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# EXPLORING THE EFFICIENCY OF CHINESE CULTURAL SYMBOLS IN THE CULTURAL WECHAT OFFICIAL ACCOUNTS



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2025



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EXPLORING THE EFFICIENCY OF CHINESE CULTURAL SYMBOLS IN  
THE CULTURAL OFFICIAL WECHAT ACCOUNTS

SHEN WEI

THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF ARTS, SUSTAINABILITY AND CREATIVE INDUSTRY  
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the use and impact of Chinese cultural symbols within Cultural WeChat Official Accounts (CWOAs). The research objectives were to analyse the frequency and types of symbols employed, identify those that resonated most with audiences, and optimize visual presentation to enhance communication effectiveness. A mixed-method research approach with sequential explanatory research design was adopted. It began with the collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by a qualitative analysis. It incorporated content analysis to map the distribution patterns of cultural symbols. Also, SPSS and NVivo were used for data analysis. Quantitative findings were derived through Qingbo Index. Nevertheless, hierarchical coding was employed for the visual analysis. Census sampling was used for quantitative data and purposive sampling was used for qualitative data. The findings from the content analysis revealed a consistent presentation of Chinese cultural symbols across the sampled CWOAs. Among these, folklore symbols were particularly prominent. They demonstrated a strong capacity to engage users. The qualitative analysis further indicated a prevalent use of vibrant colors, notably red and yellow, alongside a preference for symmetrical or centrally positioned compositions. Additionally, close-ups, medium shots, and full shots were frequently employed to effectively highlight meaningful symbols. This study implicated that CWOA operators can significantly enhance audience engagement by strategically emphasizing folklore symbols and tailoring visual strategies to align with audience preferences. It contributed to the academic field by providing a practical framework for the effective utilization of cultural symbols in digital communication. Thereby, it improved the dissemination of Chinese culture through new media platforms. Furthermore, it enriched the understanding of digital communication dynamics while offering actionable insights for enhancing cultural transmission on digital platforms.



## **MENJELAJAHI KEBERKESANAN SIMBOL BUDAYA CINA DALAM AKAUN RASMI WECHAT BUDAYA**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini meneroka penggunaan dan impak simbol budaya Cina dalam Akaun Rasmi WeChat Budaya (CWOA). Objektif penyelidikan adalah untuk menganalisis kekerapan dan jenis simbol yang digunakan, mengenal pasti simbol yang paling menarik perhatian khalayak, serta mengoptimumkan penyampaian visual bagi meningkatkan keberkesanan komunikasi. Pendekatan penyelidikan kaedah campuran dengan reka bentuk penyelidikan penjelasan berurutan telah digunakan. Kajian ini bermula dengan pengumpulan dan analisis data kuantitatif, diikuti dengan analisis kualitatif. Analisis kandungan turut diterapkan bagi memetakan corak taburan simbol budaya. Selain itu, SPSS dan NVivo digunakan untuk analisis data. Penemuan kuantitatif diperoleh melalui Indeks Qingbo, manakala pengekodan hierarki digunakan untuk analisis visual. Pensampelan bancian digunakan bagi data kuantitatif, sementara pensampelan bertujuan digunakan untuk data kualitatif. Penemuan daripada analisis kandungan menunjukkan bahawa terdapat penyampaian simbol budaya Cina yang konsisten dalam CWOA yang disampel. Antara simbol tersebut, simbol cerita rakyat (folklore) amat menonjol dan menunjukkan keupayaan yang kukuh untuk menarik perhatian pengguna. Analisis kualitatif juga mendapati penggunaan warna-warna terang seperti merah dan kuning adalah ketara, dengan keutamaan terhadap komposisi yang simetri atau berpusat. Di samping itu, penggunaan jarak dekat, jarak sederhana, dan jarak penuh juga sering kali diaplikasikan untuk menonjolkan simbol-simbol yang bermakna. Kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa pengendali CWOA dapat meningkatkan penglibatan khalayak dengan ketara melalui penekanan strategik terhadap simbol cerita rakyat serta menyesuaikan strategi visual mengikut keutamaan khalayak. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada bidang akademik dengan menyediakan kerangka praktikal untuk penggunaan berkesan simbol budaya dalam komunikasi digital, sekali gus meningkatkan penyebaran budaya Cina melalui platform media baharu. Tambahan lagi, ia memperkayakan pemahaman tentang dinamika komunikasi digital sambil menawarkan pandangan praktikal untuk mempertingkatkan pemindahan budaya di platform digital.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AISAS Attention Interest Search Action Share model

CA Content Analysis

CCN China Cultural Net

CT China Today

CWOA Cultural WeChat Official Account

ST Semiotic Theory



UIS The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)

UNESCO the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WCI WeChat Index

WOA WeChat Official Account





## APPENDIX

- A Title Page
- B Declaration of Authenticity
- C Dissertation Status Verification Form
- D Summary of WeChat Official Accounts Related to Culture
- E Qualitative Analysis Coding Table
- F Certificate of Participation in Ethical Learning





## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



#### 1.1 Introduction

This Chapter will describe the background of this study. Starting from the background of this research, the origin and research ideas of this study will be introduced in detail.

This chapter will discuss the problem statement, research objectives, research questions, hypothesis, research significance and research limitation.





### **1.1.1 Brief Introduction to the Study**

This study investigates the strategic use of Chinese cultural symbols on digital platforms, with a focus on Cultural WeChat Official Accounts(CWOAs). By examining how these symbols enhance user engagement and promote cultural awareness, the research aims to provide insights for content creators and strategists to maximize their content's impact. The study will be conducted within a specific timeframe and geographical context to ensure relevant and accurate findings.



### **1.1.2 Chinese Cultural Symbols as a Research Project**

From the perspective of an individual's academic background and the accessibility of resources. As a China researcher, there is a deeper understanding and emotional connection to Chinese culture. This gives a natural advantage and interest in studying Chinese cultural symbols. In addition, the accumulation of a wealth of expertise in Chinese culture allows for a deeper and more accurate analysis of these symbols. Furthermore, data and resources on Chinese cultural symbols are more readily available, and research in this area is likely to receive more support and funding.





Despite the growing interest in cross-cultural communication in the context of globalization, relatively little research has been conducted on Chinese cultural symbols, especially on new media platforms such as WeChat(L. Gaojie, 2021). The study of Chinese cultural symbols can fill this academic gap(NEWRANK, 2022).

In addition, the study of Chinese cultural symbols is not limited to this cultural category alone; such a research method can also be borrowed by others to study cultural symbols of other countries(Rufu, Feng, & Yi, 2019).



### **1.1.3 Importance of Exploring Chinese Cultural Symbols on Digital Platforms**

In the digital age, the dissemination of cultural symbols plays a vital role in shaping global perceptions of a country(Lilan, 2021). Chinese cultural symbols, especially those shared on platforms like WeChat, are instrumental in communicating China's rich heritage and values to a worldwide audience(Statista, 2024). This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of these symbols on WeChat's official accounts, highlighting the role of digital platforms in fostering cultural exchange and understanding. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for content creators and strategists to enhance the reach and engagement of their content on WeChat and other digital platforms.





Digital platforms have become essential tools for promoting Chinese values and traditions globally (Shaoxiang & Guoli, 2021; Yanhong, 2020). Cultural symbols convey specific cultural information and meanings through visual, auditory, and textual forms. The unique aspects of Chinese culture, including its historical background, traditional customs, and philosophical ideas, are effectively communicated through these symbols (Shaoxiang & Guoli, 2021). Social media, online videos, and blogs have made global communication more convenient and efficient (Brown, 2023; L. Taylor, 2023). This study explores the effective use of Chinese cultural symbols on digital platforms, particularly Cultural WeChat Official Accounts (CWOAs), to increase user engagement and promote cultural awareness (CNNIC, 2023). By analyzing the impact of these symbols on global communication, the research aims to deepen the understanding of the role digital platforms play in cultural exchange and understanding.

Despite the advantages of rapid dissemination, wide reach, and strong interactivity that digital platforms offer, existing research has limitations in exploring the transmission of Chinese cultural symbols on these platforms (Livingstone, 2019). This study seeks to fill these gaps by providing a new perspective on using cultural symbols on digital platforms, focusing on Cultural WeChat Official Accounts (CWOAs). By examining the impact of different cultural symbols on user engagement and content dissemination, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital platforms promote cultural exchange and understanding.



## 1.2 Background of Study

### 1.2.1 WOA and Its Significance as a Social Media Platform

WeChat is a social networking software originated from China (Economics, 2020), and according to the 51st Statistical Report on the Development Status of the Internet in China released by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the size of Internet users in China was 1.067 billion as of December 2022, and the Internet penetration rate reached 75.6% (CNNIC, 2023). With the development of China's Internet becoming more and more perfect and the popularity of 5G networks, Internet users are gradually getting used to using cell phones to access the Internet. Various apps and applications of mobile Internet are closely integrated with people's lives, and mobile Internet applications such as mobile payment, instant messaging, short video, and live broadcast platforms have lowered the threshold of Internet use and enriched the cultural and entertainment life of the masses (Gaojie, 2021).

WeChat Official Account (WOA) is a derivative of WeChat, which first appeared on January 21, 2011. Soon after, Tencent officially released the WOA on August 21, 2012, and its "picture + text" article subscription format attracted a large number of readers and users, as the active users of the WeChat platform exceeded 1.1 billion (Li



Gaojie, 2021). WeChat official account also began to be widely used by users. Since its launch, the WeChat official account has quickly become one of the most popular platforms for new media, thanks to its diversified information dissemination content, its free choice of subscription and push function for lazy users, and its compliance with the modern fragmented reading craze(Economist., 2016).

WeChat's significance as a social media platform extends beyond its vast user base. It has fundamentally changed the way people communicate, access information, and engage with content. The platform's unique features, such as WeChat Moments, WeChat Pay, and WeChat Mini Programs, have created an ecosystem that integrates social networking, financial transactions, and a variety of services into a single application. This integration has made WeChat an indispensable part of daily life for many users in China.

WeChat Official Accounts (WOAs) further enhance this ecosystem by allowing businesses, organizations, and individuals to publish content, interact with followers, and provide services directly through WeChat. The significance of WOAs lies in their ability to disseminate information quickly and efficiently to a large audience. With features such as automated messaging, article publishing, and integrated customer service, WOAs provide a versatile platform for content creation and audience engagement.





## 1.2.2 Comparison of WOA with Other Digital Platforms

When comparing WeChat Official Accounts with other digital platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, several key differences and similarities can be identified. These distinctions are important to understand the unique advantages and limitations of each platform in the context of cultural dissemination and user engagement.

This analysis has compared the social media platforms from the perspectives of platform features and user base, content dissemination and engagement, and cultural dissemination strategies (Johnson, 2022; Statista, 2024; L. Taylor, 2023), shown as

Table 1.1.



**Table 1.1**

*Comparison of WOA with Other Digital Platforms*

Feature	WeChat official account	Facebook page	Twitter account
<b>Platform Features &amp; User Base</b>	Multi-functional, large user base mainly in China, growing international presence	Robust content creation and advertising tools, large global user base, decline in younger users	Real-time communication, global user base, limited in China
<b>Content Dissemination &amp; Engagement</b>	Rich media (text, images, videos, interactive content), push notifications ensure direct content delivery	Algorithm-driven visibility, diverse content formats (live videos, long-form articles), requires paid promotion for reach	Real-time updates, hashtags and trending topics for wider reach, concise content required
<b>Cultural Dissemination Strategies</b>	In-depth, educational content, storytelling with rich media, trusted ecosystem, seamless monetization opportunities	Broad global reach, targeted advertising tools, consistent content strategy and significant ad spend needed for high engagement	Generating buzz, participating in trending discussions, live Q&A sessions, concise impactful messaging required
<b>Challenges &amp; Limitations</b>	Mainly Chinese user base, limited international reach, content regulation policies	Algorithm changes affecting visibility, privacy concerns, evolving user demographics	Rapid content turnover, character limit, complex narratives challenging, exposure to negative engagement



Based on a comparison of WeChat Official Accounts (WOAs) with other digital platforms such as Facebook pages and Twitter accounts, there are several reasons that highlight the significance of focusing on WeChat in this study. WeChat's rich media capabilities, including support for text, images, video and interactive content, make it an effective platform for engaging and nuanced cultural communication (Li Gaojie, 2021). WeChat's push notification system and user-friendly subscription model promote high engagement rates and enhance its effectiveness in reaching and interacting with audiences (L. Taylor, 2023). In addition, WeChat's integration with other services, such as payments and applets, provides a unique opportunity for content monetization and a more immersive user experience. The platform's trusted environment further enhances the credibility and acceptance of cultural content. While the WeChat official account is primarily used in China, its growing international reach, particularly among the Chinese diaspora, offers the potential for broader cultural outreach (Statista, 2024). Together, these factors make WeChat Official Accounts (WOAs) a valuable focal point for studying the symbolic diffusion of Chinese culture and its impact on digital communication.

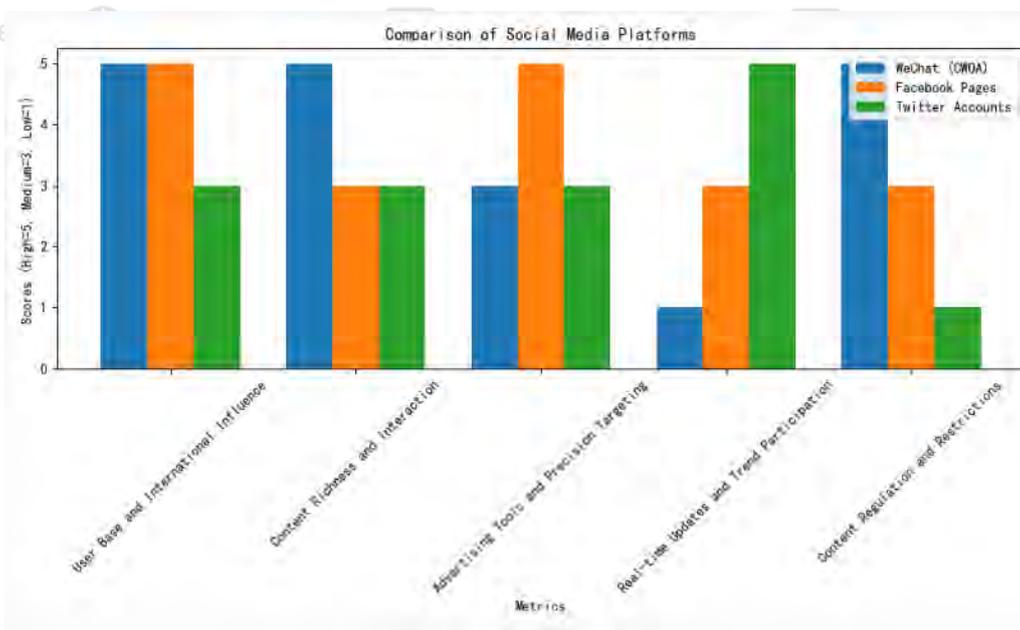
As shown in figure 1.1, this bar chart compares the performance of three social media platforms, WeChat official account (WOA), Facebook page and Twitter account, across five key metrics (Johnson, 2022; Statista, 2024; L. Taylor, 2023). WeChat official account (WOA) in terms of user base and international reach, content



richness and interactivity, and content regulation, but scores lower in real-time updates and trending engagement. Facebook Pages are balanced, scoring higher in advertising tools and precision targeting, while Twitter accounts excel in real-time updates and trending engagement, but are less regulated. Each platform has its own unique strengths and weaknesses, catering to different marketing and communication needs. However, based on the Chinese market and audience, and even in terms of studying Chinese cultural symbols, there is no doubt that WeChat's official account (WOA) is the most suitable for this study.

**Figure 1.1**

*Comparing the Three Platforms Across Key Features*



Sources: Brown, 2023; L. Gaojie, 2021; Johnson, 2022)



### 1.2.3 The Role and Growth of Cultural WeChat Official Accounts (CWOAs)

The Cultural WeChat Official Account (CWOAs) is a platform used to promote traditional Chinese culture using the official WeChat account, which is not limited to a single cultural category and has no time limit (Economist., 2016). Both the ancient Chinese traditional culture and the modern Chinese new generation culture can be spread on this platform (Alams, 2020). Because of the low threshold of the WeChat official account platform and the feature that everyone can participate, the builders of cultural WeChat official accounts can become the builders of relevant WeChat official accounts from national government agencies, ordinary enterprises and people. Cultural WeChat official accounts combine the advantages of traditional paper media and new media and are the main force of Chinese cultural communication (Alams, 2020; Economics, 2020).

The role of Cultural WeChat Official Accounts (CWOAs) in the digital landscape is multifaceted. They serve as a bridge between traditional cultural dissemination methods and the modern digital environment, offering a platform for the promotion of cultural heritage, education, and public engagement. CWOAs have been adopted by a wide range of cultural institutions, including museums, cultural centers, educational institutions, and artistic organizations, each utilizing the platform to reach and engage with their target audiences effectively.





Since this research aims to investigate the impact and influence of WeChat Official Accounts (WOA) on the dissemination of Chinese cultural symbols, narrowing the scope to cultural WeChat Official Accounts (CWOA) allows for a more targeted and nuanced analysis. By focusing on CWOAs, the research can delve into the specific strategies and content that are most effective in promoting Chinese culture, thereby making the findings more actionable and relevant for stakeholders interested in cultural promotion.

#### 1.2.4 Chinese Culture and Symbolism



Chinese cultural symbols are representations of the values, beliefs, and traditions that have been developed over thousands of years. These symbols include characters, artifacts, rituals, and icons that convey specific cultural meanings. For instance, the dragon is a prominent symbol in Chinese culture, representing power, strength, and good fortune (Liu, 2020). Similarly, the yin-yang symbol reflects the Chinese philosophical understanding of balance and harmony in the universe (Zhang, 2021). These symbols are integral to Chinese cultural identity, serving as a means of communication and continuity across generations.





The historical development of Chinese cultural symbols is deeply rooted in the country's long history and diverse cultural influences. From ancient dynasties to modern times, these symbols have evolved to reflect changes in society, politics, and philosophy. During the Han dynasty, for example, the dragon became associated with the emperor and imperial authority (Wang, 2019). Over centuries, symbols like the Great Wall and the Chinese phoenix have also taken on new meanings, adapting to contemporary contexts while preserving their traditional significance (Li, 2022). This evolution demonstrates the dynamic nature of Chinese cultural symbols and their ability to adapt while maintaining their core meanings.



Traditional Chinese cultural symbols have always been a key factor in shaping China's foreign image. To a certain extent, China's foreign cultural communication is the communication of Chinese traditional cultural symbols. The higher the degree of acceptance of traditional Chinese cultural symbols by the audience, the more they know about Chinese culture. Because traditional Chinese cultural symbols have a long history and a wide variety, scholars in academic research generally classify cultural symbols for study. Through the combing of previous literature, cultural symbols are generally identified as consisting of six categories: character symbols, object symbols, landscape symbols, concept symbols, folklore symbols, and Institutional & Event Symbols (Tingjing, 2017). Therefore, how to better disseminate these six categories of symbols, enhance the ability of foreign communication, grasp the initiative in international voice,





and establish a good national image has become an important task for China's foreign communication nowadays.

### 1.2.5 Technology and Cultural Communication

The modern field of communication has witnessed a deep integration of technology and culture. The development of digital technology has not only changed the way in which cultural content is disseminated but has also influenced the creation and interpretation of cultural symbols(X. Li & Qian, 2019). This integration has enabled cultural information to be disseminated at a faster speed and on a wider scale and has also brought about a diversification of cultural expressions(Wang & Zhang, 2020).

Digital platforms such as social media, online videos and blogs provide new channels and ways for the dissemination of cultural symbols. They enable cultural symbols to cross geographical boundaries and reach a wider audience through their highly interactive and wide-coverage features, thus enhancing the impact of culture(Wang & Zhang, 2020).



Cultural WeChat Official Accounts (CWOA) provide diversified functions, such as graphic messages, short videos and live broadcasts, etc. These technical features help to present cultural symbols more vividly and intuitively. In addition, WeChat's interactivity and user participation provide a favorable environment for the dissemination of cultural symbols(Zhang & Liu, 2021).

### 1.2.6 Significance of the Dissemination of Chinese Culture

On the one hand, from China's own perspective, after 40 years of rapid development through reform and opening, China has become the second-largest economy in the world just after the United States. Chinese people are gradually realizing that China is gradually moving from "standing up and getting rich" to "becoming stronger"(Xianyong, 2019). There has been a stark imbalance between China's increasing power on the national level and her growing international status as well as the lack of understanding and depth of the building of the national image during the new era, which have become the main contradictions of China's image building.

From the perspective of China's current policy, it is imperative to focus on the development and spread of Chinese culture. Chinese President Xi Jinping has



emphasized that the Chinese nation has had a position and influence in the world since ancient times. This influence was not achieved through military violence. It was not developed by external expansion, but by the powerful charm and attractiveness of Chinese culture (Jinping, 2013b). It has been said that Chinese cultural elements represent the essence of Chinese culture and unique symbols of traditional Chinese culture; they are the concentrated expressions of and embodiments of the national pride and culture of China, as well as the brand of culture it embodies.

### 1.2.7 Status of the International Dissemination of Chinese Culture



As a matter of fact, the spread of Chinese culture around the world is not optimistic, and China is not portrayed in a complete image. In the past few years, China's image positioning has not been as effective as expected, and some people mostly non-Chinese have misconceptions about Chinese culture.

As a Chinese student studying for a Ph.D. in Malaysia, the author has lived in Malaysia for nearly three years. During these years, the writer chatted with many Malays or local Indians and Chinese and found that many people have a one-sided understanding of China. The understanding of Chinese cultural symbols is even scarce.





For Chinese people, for example, the Terracotta Warriors and Horses of Qin Shi Huang (the emperor of the Qin dynasty) Mausoleum, one of the Eight Wonders of the World, are the representative symbols of China. However, it is unknown to the Malays around the author's residence. According to a review of the literature on cultural communication in recent decades, these results have been discovered:

Considering both China's image performance and audience recognition on a global basis: A report conducted a survey in which 11,000 respondents were surveyed in 22 countries around the world, with the results showing that the Chinese audience in every country rated China's image as 6.3 points out of 10. The index has risen by 0.1 points from 2018 to 2019, indicating an upward trend (2019 Global Survey Report on China's National Image, 2019). The recognition of the involvement of China in global governance in the fields of science, technology, economics, culture, security, politics, ecology, etc. All have been improved. The recognition in the fields of culture and security has increased by 4%, and the recognition in other fields has increased by 3%. According to overseas respondents, the three areas most recognized as China's participation in global governance are technology, economy, and culture. Culture has emerged as one of three areas in which overseas respondents expect China to play a greater role. Among the interviewees, up to 80% of overseas respondents have experienced Chinese food culture. Over 80% of them have a positive impression of Chinese food culture after the experience. Therefore, there is not much room for growth





and China's international image is not that positive. There is still a lot of room for improvement going forward.

In addition, the research platform Survey Sampling International (SSI) jointly conducted the survey on Foreigners' perceptions and willingness to accept Chinese culture with the Beijing Normal University Institute of Cultural Innovation and Communication from the end of 2015 to the beginning of 2016. The results reveal that 78.4% of the interviewees know or understand relatively few symbols of Chinese culture. The interviewer's overall awareness of Chinese culture is in the basic area (Yueming & Yishu, 2017).



The respondents to the survey expressed a low level of understanding of Chinese culture in general. Despite the fact that more and more foreigners are becoming familiar with China's image, the overall understanding of Chinese culture is far lower than it ought to be. The three most commonly recognized symbols of Chinese culture according to the survey were the panda (3.3%), green tea (3.1%), and Yin and Yang (2.6%), which is both a word and a philosophy related to ancient Chinese philosophy. Foreigners have the least recognition of three Chinese cultural symbols: Dunhuang murals (paintings on the inner walls of the Dunhuang Grottoes in China) (1.7%), Face (types of facial makeup used in operas) (1.7%), and harmony between man and nature (1.6%) (Yueming & Yishu, 2017).



Additionally, the Internet (62,9%) is the primary channel of information for finding out more about Chinese culture for foreign youths. Another important source of information about Chinese culture for foreign youth is television (12.2%) and friends and family (10%). In contrast to this, China's current online Chinese cultural activities are small and singular, making them less aligned with foreigners' needs to learn about Chinese culture through the Internet (Yueming & Yishu, 2017).

In light of the above two authoritative survey reports, it is apparent that the international perspective of China's national image is generally vague, incomplete, and superficial, and most people still picture China as a vast and mysterious eastern country which is relatively backward and even possesses a culturally ignorant image. It is often the case that foreigners' understanding of Chinese culture is at the stage of "making fun of it". The Chinese need to use the Cultural Language to spread Chinese images if they want to build a positive image of themselves outside the country.

The above background statement shows that CWOAs has a great role and potential in the dissemination of cultural symbols. It plays a positive role in spreading cultural symbols as a unique Chinese new media platform. However, the limitations of the existing dissemination of Chinese cultural symbols cannot be ignored. In this paper, we analyze the current situation of CWOAs' self-shaping by analyzing the foreign dissemination of different categories of Chinese cultural symbols, with the aim of



identifying and exploring possible problems in dissemination from visual data and providing data support for further targeted problem solving. On this basis, the communication effects of different categories of cultural symbols are explored in an attempt to identify the most popular symbol categories of traditional Chinese cultural symbols among audiences and provide suggestions for further improving the communication effects.

## **1.2.8 Current Status of Development and Research on CWOAs**

### **1.2.8.1 Limitations of Research on New Media Platforms**



In the current field of new media research, international social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have received extensive attention, with a plethora of research outputs. However, research on Chinese-native social media platforms, specifically WeChat Official Accounts (WOAs), is relatively scarce. According to data from Google Scholar, as of 2023, the number of research papers on “Facebook” reaches 203,000, while “Twitter” related studies exceed 224,000. In contrast, the number of “WeChat” research papers is only about 6,000. WeChat, as one of the largest social media platforms in China, has a unique social network structure and rich functionality on its public account platform, which plays a significant role in cultural dissemination.





Unfortunately, the current research gap means that we are unable to fully understand the specific role and potential advantages of WeChat Official Accounts in the dissemination of cultural symbols.

### **1.2.8.2 Limitations in the Content of Chinese Cultural Communication Research**

In the realm of cultural symbols research, existing literature primarily focuses on theoretical aspects, such as the definition, classification, and symbolic meaning of cultural symbols. Although these studies provide important theoretical support for understanding cultural symbols, research on the practical application and dissemination effects of cultural symbols on digital platforms is relatively scarce. For instance, a search for “cultural symbols in digital platforms” on Google Scholar reveals that most research remains at the level of theoretical discussion, with fewer studies involving specific platform applications. Empirical research on cultural symbols on the WeChat platform is particularly limited. For example, there is relatively little research on how different types of cultural symbols are received and interacted with by users on the WeChat platform, and how these symbols influence users’ cultural cognition and behavior.





### 1.2.8.3 Suboptimal Dissemination Effects of CWOAs

Poor Image Quality in Visual Communication: Although CWOAs aid in disseminating Chinese cultural symbols, they often suffer from confusion due to the lack of clear classification and quality standards, resulting in varied communication effects. WOAs can publish single or multiple graphic messages, with the first image playing a crucial role in attracting reader attention. From WeChat 5.0 onward, the opening rate of public subscription accounts decreased, making the initial image even more critical for engaging readers (Xiaoning & Xiaoxiao, 2013). Despite the massive usage of WeChat, there is no clear standard for disseminating Chinese culture (Group, 2019).



Many WOAs resort to "clickbait" tactics, publishing low-quality content to attract clicks. The self-media nature of WeChat allows anyone to operate an official account, leading to inconsistent quality and guidelines. This is particularly evident in cultural accounts, where some publish poor quality content for high traffic (Bingyi & Mengsha, 2020). This approach not only hampers effective cultural communication but can also harm cultural heritage. Low-quality images are another issue, especially in earlier years, although the quality has improved with increased competition (Wenbo & Xiaoli, 2019b). For example, some articles use unrelated or low-resolution images, such as a blurry exhibition hall door for a cultural event in Tokyo, as shown in *figure 1.2*, which fails to convey the intended message and reduces reader engagement.



## Figure 1.2

### *Low Pixel Cover Picture on WeChat Official Account*



Ambiguity in the Positioning of CWOAs: Digging deeper, the confusion of cultural symbols arises from a lack of clear focus in their communication. Audience acceptance is limited, and niche symbols that are difficult for audiences to understand do not resonate, significantly reducing communication effectiveness. Cultural WeChat official accounts, a derivative of WeChat, have fewer followers compared to other categories of official accounts (Li Gaojie, 2021). Without systematic and professional guidance, these accounts lack fresh content, leading to aesthetic fatigue and disconnection. Repetitive cultural elements or low-quality content contribute to this problem, presenting a challenge in content and topic selection (Li Gaojie, 2021).

Many cultural WeChat official accounts mix content, with high-attention accounts typically recommending books and sharing reading experiences. According to NEWRANK's 2021 ranking (shown in *Figure 1.3*), top accounts include "Ten o'clock Reading," "Have Books," "Sanlian Life Weekly," "Baicaoyuan Bookstore," and "Reader"(NEWRANK, 2021) . However, the development of accounts that recommend Chinese cultural elements is insufficient(Zhanhao, 2022).

According to the survey of big data platform Qingbo, "Zhanhao" and "Insight" are official accounts of opinions and real-time hotspots (see in *figure-1.4*), and it is clear that the CWOAs of that are capable of recommending Chinese cultural elements are not developing sufficiently(Zhanhao, 2022)

**Figure1.3**

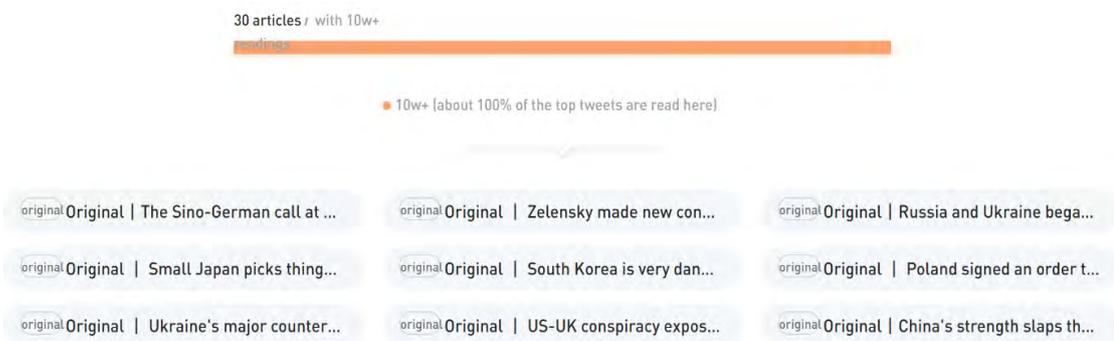
*Annual Ranking of Cultural WeChat Profiles Intercepted*

#	No public	release	total reads	headlines	average	Highest	total likes	always watching	New List Index
1	Zhanhao zhanhao668	1/8	800,000+	100,000+	100,000+	100,000+	33398	18040	998.0
2	insight DJ00123987	1/8	780,000+	100,000+	98273	100,000+	19243	17820	995.5
3	Reading at t... duhaoshu	1/8	640,000+	100,000+	80110	100,000+	17655	9430	981.0
4	have books youshuccl	1/8	530,000+	100,000+	67363	100,000+	6920	7691	967.2
5	Sanlian Life ... lifeweek	3/9	470,000+	280,000+	52545	100,000+	2484	1214	956.4
6	south wind ... SouthReviews	3/10	450,000+	220,000+	45972	100,000+	1257	575	949.5
7	Search in C... chinaso_com	10/19	390,000+	250,000+	20941	62285	2674	1664	936.9
8	New Weekly new-weekly	3/9	370,000+	240,000+	41409	100,000+	999	559	936.6
9	Baicaoyuan ... Bai-Cao-Yuan	1/8	320,000+	93715	40054	100,000+	8969	6249	933.9
10	reader duzheweixin	1/8	270,000+	100,000+	34494	100,000+	5081	2374	921.5

Sources: *NEWRANK(2021)(NEWRANK, 2022)*

## Figure 1.4

### *Recent Hot Articles from the WOA "Zhanhao"(Zhanhao, 2022)*



Sources: *the WOA "Zhanhao"(Zhanhao, 2022)*

Surveys reveal irregular tweeting patterns among some accounts, with extreme cases of too few or too many tweets per month, which is counterproductive to spreading culture (Y. Zhe, 2021). Additionally, many accounts have few followers and lack diverse content, hindering sustained attention.

Most reviewed accounts focus on a single cultural element, such as tea or jade culture, which can be biased and too specialized for general audiences (Rufu et al., 2019).

Weak Competitiveness of CWOAs: The limited dissemination of content and the impact of other platforms have led to the weak competitiveness of cultural WeChat official accounts (CWOAs). According to the 2020 China WeChat Top 500 Annual



List, only seven culture-related accounts ranked among the top 100, with "National Culture" being the only one associated with Chinese culture. The others, like "Zhanhao" and "Insight," focus on international affairs, indicating a decline in accounts reflecting Chinese cultural content (NEWRANK, 2021).

New information acquisition modes like short videos and live broadcasts have diverted user attention, reducing the average reading of WeChat official accounts each year since 2016 (NEWLIST, 2021). This decline follows Vernon's product life cycle concept, with official accounts entering a declining phase after eight years (Hongqiao, 2015). The traditional "picture + text" model no longer meets user expectations, diminishing communication effectiveness (Li Gaojie, 2021).

CWOAs face significant challenges in disseminating traditional Chinese cultural symbols. Without improvement, these accounts will lose their audience to other media platforms. To enhance their competitiveness and dissemination effectiveness, it is crucial to study the communication characteristics of cultural symbols. Identifying the focus and visual performance of symbols that resonate with audiences can improve the quality and impact of these accounts.

While there is extensive research on the communication effects of various WeChat accounts, such as medicine and entertainment, there is a gap in studying cultural





WeChat accounts. Research exists on the dissemination of Chinese cultural symbols by foreign media and short video platforms, but not on cultural WeChat accounts. Thus, it is necessary to study the characteristics and effects of CWOAs in disseminating traditional Chinese cultural symbols.

### 1.3 The Problem Statement

By combing through the previous background, it is quite easy to see that CWOAs have some weaknesses and drawbacks in the dissemination of cultural symbols. And these problems can be reduced to the following three core issues through summarization and generalization.

The first problem statement is that the mode of use and dissemination of Chinese cultural symbols remains unclear. In the digital age, CWOA has become an important platform for cultural communication, making extensive use of various cultural symbols to interact with users (Li Gaojie, 2021; Jin Jianbin, Jiangsu Jia, & Anfan, 2017). However, the specific usage patterns, types and distribution of these symbols remain unclear. There is a lack of systematic research on the usage bias of specific Chinese cultural symbols, as well as the contemporary and regional choices in CWOAs. This





knowledge gap limits our understanding of how cultural symbols influence information dissemination and user interaction.

The second problem statement is that there is a lack of clarity on the impact of Chinese cultural symbols on communication effectiveness. While it is widely recognized that the use of cultural symbols in CWOA is a key factor in improving communication effectiveness (Rufu et al., 2019), there is no clear definition of which types of symbols significantly improve communication effectiveness. This lack of clarity prevents content creators and platform operators from optimizing content strategies and increasing user engagement. Examining how different categories of cultural symbols affect communication effectiveness will provide important insights for content creation and platform strategies.

The third problem statement is that there is a lack of exploration into the optimization of visual presentation of Chinese cultural symbols. Visual design is a key factor in enhancing user interaction and information dissemination (Chaoqun, 2019; Yanqiu & Yao, 2019). However, there is a serious lack of effective strategies and clear guidelines on how to optimize visual presentations to improve communication effectiveness. Exploring effective strategies for visual optimization is essential for improving the effectiveness of CWOA's communication.





The first problem statement regarding the unclear use and dissemination of Chinese cultural symbols corresponds to analyzing their frequency and types in CWOAs. The second problem statement on the impact of these symbols on communication effectiveness matches with determining which symbols yield the highest user interaction and dissemination. The third problem statement about the lack of exploration into visual presentation optimization aligns with examining methods to improve communication effectiveness through better visual presentation in CWOAs.

#### 1.4 Significance of Study



According to Wally Davis, if a problem is well stated, it is half solved, which can contribute to the detection of problems in a profound and effective manner (Swaminathan & Magesh, 2017). The significance of the study therefore lies in the importance of the problems described, in its theoretical contribution, but also in its practical and reflective contribution to a smaller scope and its theoretical contribution to the broader social field. Therefore, to achieve the above-mentioned effectiveness, this study aims to explore the characteristics presented in the communication process of different categories of cultural symbols by the cultural WeChat official accounts and to explore and analyze the differences in the communication effects of different





categories of cultural symbols. The following are some of the important and useful results that this study is expected to provide.

Firstly, according to the problem statement, this study is carried out in the current situation of confusion in the presentation of cultural symbols in the official accounts of cultural WeChat, and on the basis of exploring the influence of different cultural symbols presentation characteristics and communication effects of the official accounts of cultural WeChat, an attempt is made to find out the commonality of cultural symbols performance of the excellent official accounts of cultural WeChat. In the study of communication effect, the categories of cultural symbols that are most easily accepted by audiences and have the greatest positive influence on the communication effect are identified. On the basis of this study, the categories of cultural symbols that have a focus are summarized in a deep visual representation, trying to provide suggestions for the establishment of new official accounts in the future or the development of existing cultural official accounts. In this way, the results of the study will help practitioners of WeChat official accounts to achieve higher efficiency in the selection and expression of cultural symbols, and also help to improve the competitiveness of cultural WeChat official accounts, bringing impetus to the development of more official accounts and providing more employment opportunities in related industries. Secondly, improving the competitiveness of cultural WeChat official accounts will to a certain extent promote the exchange and transmission of traditional Chinese cultural symbols. The





higher the quality and quantity of cultural symbols disseminated, the deeper the understanding of traditional Chinese culture by the general audience at home and abroad. This is meaningful for the shaping of China's cultural image and the development of foreign exchanges and is a point that China's current national conditions and current policies seek to achieve.

From a theoretical aspect, the study aims at the development of theoretical applications, combining cultural semiotics theory and communication effects models to explore the differences in communication effects of different categories of cultural symbols, which will be a guide for researchers who will benefit from the same type of communication effects research. A search of most of the literature cited by Web of Science (ISI) and Scopus for Chinese traditional cultural symbols, social media platforms, and communication effects shows that there are many studies on the analysis of communication effects, but few studies on different categories of cultural symbols. There are many studies on Chinese cultural symbols and traditional Chinese aesthetics, but there are gaps in studies combining them on new media platforms or official WeChat accounts. Therefore, studies that focus on the communication effects of different categories of cultural symbols on WeChat official accounts or studies that focus on the communication expressions of specific cultural categories would be the latest research. Some researchers, either in China or internationally, would benefit from this.





From a reflective perspective, this study will help guide further research and make it easier for scholars to study the effects of the optimized official cultural WeChat accounts after improving their competitiveness. Overall, intellectuals and educated people will gain new cognitive and theoretical understandings about the communication of Chinese cultural symbols and the effectiveness of new media platforms, and through these understandings, the existing problems of self-media platforms will be better improved, and the effectiveness of communication will be enhanced.

### 1.5 Scope of Research



This study focuses on exploring the communication characteristics and commonalities of Chinese cultural symbols within cultural WeChat official accounts. It evaluates their communication effectiveness by analyzing the usage frequency and visual presentation of different cultural symbol categories, as well as their impact on communication effectiveness. Additionally, the study will consider the influence of temporal factors, geographical impacts, ethnic elements, and political policies on the presentation of cultural symbols. By organizing and summarizing previous scholarly research, this study aims to categorize all cultural symbols into several manageable groups to facilitate data collection and analysis. The selection of samples will rely on data provided by Qingbo Intelligence to ensure the accuracy and feasibility of the research.





## 1.6 Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to summarize the characteristics and commonalities of the communication of different categories of traditional Chinese cultural symbols by the official accounts of cultural WeChat, and to measure the communication effects, and will conduct an in-depth visual expression analysis of the cultural symbol categories with the highest audience acceptance. The research is oriented toward measuring the following steps to accomplish this, first by Using the coding scale of the cultural symbol category, the frequency of occurrence of different categories of cultural symbols is counted to comprehensively assess the characteristics and preferences of the official cultural WeChat accounts in the dissemination of traditional Chinese cultural symbols, and to explore the reasons for such characteristics and preferences.

Next, this study emphasizes the communication effects of different categories of cultural symbols and identifies different research variables in terms of explicit and implicit factors of communication effects. Here, the different categories of cultural symbols in Chinese culture will be discussed as implicit factors, that is, independent variables. And the reading, commenting and liking of the official WeChat account of its audience will be discussed as the explicit factor, that is, the dependent variable.



Finally, based on the analysis results combining the preferences of different categories of cultural symbols presentation characteristics and communication effects of the official accounts of cultural WeChat, the visual performance analysis of the categories of cultural symbols that are most popular, most accepted by the audience and have the best communication effects is conducted, in an attempt to provide suggestions for the presentation and selection of the same types of cultural symbols in the future.

Three objectives were designed to accumulate quantitative and qualitative output. The first objective is to analyze the frequency statistics of different kinds of cultural elements presented in the sample cultural WeChat official accounts through content analysis and summarize the characteristics of different symbols presented to explore whether there are preferences and commonalities in symbol selection among the sample official accounts. The second objective is to introduce explicit factors to measure the communication effect based on the first objective and construct a model to explore the communication effect of different cultural symbol categories. Both of the above objectives will be studied as quantitative.

The third objective is to explore, after the conclusion of the first two objectives, the presentation of cultural symbols in the cultural categories that are more popular with audiences and have the greatest positive impact on communication effectiveness. The



author will summarize the relevant images and symbols in the sample in terms of visual representation, and this research objective is carried out through a qualitative approach.

The objectives are mentioned below-

RO1: To analyze the frequency and types of cultural symbols utilized within CWOAs.

RO2: To determine which types of cultural symbols garner the highest user interaction and dissemination effectiveness in CWOAs.

RO3: To examine methods for optimizing communication effectiveness through improved visual presentation in CWOAs.





## 1.7 Research Question

Around the three research objectives mentioned above, the author will develop relative research questions according to the different research methods. The first one is to discover the use and distribution of Chinese cultural symbols in the official accounts of cultural WeChat. Cultural symbols as carriers and markers of culture are not only important elements of culture, but also the most conspicuous "external dimension" of soft power(Tingjing, 2021). That is, cultural symbols are not only symbolic ideographic systems, but their value needs to be considered in the context of national power. In addition, the media, as the key to transforming symbolic resources into soft power, is crucial in presenting and using cultural symbols in foreign communication. The focus of this study is to examine the use of Chinese cultural symbols by CWOAs and the distribution characteristics of Chinese cultural symbols.

Specifically, one is the distribution of the six major types of Chinese cultural symbols: figure symbols, object symbols, landscape symbols, concept symbols, folklore symbols and Institutional & Event Symbols, and the presentation status within the six major types of Chinese cultural symbols. As mentioned earlier, this study divides Chinese cultural symbols into six major types, and each type of Chinese cultural symbols is divided into several sub-categories, such as historical figures, modern figures, mythological and legendary figures and modern fictional figures. The study





will analyze the presentation and use of several sub-categories of Chinese cultural symbols within these six categories. The second is the use of traditional Chinese cultural symbols and modern Chinese cultural symbols by CWOAs, and whether there is any bias in the selection of Chinese cultural symbols for the times. Third, in addition to national Chinese cultural symbols without regional attributes, there are also many regional cultural symbols that highlight local characteristics, and what is the trend of CWOAs' regional selection of Chinese cultural symbols. The research method in this section is a quantitative content analysis, so it will be tested by formulating research hypotheses.



Secondly, to examine the differences of different cultural symbol categories on communication effects in CWOAs. This part of the study is to examine the influence of six major categories of cultural symbols in cultural communication on the explicit factors of communication effects differences. The research of this question will be answered in two steps, the first is to determine the differences of different cultural symbol categories on communication effects, and the second step is to identify the cultural symbol categories that have the greatest positive impact on cultural communication effects.

The third research objective, an in-depth visual representation analysis of the categories of cultural symbols whose communication effects are positively correlated,



is qualitative in nature, so this part of the research objective will be explored by asking research questions.

By sorting out the above research objectives, the research questions to be conducted in this study as follow-

**Table 1.2**

*Research Objectives and Research Questions Table*

Research Objectives (RO)	Research Questions (RQ)
<b>RO1.</b> To analyze the frequency and types of cultural symbols utilized within CWOAs.	<p><b>RQ1.</b> What are the patterns of usage and distribution of cultural symbols in CWOAs?</p> <p>a. How frequently are the different categories of cultural symbols presented?</p> <p>b. Is there a prevalent bias in the use of specific Chinese cultural symbols within CWOAs?</p> <p>c. What trends are evident in the contemporary and regional choices of Chinese cultural symbols within CWOAs?</p>
<b>RO2.</b> To determine which types of cultural symbols garner the highest user interaction and dissemination effectiveness in CWOAs	<p><b>RQ2.</b> How do different categories of cultural symbols affect communication effectiveness in CWOAs?</p> <p>a. What differences exist in communication effects among different categories of cultural symbols within CWOAs?</p> <p>b. Which category of cultural symbols has the most significant influence on enhancing communication effectiveness?</p>
<b>RO3:</b> To examine methods for optimizing communication effectiveness through improved visual presentation in CWOAs.	<p><b>RQ3.</b> How can the visual presentation in CWOAs be optimized to enhance communication effectiveness?</p>

Table 1.2 outlines the relationship between Research Objectives (ROs) and corresponding Research Questions (RQs) for a study on CWOAs. Each RO is linked to specific RQs that will guide the research:

RO1 aims to analyze the usage and types of cultural symbols in CWOAs. RQ1 explores the usage patterns and distribution of these symbols, including their frequency, any biases in their use, and trends in their contemporary and regional selection.

RO2 is focused on identifying which cultural symbols are most effective in terms of user interaction and dissemination. RQ2 investigates how different categories of symbols impact communication effectiveness, the differences in effects among categories, and which category is most influential.

RO3 looks at optimizing communication through better visual presentation. RQ3 seeks to understand how visual presentation can be enhanced to improve communication effectiveness in CWOAs.



## 1.8 Organization of Thesis

The thesis is composed of five chapters, with the first three chapters providing the prerequisite for the entire research. Chapter one, "Introduction," is based on the background of the feasibility of the study, including variables such as the classification of traditional Chinese cultural symbols, WeChat, official WeChat accounts, and explicit indicators for evaluating the dissemination effectiveness of official WeChat accounts. This chapter establishes research objectives related to cultural symbols and dissemination effectiveness and drives the research forward. It includes the significance of the research work in the current social and cultural context, as well as the role of previous studies in promoting existing achievements.

Chapter two is a literature review that focuses on the explanation of relevant concepts, background, and theories, as well as literature sorting. The chapter covers concepts such as WeChat, official WeChat accounts, cultural official WeChat accounts, new media platforms, and includes some differences and debates that exist when explaining these concepts. Through the sorting of relevant literature, the global development history of research in the related fields and the current research status in China can be seen. Chapter two also provides a brief summary and explanation of the collected articles and books, especially the previous research results, which can highlight the gaps in this study in the limitations of previous research. At the same time,





chapter two also introduces the theories involved in this study, explains the theoretical support that the theory can provide for this study, and establishes the theoretical framework and conceptual framework for this study.

The theoretical framework was developed based on three main theories: Cultural Semiotics Theory and Iconography Theory and the AISAS model, where Iconography Theory is mainly concerned with Erwin Panofsky's Three-level Methodology.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation focuses on the research methodology, emphasizing the use of mixed research methods. Quantitative survey is an important part of the research, and quantitative content analysis is a prerequisite for qualitative analysis. Only through quantitative analysis can it be determined whether cultural official WeChat accounts have commonalities in the transmission of cultural symbols, and the cultural symbol category with the greatest impact on transmission effectiveness can be selected from the six major categories of cultural symbols for qualitative visual representation induction. This chapter also highlights issues such as sampling process, research design, sample selection, data collection techniques, design of coding sheets, and reliability of coding sheets in quantitative analysis.

Chapter 4 delves into the results and data analysis, focusing on the frequency and statistical analysis of cultural symbols displayed by the sampled cultural WeChat





official accounts. The content analysis provides a detailed account of the prevalence of these symbols, shedding light on the factors and characteristics that define their presentation. Following the coding of the sample, a regression model is developed to identify the cultural symbols that most significantly enhance the dissemination effect of the official accounts, using clear metrics of dissemination effectiveness. The analysis employs descriptive statistics and SPSSAU to offer a comprehensive examination of the data. This chapter also visually summarizes and synthesizes the cultural symbol categories that exert the greatest positive impact on dissemination. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to examine images of cultural symbols from previous studies, which were then categorized by subtype to encapsulate the visual attributes and trends of each category. The section culminates in a qualitative synthesis and comparison of all elements involved, providing a nuanced understanding of the research findings.

Chapter 5 is the concluding chapter that synthesizes all the findings from the preceding chapters. It summarizes the practical and theoretical contributions of this research and offers recommendations to guide future research.

