning as an important measure, and calmly deal with the problems encountered in each community.

Under the guidance of the above theory, an in-depth analysis of the importance of "soft" integration can help local governments formulate reasonable plans and programs for the development of creative economy. With the support of these theoretical achievements, it is further realized that in order to play its due role, local governance should not only rationally adjust the cooperation process, but also implement local strategic policies, enhance cultural sensitivity, enhance the adaptability of economic entities, and guide them to master the necessary network management skills.

In the process of solving practical problems, local governments must enhance their own capabilities and constantly improve the level of governance. Cuyler (2021) pointed out that local officials should maintain social equity, fully feel the value and significance of culture, and formulate reasonable policies for the development of creative economy in the light of multi-ethnic characteristics. At the same time, it emphasizes the importance of leadership decision-making to provide good services for the development of community diversity.

In the study of institutional capacity, Khoo and Lanham (2021) believed that if local governments want to make reasonable decisions, they must play the role of

co-creation methods. These scholars pointed out that in order to broaden participation in the development of community creative economy, local governments should take into account the needs of all stakeholders and formulate reasonable policies.

2.5 Research gaps and future directions

The results of this research have brought reference for the development of multi-ethnic integration and creative economy, but there are also obvious shortcomings, and many managers still have not established a correct understanding. From the literature obtained, most scholars only study specific cities, most of the relevant cases are concentrated in urban areas, according to the reality of culture and politics to study specific issues, the content of the study is basically a common problem, which requires broadening the scope of research in the next stage. From the perspective of community well-being, this paper makes an in-depth analysis of how to play the role of creative economy.

Existing literature points out that local governments will encounter many practical problems in the process of implementing policies, and must actively promote structural change, eliminate bureaucracy and overcome the adverse effects of inertia. In the future, we should pay attention to the changes in local government's power in governance, explore the impact of local government's power on the development of community creative economy, and suggest that local governments should strengthen their review and formulate reasonable policies.

The existing literature clearly points out that local governments should provide support for the development of creative economy and promote the integration of ethnic groups, but there are still many shortcomings in cross-cultural research. In the future, in-depth and comprehensive research should be carried out vertically to solve complex practical problems, promote the diversified development of cities, and formulate reasonable governance plans.

The above theory clarifies that cultural integration and economic development can not only produce synergy, but also form certain contradictions. This requires local governments to resolve conflicts, assume greater responsibility, protect cultural diversity while building the economy, bring more forces together, and formulate reasonable policies and guidelines.

3 Methodology

This study adopts a combination of literature analysis, case studies, and field investigations, striving to comprehensively and objectively present the theory and practice of creative economy and co-design in promoting multi-ethnic integration, while highlighting the crucial role of local governance. By examining how local

governments navigate the complex interplay between economic development, cultural preservation, and social cohesion, this research aims to contribute to both the theoretical understanding of multi-ethnic integration and the practical implementation of inclusive local governance strategies.

The research data primarily consists of process photographs and interview records. Due to the sensitive nature of some materials involving specific research subjects, not all data is publicly available. For inquiries about potentially available related information, please contact the corresponding author.

3.1 Research design and data collection

The study combines multiple research methods to ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis:

Literature Analysis: Systematic review of existing research on creative economy, multi-ethnic integration, and local governance.

Case Studies: Two in-depth case studies examining design workshops in northern and southern Thailand.

Field Investigations: The author actively carried out participatory observation, taking Thailand as an example to compare and analyze two cases in the north and south of Thailand. The author actively carried out discussion activities within three months, conducted in-depth exchanges with participants, and recorded the communication content in detail in each exchange.

3.2 Case study selection

3.2.1 Northern Thailand highland multi-ethnic group design workshop

The Northern Thailand Highland Multi-ethnic Group Design Workshop was held in Chiang Mai Province in the first half of 2023. This region is a multi-ethnic settlement in northern Thailand, mainly including Thai, Karen, Lahu, and Hmong ethnicities. The workshop aimed to promote economic cooperation and cultural exchange among different ethnic groups through co-design methods, while developing local characteristic creative products to promote the creative economy.

3.2.2 Southern Thailand minority design workshop

The Southern Thailand Minority Design Workshop was held in Pattani Province in the second half of 2023. This region is a multicultural area in southern Thailand, mainly including Thai, Malay, and Chinese ethnicities, with the Malay population being predominantly Muslim. The workshop aimed to promote economic cooperation and exchange among groups with different cultural and religious

backgrounds through creative economy activities, while developing products that reflect the local multicultural characteristics.

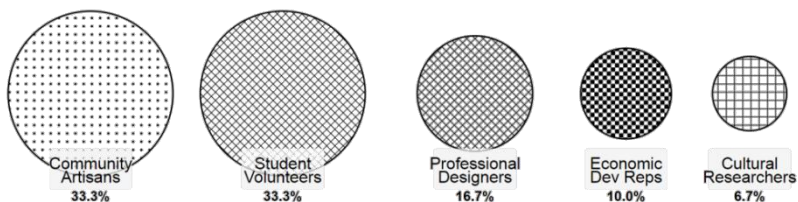
4 Results

4.1 Northern Thailand case analysis

4.1.1 Workshop process and participant composition

The workshop had 30 participants, the specific membership composition and proportions are shown in Figure 1, including 10 community artisans from different ethnic groups (2-3 from each ethnicity), 5 professional designers, 3 representatives from local economic development departments, 2 cultural research scholars, 10 university student volunteers.

Figure 1: Map of workshop participants in Northern Thailand



The workshop lasted two weeks and included the following main components:

- 1) Cultural exchange and market demand analysis (3 days)
- 2) Local cultural resource and handicraft skill research (3 days)
- 3) Creative ideation and product concept design (4 days)
- 4) Prototype production and market testing (3 days)
- 5) Results exhibition and business plan formulation (2 days)

4.1.2 Participatory observation records

Day 2: Market Demand Analysis Session Observation notes: "A market expert from Chiang Mai shared current tourism market demand trends for ethnic minority handicrafts. Song Chai (pseudonym), from the Karen ethnic group, showed great interest in this, saying: 'I didn't realize our traditional bamboo weaving skills had value in the modern market.' This session visibly boosted the confidence of ethnic minority artisans and provided direction for subsequent creative design."

Day 7: Creative Workshop Observation notes: "In Group 3, Na Ling (pseudonym), a Thai designer, proposed combining Karen traditional bamboo weaving techniques with modern lighting design. Initially, Song Chai was hesitant about

this idea, worried about the 'commercialization' of traditional crafts. After an in-depth discussion, Na Ling explained how to maintain the essence of tradition while meeting modern market demands. Eventually, Song Chai not only accepted the idea but actively shared more details about bamboo weaving techniques. This process demonstrated how co-design can promote understanding and innovation across cultures, while also reflecting the value reconstruction of traditional handicrafts through the creative economy."

In-depth Interview Excerpts Interviewee: Song Chai (Karen artisan, 55 years old).

Q: After participating in this workshop, what new insights do you have about your traditional handicrafts?

Song Chai: "This experience has made me re-evaluate the value of our ethnic traditional handicrafts. Previously, we only used these skills for ourselves, but now I understand that these techniques have great potential in the modern market. Especially through the collaboration with Na Ling, I've seen how we can combine tradition with modernity to create products that have cultural connotations and are suitable for modern life."

Q: Do you think this kind of collaboration helps promote ethnic integration?

Song Chai: "Absolutely. By designing products together, we not only exchanged skills but, more importantly, shared our cultural values. I discovered that although our customs differ, our pursuit of beauty is universal. Now, Na Ling and I have become good friends, and we plan to continue collaborating on new products in the future. The deep friendship between them can not only deepen economic cooperation, but also promote national integration and development, and play an incomparable role in any policy."

4.1.3 Case analysis results

In order to promote multi-ethnic integration in northern Thailand, many ethnic groups jointly analyzed how to solve the problems encountered in the development of creative economy. The significance is as follows:

- 1) Economic empowerment: In-depth analysis of market demand, research and development of more new products, provide support for the development of ethnic minority craftsmen, enhance their confidence in development, and give them a higher social status. Sen (1999) also used the same method in his research in this area, indicating that the economy can play an important role in the process of striving for personal freedom and improving personal level.
- 2) Cultural value reconstruction: To carry forward the advantages of traditional crafts in modern design, the workshop pays attention to this point and highlights the value of traditional culture. This approach allows cultural

diversity to be effectively protected and traditional culture to have a stronger vitality. Yúdice (2003) regards culture as an important resource, and this paper is consistent with this view.

- 3) Cross-cultural communication platform: When organizing seminars, all ethnic groups can put forward their unique views, and different cultures can communicate equally. This non-political, non-confrontational form of exchange effectively reduced prejudice and misunderstanding between cultures, validating Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis.
- 4) Cultivation of innovation capabilities: Through the co-design process, participants not only learned new design skills but also developed cross-cultural innovation capabilities. The cultivation of these skills is crucial for ethnic minority groups to participate in the modern economy and aligns with Florida's (2002) emphasis on nurturing the creative class.
- 5) Sustainable development model: The workshop focused not only on short-term economic benefits but also on establishing long-term cooperative relationships and business models. This sustainable development approach is in line with Manzini's (2015) concept of design promoting social innovation.

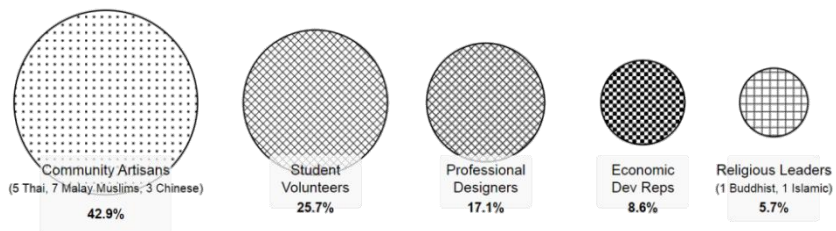
4.2 Southern Thailand case analysis

4.2.1 Workshop process and participant composition

The workshop had 35 participants, the specific membership composition and proportions are shown in Figure 2. Including:

- 1) 15 community artisans from different cultural backgrounds (5 Thai, 7 Malay Muslims, 3 Chinese)
- 2) 6 professional designers
- 3) 3 representatives from local economic development departments
- 4) 2 religious leaders (1 Buddhist monk, 1 Islamic imam)
- 5) 9 university student volunteers

Figure 2: Map of workshop participants in Southern Thailand



The two-week workshop included the following main components:

- 1) Cultural exchange and market demand analysis (3 days)

- 2) Local cultural resource and religious custom research (3 days)
- 3) Creative ideation and product concept design (4 days)
- 4) Prototype production and cultural sensitivity testing (3 days)
- 5) Results exhibition and community feedback (2 days)

4.2.2 Participatory observation records

Day 2: Cultural Exchange Activity Observation notes: "The organizers arranged a 'cultural feast' activity where each group prepared food representing their culture to share with everyone. Initially, the atmosphere was somewhat tense, especially regarding the handling of halal food. However, under the guidance of the organizers, everyone began to discuss their dietary taboos and habits. Fatima (pseudonym), from the Malay group, explained in detail the requirements for halal food, which sparked a lively discussion about food culture and religion. Surprisingly, Sulin (pseudonym) from the Thai group mentioned that her hometown's vegetarian tradition has many similarities with halal dietary practices. This discovery allowed different groups to find common ground, and the atmosphere noticeably became more relaxed and friendly."

Day 7: Creative Workshop Observation notes: "In Group 2, Chen Ming (pseudonym), a Chinese designer, proposed a textile design idea that integrates elements from three cultures. He suggested using traditional Malay batik techniques, combined with Thai Buddhist patterns and Chinese auspicious motifs. Initially, Azlan (pseudonym) from the Malay group expressed concern about juxtaposing Islamic elements with other religious symbols. However, through discussion, the group reached a consensus to focus on the common themes of peace and harmony found in each culture. This process not only promoted dialogue between cultures but also demonstrated how to create products with market potential while respect and sensitivity to different religious and cultural traditions."

In-depth Interview Excerpts Interviewee: Azlan (Malay Muslim artisan, 42 years old).

Q: How has participating in this multicultural workshop influenced your creative work?

Azlan: "This experience has shown me the potential of our traditional crafts in the modern market. Especially during the process of designing fusion products, I realized how our cultural elements could attract a broader consumer base. At the same time, I also learned how to meet market demands while maintaining cultural authenticity."

Q: What role do you think this creative process plays in promoting cultural understanding?

Azlan: "This process is very meaningful. Through co-creation, we not only learned about each other's cultures but, more importantly, established economic cooperation relationships. Now, Chen Ming, Sulin, and I have become good friends, and we plan to collaborate on developing new product lines. This kind of cooperation, based on mutual respect and economic interests, is more effective in promoting true cultural integration than any policy."

4.2.3 Case analysis results

The Southern Thailand Minority Design Workshop case demonstrates the potential of creative economy and co-design in dealing with complex cultural and religious differences:

- 1) Cross-cultural dialogue platform: The workshop provided a safe and open dialogue platform for groups with different cultural and religious backgrounds. Through the neutral topic of economic cooperation, participants were able to understand each other's cultures in a relaxed atmosphere, validating Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis.
- 2) Balance between cultural sensitivity and market orientation: While promoting innovation, the workshop also emphasized respecting the uniqueness of each culture. Kymlicka (2020) focuses on the analysis of the connotation of multiculturalism in his research, and this paper is consistent with it, promoting the development of cultural diversity through creative economy.
- 3) Creative problem solving: There are differences in different cultures, so we should have enough understanding of them and use creative ways to solve problems. Cultivating this ability not only aids product innovation but also provides new approaches to resolving social conflicts.
- 4) Driven by economic benefits: The seminar emphasizes the cooperation and effectiveness of multiple groups, and efforts should be made to obtain economic benefits. This kind of cooperation has a strong economic motivation, and is more persistent and coherent than cultural exchanges.
- 5) Community engagement: By inviting broader community members to participate in the results exhibition, the workshop expanded its influence. This community engagement approach not only helped with product market testing but also promoted wider cultural exchange.

4.3 Comparative analysis of the two cases

Through an in-depth comparative analysis of the Northern Thailand Highland Multi-ethnic Group Design Workshop and the Southern Thailand Minority Design Workshop, we can observe both significant commonalities and some noteworthy

differences in terms of creative economy development, co-design implementation, and ethnic integration effects, the specific comparison is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Northern and Southern Thailand case comparison

Aspect	Commonalities	Differences
Effectiveness of Creative Economy	Through these two cases, we further realize the value and significance of economic cooperation and cross-cultural communication, which is consistent with the concept of creative economy put forward by Howkins (2001).	The northern case emphasizes the importance of modernizing traditional crafts, while the southern case requires the integration of multicultural elements.
Co-design Methods	Both cases emphasize the importance of collaborative design, which can promote innovation and enhance cultural understanding, and are consistent with the concept of multi-collaborative design proposed by Sanders and Stappers (2008).	Unlike the Northern case, which calls for the use of reasonable means to promote cultural integration, the Southern case points to the importance of maintaining cultural sensitivity.
Cultural Attitudes	Both cases emphasize the importance of opening minds and enhancing cultural self-confidence, which is consistent with the research conclusions of Berry et al. (2006).	The northern case focuses on ethnic differences, while the southern case focuses on cultural and religious differences, which is in line with Crul's (2016) concept of "hyperdiversity".
Value Integration	Both cases emphasize the coordinated development between culture and economy. Yyúdice (2003) regards culture as an important resource, and there is synergy between them.	The case of the South points to the importance of economic cooperation in the process of cultural integration, given the high level of cultural and religious complexity in the region.
Long-term Impact	Both cases emphasize the importance of economic cooperation and require cross-cultural communication, which is consistent with the conclusions of Björgvinsson et al. (2012).	The southern case points out that cultural integration can provide a powerful driving force for economic development, emphasizing the need to maintain close ties between the two, and Granovetter (1973) makes a similar point.

This comparative analysis reveals several key insights:

- 1) Both workshops effectively utilized creative economy as a platform for cultural integration, though with different emphases based on local contexts.
- 2) The role of co-design varies according to the specific cultural and religious dynamics of each region.
- 3) Economic cooperation serves as a powerful driver for cultural integration in both cases, but the mechanisms differ.
- 4) Cultural sensitivity and respect emerge as crucial factors, particularly in the southern case where religious considerations play a more prominent role.
- 5) Both workshops demonstrate the potential of "soft" integration through creative economy initiatives, though the pathways to integration vary based on local conditions.

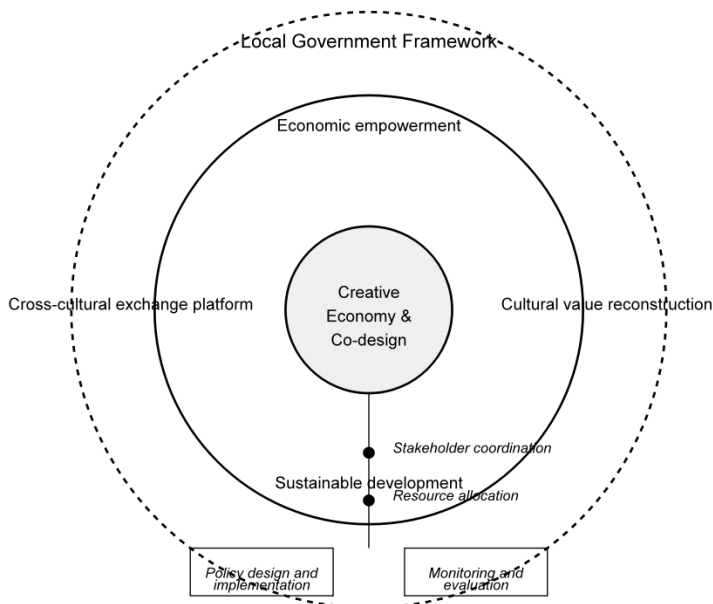
These findings suggest that while the basic principles of using creative economy for multi-ethnic integration remain consistent, the specific implementation strategies must be carefully tailored to local cultural, religious, and social contexts. The success of both workshops in promoting integration while respecting cultural differences provides valuable insights for similar initiatives in other multi-ethnic regions.

5 Discussion

5.1 Model construction and core elements

Through an in-depth analysis of the two Thai design workshop cases and integration of local governance theory, this study constructs an innovative theoretical framework and practical model aimed at promoting multi-ethnic "soft" integration through creative economy policies and co-design. This governance-centered model integrates the core concepts of creative economy, multi-ethnic integration theory, and collaborative governance, providing new ideas for solving complex multicultural social problems. The schematic of the model is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Thai design workshop model for multi-ethnic "soft" integration through creative economy policies and co-design



The core elements of this model highlight the central role of local governments in facilitating creative economy initiatives and multi-ethnic integration. Local authorities serve as key coordinators, providing policy support, resource allocation, and stakeholder coordination. It provides conditions for the development of creative industries and has a more prominent performance in environmental construction, which not only reflects the cultural representativeness, but also enables cultural heritage to be effectively protected. Thus, local governments should coordinate the relationship between cultural protection and economic development.

The implementation of this model clarifies the value and significance of collaborative governance in the process of developing creative economy. The establishment of a structured participation platform enables local governments to take into account the relationship between multiple stakeholders at the same time, innovate in practice, and provide favorable conditions for cooperation between ethnic groups. In this case, more economic opportunities will be created to cooperate in a cross-cultural manner. This model is based on the realization of sustainable development, which requires local governments to carry out rational layout and planning, and enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of policies.

5.2 Implications for ethnic policies and implementation possibilities

The development of this research has brought enlightenment for local governments to formulate reasonable ethnic policies. Through research, we know that the development of creative economy requires coordinating the relationship between many stakeholders and exploring a good collaborative governance model in practice. This requires local governments to pursue balance in the process of development, to develop economy while protecting culture, and to bring tangible and intangible culture into the scope of protection.

The implementation of this model will have an impact on all aspects of local governance, especially capacity-building, cultural exchanges and so on, and promote regional development. Local governments should rationally plan urban construction, integrate various creative ideas, develop creative industries in a cluster way, carry out activities in a cross-cultural way, and carry out training activities according to specific conditions. Flexible measures should be taken to conform to regional development and enhance cultural sensitivity.

5.3 Research limitations and future research directions

In the course of this study, there are several shortcomings. Although the case study can help us further understand what role local governments can play in the

development of creative economy, the conclusions may not be suitable for all political and cultural backgrounds, and the universality needs to be verified. At the same time, there is no comprehensive data in this study, and the longitudinal comparison is insufficient, which can not make an objective assessment of the effectiveness of the policy.

In the next stage of research, we should take a variety of ways to make up for the shortcomings. Longitudinal research can grasp the relationship between multi-ethnic integration and creative economy in the future. By comparing different cultural backgrounds and finding out the differences between different governance models, we can make an objective evaluation of the effectiveness of policies and grasp the adaptability of policies. At the same time, the analysis of the implementation mechanism can help stakeholders to make reasonable participation decisions.

In this study, the driving role of technology in the process of community governance is clearly pointed out, and the role of digital integration is clarified. In the next stage of research, we should deeply analyze how local governments develop creative economy with the help of digital platforms, and also protect cultural authenticity. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the role of virtual platforms, adopt reasonable cultural protection methods, and release the energy of online communities.

In this study, the role of local governments in the process of multi-ethnic integration and creative economy development is analyzed, and a relatively complete theoretical framework is constructed. The research results need to strive to develop a long-term sustainable direction in the implementation process, to meet the needs of multiple stakeholders, and to make full use of local resources. Whether the model is effective or not depends on whether the local government can reflect a strong cultural sensitivity, which is also inevitably related to economic inclusiveness.

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Conflict of interest:

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

All interviewees in the in-depth interviews have been assigned pseudonyms to protect their privacy. The research data primarily consists of process photographs and interview records. Due to the sensitive nature of some materials involving specific research subjects, not all data is publicly available. For inquiries about potentially available related information, please contact the corresponding author.

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