

# Thailand's 'Design Workshop' Model for Promoting Ethnic Integration: Research and Implications

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**Abstract:** This study focuses on the application and effects of Thailand's "design workshop" model in promoting ethnic integration. Through case studies of design workshops in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, we explore how this model facilitates cross-cultural understanding and cooperation through creative practices. The research finds that design workshops effectively reduce cultural barriers and enhance participants' cross-cultural competencies through co-creation, cultural dialogue, and emotional connections. Based on case analysis, this paper proposes a theoretical model of "design workshops promoting ethnic integration" and discusses its implications for China's ethnic measure. The study points out that this approach faces challenges in practice, such as ensuring equal participation and balancing cultural differences. Future research needs to further assess long-term effects and adapt to local contexts.

**Keywords:** Design Workshop; Ethnic Integration; Cross-cultural Understanding; Collaborative Innovation

## 1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, the harmonious development of multi-ethnic countries has become a universal challenge. Traditional ethnic integration policies often focus on "hard measures" such as economic and educational approaches, which struggle to meet the needs of increasingly complex multicultural societies. In recent years, academia has begun to explore the possibility of promoting ethnic integration through "soft measures" such as cultural and creative activities [1].

Thailand, as a multi-ethnic country, has long faced challenges in coordinating ethnic

relations. In recent years, the Thai government and non-governmental organizations have launched "design workshop" projects in several cities, aiming to promote exchange and cooperation between different ethnic groups through art and design activities. These projects have achieved significant results, providing valuable experience for other multi-ethnic countries.

This study takes Thailand's "design workshops" as an example to explore the mechanisms and practical modes of this innovative model in promoting ethnic integration. By analyzing Thailand's experience, the research aims to provide insights for other multi-ethnic countries, especially for China's ethnic integration work. This study adopts a case study method, combining literature analysis and field research to present the theory and practice of design workshops in promoting ethnic integration.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Current Research on Ethnic Integration Theory

Research on ethnic integration theory can be traced back to the early 20th century, with early studies focusing mainly on colonial management and immigrant assimilation. As globalization accelerates, related research has entered a new stage. Vertovec [2] proposed the concept of "super-diversity," emphasizing that the complexity of cultural diversity in contemporary society has transcended traditional ethnic categorizations. Modood [3] proposed "interactive multiculturalism," emphasizing dialogue and interaction between different cultural groups.

In China, research on ethnic integration has undergone a development process from macro theory to micro empiricism. Ma Rong [4]

proposed a "de-politicized" approach to ethnic studies, sparking widespread discussion in academia. Zhu Zhirong [5] studied the integration mechanisms of urban ethnic communities from a spatial perspective, providing a new perspective for understanding multi-ethnic integration. In recent years, research focus has gradually shifted to urban ethnic integration practices. Wang Xianghua [6] conducted an in-depth analysis of the experience of Guangzhou's "Qixinggang Model" in promoting multicultural coexistence. However, existing research still has some limitations. Firstly, there is a disconnect between theoretical research and social reality, with many studies lacking empirical support. Secondly, research subjects are often concentrated in urban areas or easily surveyed groups, with insufficient attention to remote areas and complex minority groups. Finally, research methods tend to favor quantitative analysis, lacking in-depth exploration of micro-processes.

## **2.2 Application of Creative Practices in Social Integration**

Creative practices as a method to promote social integration have received increasing attention in recent years. Markusen and Gadwa [7] proposed the concept of "creative placemaking," emphasizing the role of art and creative activities in promoting community engagement and social cohesion. Matarasso [8] explored the impact of participatory art projects on social inclusion through long-term empirical research.

In the Asian context, creative practices have also shown unique value in promoting social integration. Kong [9] studied how Singapore uses cultural and creative industries to promote harmony among multiple races. Yue [10] analyzed the role of Community art projects in bridging social capital between local residents and new immigrants.

However, research on the application of creative practices in promoting ethnic integration remains relatively scarce. Although some scholars have begun to pay attention to the role of art and design in cultural exchange, such as the concept of "art intervention" proposed by Zheng Xue [11], systematic research is still lacking. In particular, there is no clear theoretical framework and practical model for how to promote ethnic integration

through specific forms such as design workshops.

## **2.3 Review of Research Status**

Synthesizing existing research, it can be found that while significant progress has been made in both ethnic integration research and creative practice research, the intersection of these two fields remains to be explored in depth. Specifically:

There is insufficient exploration of "soft measures" in ethnic integration research. Traditional research often focuses on "hard measures" such as economy, education, and policy, while research on how to promote ethnic integration through culture, art, and other "soft measures" is relatively scarce.

Research on the application of creative practices in ethnic integration lacks systematization. Although there are sporadic studies involving creative activities and cultural exchange, a complete theoretical framework and practical model have yet to be formed.

There is insufficient research on creative practices in cross-cultural contexts. Existing research on creative practices is mostly concentrated in relatively homogeneous cultural backgrounds, lacking in-depth exploration of how to conduct creative activities in multicultural environments.

Empirical research, especially field-based research, is relatively scarce. Most studies remain at the theoretical level or are based on secondary data, lacking full participation and in-depth observation of actual projects.

Given the current research status, this study focuses on the innovative topic of "design workshops promoting ethnic integration," selecting practical cases from Thailand for analysis. It explores how design workshops function in multicultural environments to promote exchange and understanding between ethnic groups, as well as the advantages and limitations of this method compared to traditional integration approaches.

## **3. Theoretical Foundation**

### **3.1 Current Research on Ethnic Integration Theory**

This study takes "Interactive Multiculturalism" proposed by Modood [3] as its core theoretical foundation. This theory emphasizes that a truly

multicultural society should not be a simple juxtaposition of cultural groups, but active interaction and dialogue between different cultures. Interactive multiculturalism argues that by promoting exchange and cooperation between different cultural groups, a common social identity can be constructed while maintaining cultural diversity.

This theory provides an important perspective for understanding the role of design workshops in promoting ethnic integration. Design workshops create an interactive platform that allows participants from different cultural backgrounds to achieve deep exchange and understanding through co-creation. This interaction not only helps break down cultural barriers but may also promote the formation of new cross-cultural identities.

### **3.2 Social Innovation Theory**

Manzini's [12] social innovation theory provides another important theoretical support for this study. This theory argues that when facing complex social problems, innovative solutions often come from "small-scale, localized but interconnected" practices. Design plays a key role in this process, not only as a tool for problem-solving but also as a medium for promoting social participation and empowerment.

Design workshops, as a social innovation practice, conform to the characteristics described by Manzini. They explore new methods to solve the complex social problem of ethnic integration through small-scale, localized creative activities. At the same time, the networked operation mode of the workshops also reflects the characteristic of "interconnectedness," which is conducive to the dissemination and diffusion of experiences.

### **3.3 Contact Hypothesis**

The Contact Hypothesis proposed by Allport [13] provides a psychological basis for understanding the working mechanism of design workshops. This theory argues that under appropriate conditions (such as equal status, common goals, institutional support, etc.), contact between different groups can reduce prejudice and increase understanding. The meta-analysis study by Pettigrew and Tropp [14] further supports this theory and emphasizes the key role of emotional connection in reducing prejudice.

Design workshops provide an interactive environment that meets the conditions of the contact hypothesis for participants from different cultural backgrounds. Through the specific goal of co-creation, participants cooperate on an equal basis, which helps break down stereotypes and establish cross-cultural friendships.

### **3.4 Creative Problem Solving Theory**

Osborn's [15] Creative Problem Solving theory provides a theoretical basis for the operational methods of design workshops. This theory emphasizes that through structured creative processes (such as brainstorming, prototype design, etc.), innovative thinking can be stimulated to find unconventional problem solutions.

In design workshops, participants use creative problem-solving methods to jointly explore how to express and integrate different cultural elements. This process not only produces innovative design results but also provides participants with a new way of thinking and communicating, which helps break through cultural barriers and find innovative paths for cultural integration.

These four theoretical perspectives jointly constitute the theoretical framework of this study. Interactive multiculturalism provides the overall value orientation, social innovation theory explains the rationality of design workshops as an intervention means, the contact hypothesis clarifies its working mechanism, and creative problem-solving theory supports specific operational methods. This multi-dimensional theoretical framework helps to comprehensively understand and analyze the role and potential of design workshops in promoting ethnic integration.

## **4. Research Methods**

This study adopts qualitative research methods, mainly based on case studies and participatory observation. Design workshop projects in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, Thailand, were selected as research cases. Rich first-hand data was collected through field research, in-depth interviews, and participatory observation.

### **4.1 Case Selection**

The selection of design workshops in Bangkok and Chiang Mai as research cases was based on the following considerations:

Representativeness: Bangkok, as the capital of Thailand, is a multicultural urban center; Chiang Mai represents the multi-ethnic region of northern Thailand. These two cases can reflect the implementation of design workshops in different social environments.

Accessibility: The research team established good cooperative relationships with project organizers in these two places, enabling full research support.

Richness: These two cases differ in participant composition, implementation methods, and project outcomes, which is conducive to comparative analysis and drawing more comprehensive conclusions.

#### **4.2 Data Collection**

Data collection was mainly carried out through the following methods:

Participatory observation: Research team members participated in the activities of design workshops in both locations throughout the process, recording detailed field notes, including participants' interaction processes, emotional responses, and creative processes.

In-depth interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with workshop organizers, participants, and community representatives, totaling 40 interviews. Interview content included participation motivations, workshop experiences, changes in cultural attitudes, etc.

Document analysis: Project-related document materials were collected and analyzed, including workshop plans, outcome reports, media reports, etc.

Focus group discussions: After the workshops, focus group discussions were organized with participants to explore in-depth workshop experiences and long-term impacts.

#### **4.3 Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to systematically analyze the collected data. The specific steps were as follows:

Data familiarization: Repeatedly reading transcribed interview texts, field notes, and other materials.

Initial coding: Preliminary coding of the data, marking key information related to the research questions.

Theme searching: Combining related codes into potential themes.

Theme review: Checking whether the themes

correspond with the coded data and the entire data set.

Theme definition and naming: Further refining the specific content of each theme and giving clear definitions and names.

Report writing: Selecting typical cases and quotes, combining theoretical analysis to form the final research report.

Through this systematic analysis process, we identified several key themes, including "cross-cultural dialogue platform," "creative expression and cultural identity," "emotional connection and attitude change," etc., laying the foundation for subsequent case analysis and theoretical construction.

### **5. Case Analysis**

#### **5.1 Bangkok Multicultural Design Workshop**

##### **5.1.1 Background Introduction**

The Bangkok Multicultural Design Workshop was held in November 2022 in downtown Bangkok, lasting for two weeks. The project was jointly organized by the Thai Ministry of Culture and the Bangkok City Government, aiming to promote exchange and understanding among urban multicultural groups through design activities.

##### **5.1.2 Participant Composition**

The workshop had 40 participants, including: 15 community members from different cultural backgrounds (Thai, Chinese descent, Muslims, etc.)

10 professional designers

5 community workers

5 university student volunteers

5 government representatives

##### **5.1.3 Workshop Process**

Cultural exchange and team building (2 days)

Community research and problem definition (3 days)

Creative ideation and concept design (4 days)

Prototype making and testing (4 days)

Outcome presentation and feedback (2 days)

##### **5.1.4 Key Findings**

###### **(1) Cross-cultural Dialogue Platform**

The workshop provided a neutral, open communication platform for participants from different cultural backgrounds. Through joint creative activities, participants were able to explore cultural differences and commonalities in an informal atmosphere.

For example, during the community research

phase, a Chinese descent participant and a Muslim participant were assigned to the same group. Initially, communication between the two was limited due to cultural differences. However, when discussing how to design a public space that could reflect Bangkok's multicultural nature, they gradually opened up topics, sharing the lifestyles and values of their respective communities. This task-based communication effectively broke through cultural barriers.

#### (2) Creative Expression and Cultural Identity

The workshop encouraged participants to express their cultural identities through creative design while considering how to integrate with other cultural elements. This process not only strengthened participants' identification with their own culture but also cultivated an open attitude towards other cultures.

A typical case was the "Fusion Restaurant" concept jointly designed by a Thai designer and a Muslim community member. They cleverly combined Thai traditional architectural elements with Islamic geometric patterns, creating a space design that reflected cultural characteristics while being inclusive. During this process, both parties not only gained a deep understanding of each other's cultures but also discovered many unexpected commonalities.

#### (3) Emotional Connection and Attitude Change

Through intensive cooperation and creation processes, deep emotional connections were established between participants. These emotional bonds played a key role in changing cultural attitudes and eliminating prejudices.

A Chinese descent participant stated in an interview: "Previously, I felt unfamiliar and guarded towards the Muslim community. But through this workshop, especially collaborating with Ali (pseudonym), I found we have a lot in common. Now I actively learn about and understand Islamic culture."

#### (4) Practice-oriented Cultural Learning

The workshop was highly practical, with participants learning and experiencing different cultures through specific design tasks. This "learning by doing" approach was more effective and in-depth than traditional cultural education.

For example, when designing a urban wayfinding system that reflected multiculturalism, participants needed to deeply

research the visual symbols and language habits of different cultural groups. This process greatly expanded participants' cultural horizons and cultivated cross-cultural communication skills.

#### (5) Sustained Impact and Community Involvement

After the workshop, many participants continued to maintain contact and promoted multicultural concepts in their respective communities. Some design outcomes were also adopted by the city government and will be applied in actual urban planning.

A community worker stated: "This workshop not only changed the participants, but through them, is slowly changing the atmosphere of the entire community. We are planning to bring similar activities to the community level."

### **5.2 Chiang Mai Ethnic Cultural Innovation Workshop**

#### 5.2.1 Background Introduction

The Chiang Mai Ethnic Cultural Innovation Workshop was held in March 2023 in a multi-ethnic village on the outskirts of Chiang Mai, lasting for 10 days. The project was jointly initiated by the Faculty of Fine Arts at Chiang Mai University and local non-governmental organizations, aiming to promote the inheritance and development of hill tribe minority cultures through innovative design.

#### 5.2.2 Participant Composition

The workshop had 30 participants, including: 12 community members from different ethnic minorities (Dai, Lahu, Akha, etc.)

8 design major students

5 ethnic culture researchers

3 local artists

2 government representatives

#### 5.2.3 Workshop Process

Cultural immersion and team building (2 days)

Traditional craft learning and cultural resource sorting (3 days)

Innovative concept development (2 days)

Product design and production (2 days)

Outcome presentation and market feedback (1 day)

#### 5.2.4 Key Findings

##### (1) Cultural Confidence and Innovation

The workshop enhanced the confidence of ethnic minority participants in their own culture by combining traditional crafts with modern design. At the same time, the process of innovative design also inspired new



thinking about cultural inheritance.

A Lahu participant shared: "Before, I thought our traditional costumes could only be worn during festivals, but through this design, I discovered that it can be integrated into modern life in new ways. This has given me more confidence in the future of our culture."

**(2) Intergenerational Cultural Transmission**

The workshop built a bridge between the younger generation and community elders, promoting the transmission of cultural knowledge. Young design students gained an in-depth understanding of the essence of traditional crafts through collaboration with elders, while elders learned new design concepts from the younger generation.

**(3) Balance between Economic Value and Cultural Protection**

The workshop explored how to enhance the economic value of traditional crafts while protecting cultural authenticity. This attempt to balance provided new ideas for sustainable development in ethnic minority areas.

For example, a project combining Dai brocade weaving techniques with modern home design not only preserved traditional craftsmanship but also opened up new market spaces. This innovation not only brought economic benefits but also enhanced young people's motivation to learn traditional crafts.

**(4) Cross-cultural Cooperation and Mutual Learning**

Participants from different ethnic backgrounds enhanced mutual understanding through collaborative design. This cross-cultural cooperation not only produced innovative design results but also promoted harmonious relationships between ethnic groups.

A design student stated: "Collaborating with partners from different ethnic groups made me realize how valuable multicultural resources are. The unique perspective of each ethnic group brought new possibilities to the design."

**(5) Community Participation and Empowerment**

The workshop adopted participatory design methods, fully respecting and leveraging the subjectivity of community members. This approach not only ensured the cultural appropriateness of design outcomes but also enhanced the community's capacity for autonomous development.

A community leader commented: "This workshop made us feel that we are not only

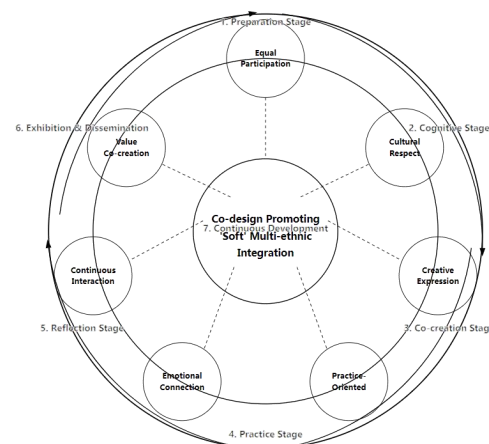
inheritors of culture but can also be innovators. This confidence is very important for the development of our community."

Through in-depth analysis of these two cases, we can see the unique role of design workshops in promoting cultural exchange, enhancing understanding, and stimulating innovation. These findings provide a solid empirical basis for constructing a theoretical model of "design workshops promoting ethnic integration."

**6. Discussion and Model Construction**

Based on the in-depth analysis of the design workshop cases in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, this study proposes a theoretical model of "Design Workshops Promoting Ethnic Integration." (Figure 1) This model not only summarizes the key mechanisms of design workshops but also provides a guiding framework for future practice.

**6.1 Theoretical Model Construction**



**Figure 1. Schematic diagram of the Design Workshop Promoting Ethnic Integration Model**

The model includes the following core elements:

- (1) Cross-cultural Dialogue Platform: Design workshops create a neutral, open communication environment that breaks through traditional cultural boundaries.
- (2) Creative Expression: Through design activities, participants can express and integrate cultural elements in innovative ways, enhancing cultural confidence.
- (3) Practice-oriented Learning: The "learning by doing" approach makes cultural learning more intuitive and in-depth,

effectively cultivating cross-cultural competencies.

**(4) Emotional Connection:**

Emotional bonds formed during the co-creation process are key factors in attitude change and prejudice elimination.

**(5) Value Co-creation:**

Workshops not only generate cultural value but also create economic value, providing impetus for sustainable development.

**(6) Community Participation and Empowerment:**

Respecting community subjectivity and enhancing autonomous development capabilities.

**(7) Sustained Impact:**

Workshop effects extend to broader community networks through participants.

These elements interact to form a virtuous cycle promoting ethnic integration. The model emphasizes that effective design workshops should be a dynamic, interactive process rather than a single intervention activity.

## **6.2 Theoretical Contributions of the Model**

This model makes contributions to existing theories in the following aspects:

**Enriching Interactive Multiculturalism Theory:**  
Providing a concrete operational method, demonstrating how to promote positive interaction between cultures through creative practices.

**Expanding Social Innovation Theory:**  
Showcasing the application potential of design thinking in solving complex social problems (such as ethnic integration).

**Deepening Contact Hypothesis:**  
Offering a new perspective on how creative activities can enhance the effects of intergroup contact.

**Integrating Creative Problem Solving and Cultural Learning:**  
Demonstrating how creative activities can become an effective medium for cultural learning and exchange.

## **6.3 Practical Implications**

Based on this model, we can provide the following suggestions for future ethnic integration practices:

Policy makers should recognize the role of "soft measures" and incorporate creative practices into the toolkit of ethnic policies.

In designing projects, focus should be placed

on creating opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue, rather than solely on final products.

Long-term, continuous projects should be encouraged rather than one-time activities to ensure lasting impact.

Project design should fully consider how to promote emotional connections, such as setting common goals and team building activities.

Local knowledge and community participation should be emphasized to ensure cultural appropriateness and sustainability of projects.

## **6.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Although this study proposes an innovative theoretical model, it still has some limitations:

**Case Limitations:**

The research is based on only two cases from Thailand; future studies need to validate the model's applicability in more diverse cultural backgrounds.

**Long-term Effect Assessment:**

Due to time constraints, this study mainly focused on short-term effects; future research needs to conduct long-term follow-up studies.

**Universality Challenge:**

Cultural differences and levels of conflict vary in different regions; the model may need to be adjusted according to specific situations.

Future research can further deepen in the following directions:

Explore the differentiated roles of different types of creative activities (such as music, drama, etc.) in promoting ethnic integration.

Study how to organically combine the design workshop model with other integration strategies (such as education, employment policies, etc.).

Develop more refined evaluation tools to accurately measure the long-term impact of design workshops on ethnic integration.

Explore how digital technology can enhance the effectiveness of design workshops, especially in cross-regional cooperation.

Study how to strike a balance between protecting cultural diversity and promoting integration, avoiding cultural homogenization.

In conclusion, this study provides a new perspective for understanding and practicing harmonious development in multicultural societies by constructing a "Design Workshops Promoting Ethnic Integration" model. This model not only helps academia better understand the role of creative practices in

cultural integration but also provides an operational guiding framework for policy makers and practitioners. Future research and practice should further explore how to extend this innovative approach to broader social and cultural contexts to address the increasingly complex challenges of multicultural societies.

## **7. Conclusion and Implications**

This study explored the role and potential of creative practices in promoting ethnic integration through case analysis of design workshops in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, Thailand. The research found that design workshops, as an innovative "soft measure," show unique advantages in the following aspects:

Creating non-politicized communication platforms

Promoting cultural confidence and innovation

Cultivating cross-cultural competencies

Establishing emotional bonds

Balancing cultural protection and economic development

Based on these findings, this study constructed a theoretical model of "Design Workshops Promoting Ethnic Integration," providing new ideas for future research and practice.

### **7.1 Implications for China's Ethnic Policies**

Although China's ethnic situation differs from Thailand's, Thailand's experience still provides valuable insights for China's ethnic work:

Combining Hard and Soft Approaches:

While maintaining necessary institutional safeguards, adopt more "soft measures" such as cultural and creative activities to promote ethnic integration. This approach can create more opportunities for exchange and understanding while respecting the cultural characteristics of each ethnic group.

Emphasizing Grassroots Innovation:

Encourage and support innovative cultural exchange projects at the community level. Central policy makers should provide policy support and resource guarantees for such innovative practices.

Cultivating Cross-cultural Talents:

Introduce cross-cultural design thinking into the education system, especially in ethnic colleges, to cultivate a new generation of talents with innovation capabilities and cultural sensitivity.

Promoting Cultural Industry Development:

Drawing on the experience of design workshops, explore industrialization paths that combine ethnic minority cultural elements with modern design, both inheriting culture and promoting economic development.

Establishing Long-term Mechanisms:

Cultural exchange activities should not be viewed as one-time projects, but rather as continuous exchange platforms and networks to ensure long-term effects.

### **7.2 Research Contributions**

The main contributions of this study include:

Theoretical Innovation:

Proposing a theoretical model of "Design Workshops Promoting Ethnic Integration," enriching the theoretical framework of ethnic integration research.

Methodological Innovation:

Demonstrating the potential of creative practices as a research method in exploring complex social issues.

Practical Guidance:

Providing an operational framework and specific suggestions for policy makers and practitioners.

Interdisciplinary Integration:

Integrating knowledge from design, sociology, psychology, and other disciplines and applying it to ethnic studies.

### **7.3 Research Limitations and Future Directions**

This study also has some limitations, mainly including:

Case Limitations:

The research is based on only two cases from Thailand, which may not fully represent situations in other cultural backgrounds.

Time Span:

Due to research time constraints, long-term follow-up surveys were not conducted, making it difficult to assess the long-term effects of design workshops.

Participant Representativeness:

Workshop participants may not fully represent the entire community, with the possibility of selection bias.

Based on these limitations, future research can expand in the following directions:

Cross-national Comparative Studies:

Validate and refine the theoretical model in different countries and cultural backgrounds.

Long-term Effect Assessment:



Conduct longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of design workshops on participants and communities.

Large-scale Application Research:

Explore how to extend the design workshop model to larger-scale social practices.

Technology Integration Research:

Study how to utilize digital technology to enhance the effectiveness of design workshops, especially in cross-regional cooperation.

Policy Integration Research:

Explore how to organically combine creative practice methods with existing ethnic policy systems.

In conclusion, this study provides an innovative perspective and method for understanding and promoting ethnic integration. In the context of globalization, how to maintain cultural diversity while promoting social harmony remains a complex and urgent topic. Design workshops, as an innovative "soft measure," have shown unique potential. Future research and practice should further explore how to extend and deepen this approach to address the increasingly complex challenges of multicultural societies.

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