



An Analysis of the Current Transmission Situation of the Local Myths and Legends in Zhoushan City Based on “5W” Model of Communication --- A Case Study of 12 Legends of Dragons in Dinghai

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Abstract: As early as the 1940s, analyzing the development of cultural transmission and exploring the law of communication has been becoming an important part of cultural studies. The thesis adopts “5W” Model of Communication proposed by Harold Lasswell to analyzing the lack of cultural transmission of legends in Dinghai District, Zhoushan City, Zhejiang Province through the research method of a combination of field investigation, questionnaires and interviews, then analyzing the collected data to indicate that “5W” Model of Communication plays an active role in improving transmission of regional and traditional culture as well as pointing out the corresponding modern revelation on mass media for the inheritance of traditional legends.

Keywords: “5W” model of communication; local myths and legends; cultural transmission; media

1. INTRODUCTION

Regional culture is a reflection of the economic development and social changes, which mostly can be reflected via local cultural characteristics, ecological customs and traditions, etc.. Regional culture has the characteristics of uniqueness, regionalism and dispersion (Niu Bo and Yang Shuqiong, 2019), yet people are still involved, enrich the dynamic culture, which is an important part of Chinese traditional culture with the advantages that the local people are easy to accept it and the certain affinity and convenience in the inheritance of traditional culture. According to the author’s field investigation, however, there are only few domestic studies on the stories of the dragon legends in Dinghai, Zhoushan, and there has also been little research on the analysis and recommended suggestions of its cultural communication upon this issue.

Besides, the rapid development of intelligent technology in recent years has been subverting and reconstructing every link in the transmission chain of traditional culture, thus Jansen (2010), Eadie (2011), Malin (2011) and Wahl-Jorgensen (2004) all simultaneously proposed Lasswell’s “5W” communication model to help legalize mass communication research into a feasible academic research field, and pointed out its guiding role in cultural communication. From the perspective of communication, this paper aims to analyze the development of Lasswell’s “5W” model of communication and explores the rules of cultural communication, so as to obtain the corresponding important enlightenment. On the basis of Lasswell’s “5W” model of communication, therefore, it is necessary to make an objective and rational discussion and analysis of the internal and external transmission situation of the dragon legends in Dinghai, Zhoushan, and to find out the factors limiting its transmission and popularity.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS

2.1. Definition of “5W” Model of Communication

In 1948, Lasswell first put forward the five basic elements of the communication process in his work *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society*, and arranged them in a certain structural order, forming the process model later known as the “5W” or “Laswell formula”. These W’s are the first letters of five interrogative pronouns in English: who, says what, in which channel, to whom,

with what effect (Nei Wei, 2019). The Lasswell communication model (Figure 1), created after World War II, represents a simplistic broadcast conception of communication, with one sender, one message, and one or more receivers, but no interaction (Wilson, 2001), which vividly depicts a typical conception of Lasswell’s construct as a graphic model of communication.

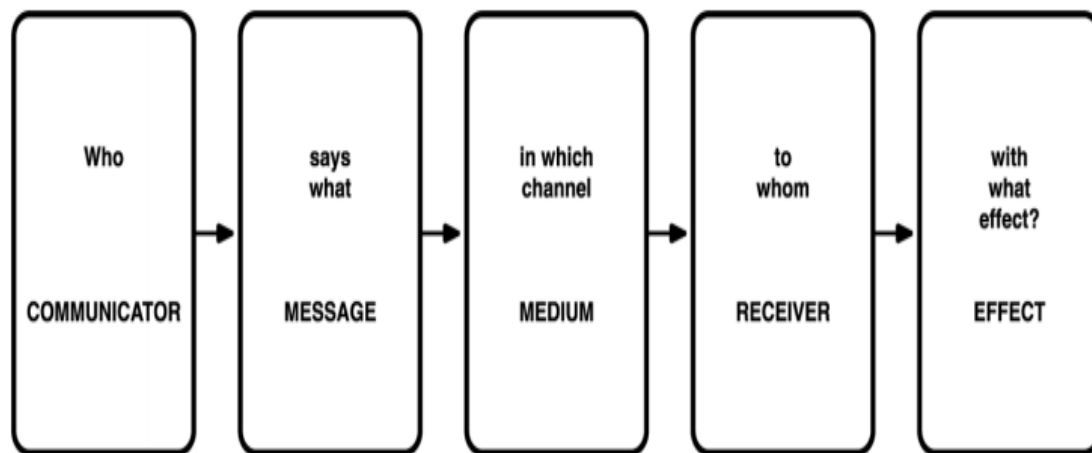


Figure1

2.2. Functions of “5W” Model of Communication

Transmission of the social heritage refers to the ability of the media to communicate values, norms, and styles across time and between groups. It is the function that spreads the common norms and values among the public. This action is called socialization, which is helpful for the unification of a country. The advanced national regional culture, which a certain extent is regarded as social heritage, can form the impetus of cultural development, and its core is the shaping of cultural brand (Zhao Shuo and Tang Chao, 2019), indicating the considerable significance of regional cultural transmission.

Lasswell’s construct is still a relevant conceptual tool today by highlighting its continued use in the construction of mass communication definitions, as a modified paradigm in content analysis, and as a general framework to identify and classify acts of communication. Indeed, scholars such as Watson and Hill (1997), and Stempel (2003), Demers (2005) empirically prove that Lasswell’s construct is alive and reasonable. Despite many claims to the contrary, it also reveals that Lasswell’s construct remains silently influential in the field through a variety of applications. Its utilization in mass communication dictionaries and entry-level course books ensure that Lasswell’s construct is being passed down to a new generation of communication scholars. It also provides value for the field by being a model frequently chosen for comparison. In these situations, it operates similarly to a canonic text by offering a point from which to measure the progress of the field, theory, or model. When used in this role, its value resides in its ability to act as a marker and accurately measure the theoretical distance traveled between the two concepts, models, or theories being compared.

2.3. Achievements and Limitations of Previous Studies

It can be easily concluded that Lasswell’s model is both a relevant and useful concept for the field of cultural communication today despite several misconceptions surrounding it. In recent decades, for instance, several scholars have criticized Lasswell’s selection of categories for inclusion. One reason commonly offered is that Lasswell failed to incorporate feedback as a category directly into the model (Berger, 1995), yet another is that he conceptualized the medium as a “channel” which certain scholars consider a problematic metaphor due to its connotation that media act as “pipes” or “conduits” (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

Besides this, there are only a few domestic studies on the stories of dragon gods as well as very limited studies on their dissemination, and there are many constraining factors for the dissemination of legends of the dragon gods of Dinghai in Zhoushan. Therefore, the research space of this topic is very large and it is of great necessity to re-examine and further study the dissemination of the stories of the dragon gods in Dinghai, Zhoushan. In addition, China is such a resourceful country with a vast

territory and abundant cultural diversity, thus there are many traditional Chinese cultures like the story of the dragon gods which need improving measures concerning their existence and transmission. Therefore, taking the stories of the dragon gods in Dinghai, Zhoushan as an example, the spread of such precious stories of Chinese traditional culture is very worthy of in-depth study and needs to be further expanded and deepened.

3. A CASE STUDY OF 12 LEGENDS OF DRAGONS IN DINGHAI

3.1. Methodology

3.1.1. Research Aims

This study intends to figure out the current transmission situation of the dragon legends in Zhoushan and specifically analyzing the local cultural transmission of 12 particular legends in Dinghai. In this way, problems in the process of cultural transmission of legends can be pointed out accordingly. Meanwhile, the research focuses on exploring the shortcomings and improvement strategies in the process of local legend transmission, and revealing the rules of the transmission of ancient Chinese culture in the new era, so as to put forward effective and targeted suggestions for the transmission of regional culture. In order to collect comprehensive information for it, a questionnaire is designed in different perspectives, including subjects' basic information, knowledge of dragon legends in Dinghai, views of legends, personal suggestions on legend transmission, etc.. It also aims to put forward feasible suggestions and strategies on these issues and explore a reliable path to improve the transmission situation of traditional Chinese culture.

3.1.2. Research Subjects

Considering that the subjects in different regions have various understanding of these particular 12 dragon legends, the author therefore divided the subjects of this study by region in order to improve the comprehensiveness and credibility of the collected data. The total number of participants was 161, including 122 local respondents and 39 non-local respondents. The respondents ranged in age from 5 to 90 years old. The average age at the time of the survey was 41.3 years old. In addition, the author also personally visited several local communities in Zhoushan to interview 18 local residents of different ages to understand their understanding and views on the dragon legends.

3.1.3. Research Method and Data Collection

This research adopts the survey method combining questionnaires and interviews. Among them, the questionnaire contains a total of 13 related questions, the purpose of which is to investigate the respondents' understanding of these 12 dragon legends in Dinghai, their opinions on the inheritance forms of Chinese legends, their ideas on the adaptation of legends by mass media and the feasibility of suggestions on the legend transmission, etc.. The author displayed the Chinese version of the questionnaire in order for each subject to clearly understand the meaning of each issue. Throughout the study, all the subjects were surveyed before being told the purpose of the study and there were no right or wrong answers for their response, hence, they just answered each question honestly and frankly according to their own opinions and behaviors. By the large, a total of 161 subjects participated in the questionnaire survey, and 161 pieces of valid questionnaires were collected. Besides this, a total of 18 subjects were interviewed, including 3 under 20 years old, 4 between 20 and 29 years old, 4 between 30 and 39, 4 between 40 and 59, and 3 over 60.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Results

According to the research methodology, the author used statistical software to carry out descriptive statistical analysis and a summary of the retrieved questionnaires based on the theory of “5W” model of communication. The analysis results are as follows.

4.1.1. Statistical Results of Existing Cultural Heritage Situation

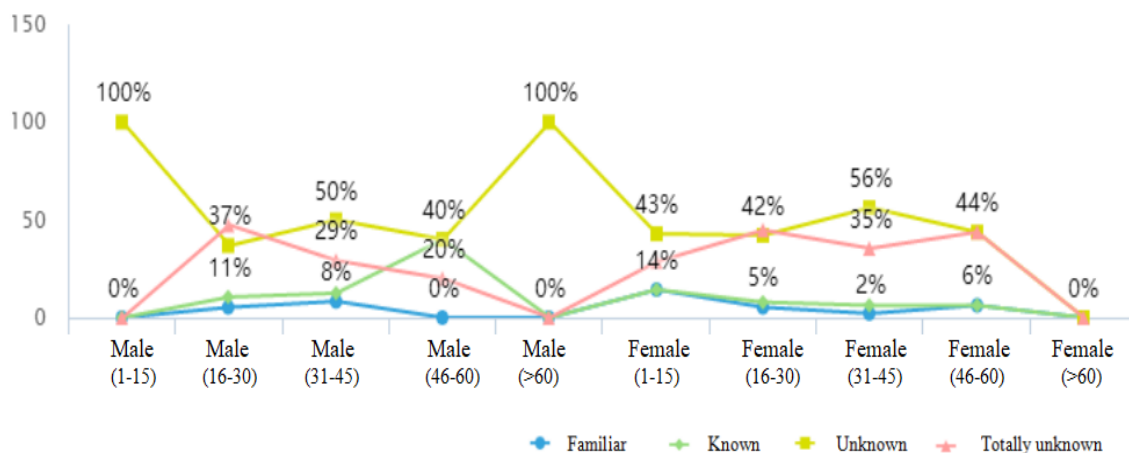


Chart1: Relationship between the Factors of Gender and Age and Local Cultural Understanding

As can be seen from the above line chart, the two factors of gender and age are found related to the understanding of local traditional culture. Specifically, from the perspective gender, male residents have a considerably higher level of understanding of local dragon myths and legends than female residents. There are together 59% of investigated men, whose age group is mainly concentrated on the age period between 46 and 60 years old, expressing their understanding of the plots of these dragon legends. In comparison, only 27% of the female residents surveyed said they have known these local mythologies, and the age group of these females is mainly concentrated in the age group of 1-15 years old (about 1/2 of the total), which makes a stark contrast with that of males.

However, these above data do not mean that gender is the decisive factor in this relationship since in the two age groups of 1-15 and over 61 years old, men are far less knowledgeable about local culture than women. In terms of the factor of age, the age groups that are completely ignorant of the local dragon myths and legends are mainly concentrated in young people (16-30 years old) and middle-aged people (about 45 years old). In general, the combination of the two factors illustrate that, regardless of gender, young or old, respondents surveyed have a quite poor understanding of local traditional culture since the majority of them do not understand or even feel completely unknown about deservedly cherished culture, in this way, it can be apparently concluded that the inheritance and popularization of local traditional culture is sort of pessimistic and worth people to take improvement measures.

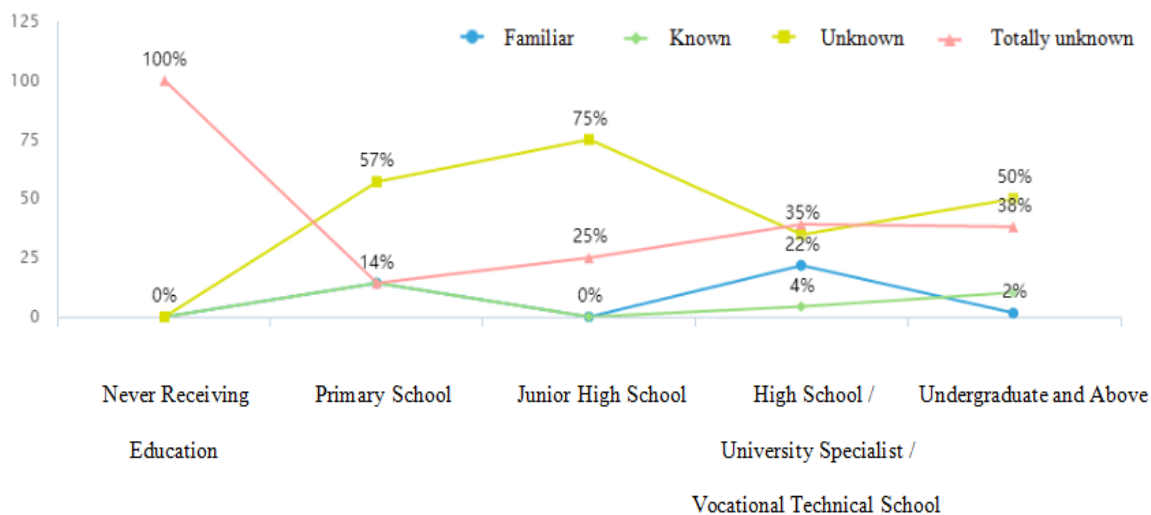


Chart2: Descriptive statistics on the impact of educational attainment on local cultural communication

The data in Chart 2 shows that various levels of education have a different understanding of local traditional culture. All the respondents never receiving education choose the option never hearing about the dragon legends. 57 percent of the respondents with primary school education indicate that they do not understand the dragon mythologies questioned while the number of people who are familiar, understanding and totally ignorant of these myths and legends was about the same,

accounting for about 14% of the total. For people with junior high school education, there shows a different situation compared with the ratio of the two previous numbers. No one believes they familiarize with or understand the dragon mythology stories. Three-quarters of the them choose the option not understanding these legends, and the remaining quarter hold they completely ignore the local methodologies questioned. In contrast, 22% of respondents with a high school, college or vocational college degree said they are familiar with these dragon myths and legends and 4% of them believe they quite understand these myths, which is the largest proportion of all five segments, indicating that respondents at this level of education are most aware of local culture. In terms of people with undergraduate and above degrees, most people choose the option not knowing or being completely ignorant of these dragon myths, the proportions being 50% and 38% respectively.

In addition, the interviews also confirm the above results of questionnaires to some extent. Combined with the data collected during the interview, the author learn that 58 of the 94 native students (61.70%) in primary and secondary school in Zhoushan do not understand or hear about local dragon mythologies, however, only 8 of the 47 Zhoushan native residents (17.02%) admit that they did not hear about it. The same survey done among 65 college students who were recently studying in Zhoushan find that only 9 (9.47%) of the total say that they just slightly knew of them. It can be seen that improving the understanding of local culture among young children and migrants in the region is the primary task of improving the current situation of mythological stories.

4.1.2. Statistical Results of Suggested Strategies

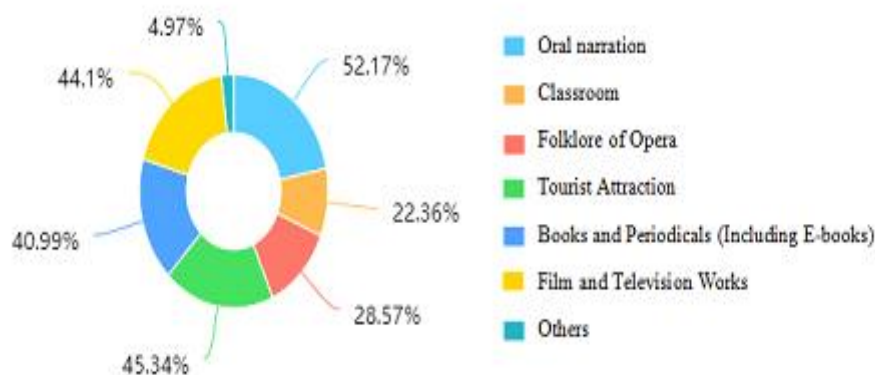


Chart3: Channels and Methods for Hearing about Mythological Stories

According to the descriptive statistics of the above ring chart, in this multiple-choice questions, more than half (52.17%) of respondents believe that the oral narration of the elders was the main form of their understanding of local culture. In addition, it is also very common for these respondents surveyed to understand their traditional culture through film and television works, books and periodicals (including e-books), and tourist attraction, accounting for 44.1%, 40.99% and 45.34%, respectively, which are just slightly lower than the proportion of people hearing about via oral narration. Besides this, it is rare to know about local culture through the folklore of opera since only 28.57% of them think it is a significant approach to enable them understand the local culture. However, much to the author’s surprise, the percentage of understanding local culture with special characters through the method taught in the teacher’s classroom is the lowest of all the six options given, making up only 22.36% of the total which is more or less half of the first four transmission methods mentioned above.

Based on the data in Table 2 and the conclusions of the interviews, it is obvious that the younger generation and the migrant population in the area investigated (such as college students, etc.) have a much lower level of understanding of the local culture than the middle-aged locals, and the data in Figure 3 also confirms this conclusion to some extent because the proportion of understand the local culture via teacher’s classroom is the smallest of all the segments. It can be seen that promoting the school teaching and education to improve the students’ awareness of local culture and meaningful culture is the most important task in solving the cultural inheritance fault phenomenon.

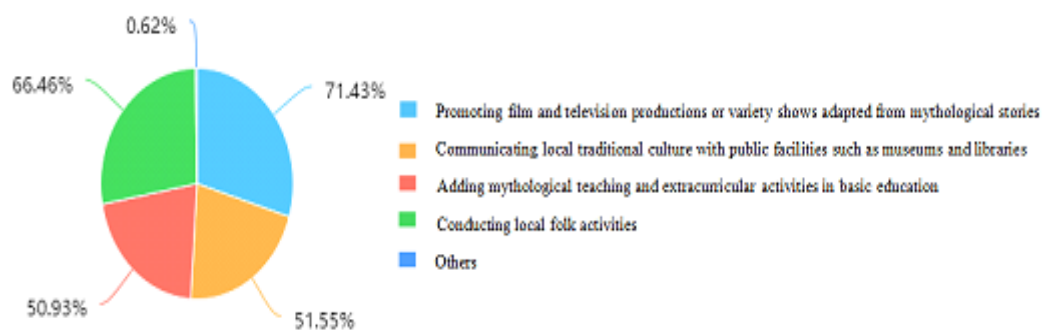


Chart4: *Methods for Relatively Effectively Improving the Popularity of Myths and Legends*

According to the pie chart, the above statistics show that the people surveyed hold on various opinions on ways to effectively increase the popularity of local myths and legends. 71.43% of respondents think that promoting film and television works or variety shows adapted from mythological stories is a far more effective and reasonable transmission method. Two-thirds of the them feel that carrying out local folk activities is an important approach to improve the transmission of mythologies with local characteristics. In addition, people surveyed of an almost same proportion (around 51%) consider it is of great effectiveness and efficiency to improve the popularity of myths and legends via taking advantage of public facilities, such as museum libraries, and spreading local traditional mythological stories in basic education and extracurricular activities. It can be seen that although the suggestions made by these respondents are different, the proportions do not differ a lot. Combining the data of the other three charts, an obvious conclusion can be put forward that in addition to enriching the introduction and teaching activities of local mythological stories in basic education, it is also of great significance and necessity to make full use of public facilities (such as museums and libraries, etc.) to organize local cultural exhibitions and other artistic or educational activities to spread local traditional culture.

4.2. Implications on School Teaching and Public Communication

By the large, the phenomenon of cultural inheritance faults is quite serious, and the current transmission situation of local dragon myths and legends in Dinghai District of Zhoushan City is not optimistic, especially for young children and migrants who have little knowledge of these precious cultures. Additionally, based on Harold Lasswell’s “5W” model of communication, combined with research data and interview conclusions, the author believes that the two approaches of school teaching and public communication, functioning as existing local cultural communication channels, have not exerted their due positive impacts on improving cultural communication and effectively promoting the popularity of regional myths and legends. On account of this, this research has broad implications for regional cultural communication and transmission.

Via analyzing the essential causes of the regional cultural communication dilemmas, it can be concluded that Lasswell’s “5W” communication model can provide targeted guidance for this issue. For example, as for the communicator factor, the disseminators of the mythology story mainly focus on the age group of the elderly in rural areas who generally lack reasonable education. Moreover, the communicator has a phenomenon of faults, and there are few young communicators with higher cultural literacy. For the media factor, there is no good use of the current information network technology as a medium to spread the dragon mythology. Regarding the audience factors, the progress of the times, the development of culture, and even the audience’s taste for culture has been greatly changing, which requires the necessity to investigate and analyze the audience market and innovate the mythical story in Dinghai.

Therefore, the author believes the transmission situation of the legends in Zhoushan is able to be considerably promoted with the implications on the perspectives of school teaching and public communication. On the one hand, students’ awareness of the necessity and importance of local cultural communication will be promoted through school education, and the whole family, even the community will be promoted to transmit the local excellent and precious regional culture with

characteristics. In this way, it is apparent that every residents, especially for the students can be excellent practitioners of cultural communication. On the other hand, public facilities, such as libraries and museums, should also play an active role in local cultural transmission via exerting an positive effect on documentary record and cultural publicity, which allows an increasing number of people to understand local characteristics. From these two aspects, both the factor of the communicator and the media of communication are dramatically optimized, which can effectively improve the problem of limited regional cultural communication and also has guiding significance for other forms of cultural communication methods.

5. CONCLUSION

American political scientist Harold Lasswell is recognized as the founder of communication studies and is widely known for his “5W” model of communication, content analysis and propaganda research. The thesis makes a comprehensive review of the researches on Lasswell’s theory, form which it can be apparently looked out that it is of great necessity and significance to adopt this theory to the study on promoting the dissemination of cultural forms, especially for local myths and legends.

In this paper, Lasswell’s theory functions as the theoretical basis of the study, and the author examines the theory to improve the status quo of the dragon legends in Dinghai, Zhoushan through field research and interviews, which contributes to draw guiding opinions and provide inspiration for improving local cultural communication. The paper concludes that Lasswell’s theory is not only applicable for the dissemination activities from the perspective of human nature, but also for the use of communication from the purpose of control.

After the analysis of the collected data of the field research and interviews done in Dinghai district, the author concludes that the following four issues are the main barriers maintaining in the process of local cultural communication. Above all, the popularity of dragon legends occur in age faults, namely, the elder residents know more about them, the middle-aged people just have a little understanding about this, and young people even have no idea at all. Furthermore, the existing popularization is not complete. Although there are still a few residents who have heard about the local stories, most of them feel difficult to repeat the story in detail and the versions of the story contain multiple discrepancies and personal modifications. Besides this, the popularization method of these legends is relatively simple, and the method of word-of-mouth communication is the most ubiquitous, the written form is rare while the popularization method of modern media is not ever seen. On account of this, the above phenomenon is able to offer us profound reflection on the analysis of the current situation of the cultural communication of dragon legends in Dinghai district with the help of “5W” model of communication.

In this research, it should be admitted that abstract cultural communication and transmission are sophisticated and complicated issues which need to be explored further in the future. Due to the limited knowledge of this study, this thesis has the following deficiencies: for one thing, the subjects investigated are not universal enough, which means the study result may maintains some limitations. Therefore, the follow-up research could be carried out on the basis of this research and the subjects can be residents of various age groups in different cities and provinces. For the other, limited by length of the dissertation and the scale of data collection, this dissertation is just a small project and other factors influencing cultural transmission and suggestions on this issue have not been explored yet. The author hopes that more studies can be done in this topic, which will function as a dynamic and referential choice and application of cultural communication for all sorts of cultural forms.

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