

Exploring Zine Culture's Influence on Local Communities

Keyu Shi^{1,a,*}

¹University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

a. U3621112@connect.hku.hk

*corresponding author

Abstract: Zine culture includes many cultural practices, like DIY making, Lofi, etc. It also crosses the different cultures and binds them together. Social communities and diverse groups are bound together through culture. Zine culture, as a form of culture originating in the West, has been introduced to China and has developed its own new ideas and content within the Chinese culture. China is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country. Different places have their own local traditional culture. For example, each place has a different dialect. Zine culture, with its many DIY forms of cultural expression such as text and pictures, has an important significance and role in spreading and developing local culture. Therefore, this paper will explore the connection between zine culture and local culture. Because of the unique features of zine culture, it provides a platform for local traditional culture to develop. Cultural diversity could be seen as the basis of a national cultural balance. Thus, zine culture promotes national cultural harmony.

Keywords: Zine culture, local culture, niche culture, DIY

1. Introduction

In one type of definition of culture, Zine culture can be seen as a series of cultures that are “a series of texts and practices” [1]. This definition of culture is also similar to the “signifying practice” proposed by structuralists and post-structuralists. Zine culture, then, as a text culture, can produce and signify meaning and provide a platform for this process [1]. Thus, in conjunction with the definition of culture in this direction, zine culture, as a kind of practice in signifying practice, facilitates the voices of different communities and the more personalized cultural expression of individuals.

According to Lu, the spirit of Zine is that “anyone can publish their ideas” [2].

“A zine is a privately published handmade book on paper, which is mainly done in various DIY forms such as collage and hand-drawing, and the creators (zinesters) usually make them according to a specific content, which can be used for mutual exchange, exhibition, and sale. Zinesters, through the reorganization of a variety of existing materials, the appropriation of symbols, and the combination of hand-drawn visualizations, construct a new discursive symbol system and meaning communication system” [2].

Upon entering China, Zine culture began to integrate with the local cultural and social context. Unlike the anti-mainstream, anti-authority, and sub-culture elements commonly found in Western Zines, Chinese Zine content conveys self-expression, independent art, and individuality while often incorporating unique reflections and criticisms of Chinese society, history, politics, and culture.

Therefore, based on zine culture, the author will explore how zine culture combines individual uniqueness to construct cultural symbols of local traditional culture and convey the meaning of local culture. The impact and significance of zine culture as a self-published culture detached from the subjective discourse system has an impact and significance on local culture.

2. Form and Content Innovation in Zine

2.1. DIY(Do It Yourself)Culture

The process of making Zine is a process full of independent thoughts. The action of making, or the independent way of making (DIY: do it yourself), which is mainly emphasized in this article, determines the tone of the zine's form and content to a certain extent. Why does DIY as a way of creating the idea of independence in zine culture? First of all, DIY is a personal way of making. In other words, DIY empowers the maker to do all the steps of making independently by themselves. Thus, according to Peter Bryant, DIY gives a democratized path to the realization of the individual self [3]. There is no need for expert guidance, no need for specific skills to follow the steps to completion (Gauntlett). Secondly, DIY making gives each individual a safe space to re-make without fear of failure and without deadlines (Watson and Shove). Therefore, this safe engagement gives DIY makers the motivation to actively make zines.

Besides, sociality is another important role of DIY making [3]. Moreover, DIY making as a social process includes a lot of social practice such as sharing of culture and lived experiences. In fact, what is important in DIY making is not simply the action or process of making, but also the content and the feelings of the maker. In fact, the importance of the DIY process is not simply the action or the process of making, but more importantly the content and the sentiment of the maker. For example, according to Tanenbaum et al., "These making practices can also create a sense of nostalgia for obsolete or retro forms of making that is critical in defining the identity of some makers" [3].

Zine has many DIY creations in many art forms. Because they are personal creations, all forms of art can be freely created without limitations. For example: four-panel comics, essays, illustrations, photographs, poems, novels, photo album reviews, etc. Like DeLaRosa, she uses more different art forms in her collection: in "literary tradition, she used roman a clef, bildungsroman, epistolary, and picaresque; she also varies the narrative storytelling in zine by using graphic design techniques, fine art and commercial processes, pastiche, collage and other forms of art" [4].

Therefore, the core production method of zine culture, DIY, provides a possible way for people to express their independent thoughts and a space for creativity. The freedom of expression and experimentation in design and form gives zine culture an opportunity and a platform for the expression of individual will and thought [4]. It also gives producers and consumers who share the same emotional experience and spiritual resonance an independent, free, and free communication platform.

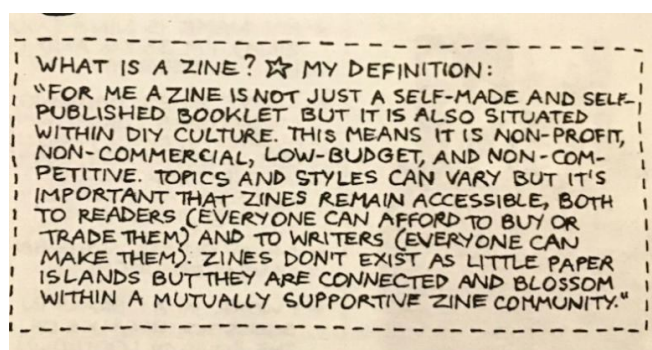


Figure 1: What is a zine? [5]

2.2. Zine and the Reproduction of Local Culture

2.2.1. Local Expression Interacts with a National Vision

Fanzine culture, also known as “pamphlets”, can be printed in black and white, in small quantities, or as a single book, and each handmade pamphlet is a free and independent expression of the creator. The reader is able to appreciate the sincerity and self-expression of the creator from his or her own point of view [6]. The expression of zine culture is a great contribution to the expression and dissemination of local culture.

Local culture generally exists in a small area and is a niche group compared to mainstream culture. Zine culture is precisely the best way to give voice to this niche. This is due in no small part to the DIY production methods the author mentioned above, and many in zine culture work individually as independent publishers, independent presses, and innovators to guide or communicate with their audiences [6].

In *Behind the zines: Self-Publishing Culture*, one can see a wide range of individual artworks being read and understood by a wider audience through zine self-publishing. Printing their own narratives and self-publishing in zine culture is full of free creativity and independent perspectives [6]. Thus, both self-publishing and DIY in zine culture endow this culture with a high degree of freedom and independence.

Then, how to combine such a free and independent form of cultural expression with local culture? First of all, local characteristics of traditional culture is an important part of national culture. Although it is only a small region and a minority group, it helps people to deepen their knowledge and understanding of their own national culture, thus enhancing their cultural self-confidence and national pride, and thus helping to maintain the independence and diversity of the national culture. What's more, local traditional culture is an important key to the harmonious development of society because it helps to cultivate people's sense of social responsibility and civic awareness, thus strengthening the maintenance of social stability [7].

It is because of the importance and specificity of local culture that people need the independence and freedom of zine culture to help local culture be known, recognized, to be loved by more people. For example, we can organize a zine booklet-making workshop to involve local or other people in the process of understanding the local culture. This activity can be carried out in museums or libraries as a social education activity, and the DIY-making method allows children and adults to enjoy the fun of free creation.

As mentioned above, DIY making is multiform, liberal, democratic and social. As mentioned by Xu Zilin & Liusi, people can encourage cultural enterprises and creative teams to develop cultural creative design and cultural product development [7]. Zine culture can be used as the artistic carrier and expression of these cultural creative designs and cultural products. In this way, the organic combination of zine culture and local traditional culture will form new local characteristic exhibits to inherit and promote local culture.

According to Bryant, social media and technology both contribute to increasing the social capacity of DIY making as they both serve as tools to support more people to participate in creating zine culture and sharing zine culture [3]. Therefore, if the author adds social media and technology to the combination of zine culture and local traditional culture, we will maximize the independence and autonomy of zines to help spread Chinese local traditional culture nationally and globally. This will help to improve social harmony and stability at home and improve China's cultural soft power abroad.

2.2.2. Case Study

Local traditional culture includes many forms, such as folk music, dance, opera, ancient architecture, handicrafts, cuisine and so on. There are many narrative strategies, such as text narrative, picture narrative, audio narrative, video narrative and so on. Besides, in emotional narrative, we can use sadness, comedy, thriller and other emotional color narrative. In terms of audience, it can also be divided into children, teenagers, adults and elderly audience groups [8]. The combination of so many cultural forms and narrative styles with the DIY production method of zine culture and the free and independent content delivery of self-publishing can greatly help the inheritance, dissemination, innovation and development of local traditional culture. The author will use case studies to show how zine culture can be combined with local culture to pass on, innovate and spread these local cultures.

2.2.3. Taiwan: Zine and Local Culture in Taiwan

Taiwan's zine culture is closer to daily life sharing and more integrated into people's expression of personal propositions. Recently, zines in Taiwan are mostly used by young art creators as a platform to publish their works [9]. According to Huang Wei-Rong, most Taiwanese zines at that time were of a single genre and serious themes, and did not focus on the daily life [9]. Moreover, this life refers not only to the life of social elites, but more, the value proposition of different styles, national cultures, and different groups.

Therefore, zine culture provides a platform for sharing and disseminating more tiny details of life, local cultures, and personal opinions. In addition, he points out that small magazines focus on the pursuit of pure and authentic tastes of life, and bring readers a sense of intellectual reading and sensory pleasure [10]. The author is thinking more about art, DIY making, and the different creative techniques that bring readers. Therefore, the positioning of Taiwan's small magazines is a platform to show the diversity of social life of different groups outside the mainstream media and outside the lives of the elites [10].

Taiwan is one of the places where Zine culture is relatively mature in the Chinese-speaking region, and according to Cheng, Yen-Wei, there is a large number of independent publications and small zines emerging in Taiwan [10]. The emergence of these small magazines represents, to a certain extent, the gradual maturation of cultural appreciation in Taiwanese society, where more and more different groups are willing to break out of the frame, express themselves, pay attention to the ego, and emphasize their inner feelings and daily life [10]. They have the ability to think independently, step out of the mainstream media narrative discourse, and do not blindly follow trends, but are purer in expressing their feelings and sharing their real lives.

The author chose Write and Write editorial school in Taiwan as a case study. This small platform is in the Hualien area of Taiwan. On its Facebook page and its own official website, readers can see some self-introductions:

"About Write and write editorial school, it established in 2014, "Write and write editorial school" hopes to publish works that "everyone can tell a story". The idea for such a publication originated from a BD farm owner in Hualien, who said he wanted to "live like a tree". He said that after the tree grows strong, birds, butterflies, and insects need the nourishment of the tree and will naturally come close to it, forming a rich and diversified small ecosystem. He doesn't need to yell at people to learn about planting and life, just do your job as a farmer and things will happen. Write and write editorial school also needs to do its editorial work quietly, and the story will grow its own strength" [11].

Through its profile, people can know that the platform of Write and write editorial school maximizes the role of zine culture, and "everyone can tell a story" reflects the freedom and

independence of zine culture. Their stories may have a theme, allowing everyone to share their daily lives, or they may have no theme, simply caring for themselves inwardly.

On the official website of Write and write editorial school, one can see that they already have quite a number of published works, all of which are independently published and self-published pamphlets. For example, the names of the latest three series of zine works are Send Yourself Back to Nature - Talking to Nature, Send Yourself Back to Nature - Meeting the Wildland Jobber and Send Yourself to Nature - Becoming a Walker. Besides that, we can also see some other types and themes of zines. e.g. How are you? Healing Journey, We're Walking on the Same Path and The Living City: These Guys in Hualien [12].

The pamphlets have different themes: about life, about the street, about plants, about pets, about the inner self, or maybe about nature. Whatever the theme, she is all about making her voice heard. Deviating from the mainstream media outside of Mandarin, returning to her own, nature, life's bits and pieces, recorded epiphanies and thoughts.

Among them, the latest publication of the book zine Send Yourself Back to Nature - Talking to Nature, the author especially like the official website to him a line of introduction: "Awareness of their own there, will become part of the forest [13]". This is a very interesting introduction, which made the author realize at first glance that the author of this zine is trying to express the theme that human beings are a part of nature. The author of this zine seems to like the natural environment of Hualien very much, and this zine makes the author feel that the local culture of Hualien and nature are closely connected.

Besides that, there's a paragraph in the book's introduction on the web page that really impacted the author:

6 Stories to Start the Discovery

In the course of the interviews, the partners will also look for their own favorite or related interviewees. Those who like guided explanations and eco-education chose to interview the teachers who guided them back then; those who respect nature and have moved to Hualien, or those who are concerned about the Bunun culture through fieldwork, interviewed the indigenous people living in the mountains; and those who wish to awaken their own dialogue chose the spiritual quests and the autobiographies of those who have hiked along the coasts. Each story includes the author's thoughts after the interview, creating an invisible link between the author, the interviewee and the reader [13].

Through this introduction, the author can know that zine culture provides creators with a great deal of freedom. For example, they all have a common topic for nature, but based on zine culture, they can independently choose their own interviewees and the direction of the topic they are interested in. In this zine, some people also focus on the local traditional and aboriginal culture of Hualien. In this example, the author can better see how zine culture allows local traditional culture to be passed on, innovated and developed. And this process is free and independent. In this book, the author can see the DIY making of zine is shown. For example, in this book, photos and words coexist. The layout of the book and the layout of the photos are done by the author himself. Through these independent creations, the local relationship between man and nature, and the cultural stories of the aborigines are recreated, so that the harmony and coexistence of these lives and nature, and the spiritual culture of the aboriginal culture can be passed on and innovated. Through this independent publishing method of dissemination, more young people are attracted to understand and respect the aboriginal culture and the state of man and nature.

It is known that zine culture, as an advocate of non-mainstream media, and organizations such as "Write and write editorial school" are carried out for the purpose of non-profit, and are a group of like-minded friends who adhere to it without any commercial interests, but simply "want to realize the value together" [10]. Therefore, in the middle is the creators' feelings about the ideas and concerns they want to express. For local traditional culture, there is a need for such an organization, which can

be cost-neutral, but simply has strong ideals for the preservation, inheritance, and promotion of the local culture, and Zine Culture provides such a group of people to come together. They are united through the production of zine culture. Zine culture provides such a group of people with the opportunity to come together, and through the production of zines, they are united, and the zines “have become a medium of cultural action, shaping the outside world's alternative imagination of local culture” [10].

3. Conclusion

Until now, zine culture has been involved in many areas, such as peace, art, women, race, and the environment. Nowadays, zine culture festivals, zine libraries or zine fairs are organized in some places. In these years of rapid development of digital media, the emerging media form of zine+ has also helped to add a lot of color to zine culture, providing zinesters with a broad social group and freer creative space.

In this paper, the author uses the platform “Write and write editorial school” in Taiwan to show the connection between zine culture practitioners and local culture. Perhaps it is the freedom and individuality of zine culture that provides a broad platform for the dissemination of different regional and traditional cultures. The author supports letting the local culture that can only be seen or heard in the local area really go out and letting more people understand, know, and fall in love with. The communication and dissemination of culture has gone through different periods of constant change and renewal. However, some traditional cultural connotations have been passed down through generations of people living in the place. The communication, exchange and combination of local culture and foreign zine culture is an effective witness of cultural exchange between China and the West. In China, different ethnic groups, different regions, cultural exchanges and interactions can make our country social stability, people's unity, mutual communication, peace and mutual construction.

References

- [1] Storey, J. (2024) *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. Beijing University Press.
- [2] Lu, H.S. (2021) *The Research of self-expression of zine subcultural in China*. Suzhou University.
- [3] Bryant, P. (2017) *Choosing Zines: Defining the constructs that influence the decision to participate in the practice of zine-making in the digital age*, Dissertation, University of Technology Sydney .
- [4] DeLaRosa, A. (2021) *The art of the zine and the DIY aesthetic: exploring and experimenting with multimodal storytelling*, Capstone in MA, the State University of New Jersey.
- [5] Nijsten, N. (2020) *Scissors & Chainsaws No. 2: Diary Comic Zine Made in July 2020 During International Zine Month*. Gent, Belgium: Nina Nijsten. <https://zines.barnard.edu/zine-basics>
- [6] Yin, L. (2017) *Exploration of Fanzine Culture and Form*. *Beauty and Times (above)*, (08):75-77.
- [7] Xu, Z. L, Liu, S. (2024) *Inheritance and Promotion Strategy of Traditional Culture with Local Characteristics*. *Henan Economic News*, 2024-07-04(012).
- [8] Sun, S. Q. (2024) *Multimedia Narrative of Local Culture*. *Cloud*, (39): 44-46.
- [9] Huang, S. C., (2013) *Zine, Development and overview of independent journals in Taiwan*, *Journal of Cagst, Chinese Annual of Printing Science and Technology*, 451-468.
- [10] Yeh, S. Y.: (2017) *Cultural Production of Contemporary Taiwanese Small Journals*. *Society for Cultural Studies*, 1-14.
- [11] *Write and write editorial school*, (Facebook), Profile, Feb. 9th, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/happywriter2015> & <https://happywriter.tw/about>
- [12] *Write and write editorial school*, Published work, Feb. 9th, 2025, <https://happywriter.tw/publication>
- [13] *Write and write editorial school*, *Send Yourself Back to Nature: Conversation with Nature*, Feb. 9th, 2025, <https://happywriter.tw/publications/164>