



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



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Zhu Lei Gang, Loy Chee Luen, Lee Keok Cheong

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i7/17830>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i7/17830

Received: 11 May 2023, **Revised:** 13 June 2023, **Accepted:** 29 June 2023

Published Online: 16 July 2023

In-Text Citation: (Gang et al., 2023)

To Cite this Article: Gang, Z. L., Luen, L. C., & Cheong, L. K. (2023). The Aesthetic Structure of Cursive Script. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13(7), 1159 – 1169.

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Vol. 13, No. 7, 2023, Pg. 1159 – 1169

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The Aesthetic Structure of Cursive Script

Zhu Lei Gang
City University Malaysia

Loy Chee Luen
Sultan Idris Education University & City University Malaysia

Lee Keok Cheong
City University Malaysia

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore and analyze the aesthetic structure of cursive script, unraveling its artistic elements, design principles, and emotional impact to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of this visually captivating writing style. The sequential development of the three aesthetic structures of cursive script, namely poetic thinking, brush thinking, and the realm of freedom, may contribute to the aesthetic context of cursive script. Poetic thinking allows creators to imagine the stylization that they cannot escape as a means to express emotions, engaging viewers as emotional participants. However, poetic thinking has a significant element of performance, which can lead to more profound expressions. Brush thinking involves the movement of technical assumptions and imaginary techniques in cursive script. Through training in public techniques of cursive script, creators develop technical assumptions that are connected to poetic thinking. The movement of imaginary techniques gives rise to brush thinking in cursive writing. The realm of freedom is inherent in the genetic nature of cursive script. Without this sense of freedom, pseudo-cursive scripts lack authenticity. Contemporary teaching methods struggle to convey the difficulty of gene transmission, but the activation of freedom gene transfer occurs through deep performances and the movement of imaginary techniques. Overall, this paper highlights the significance of embracing expression, recognizing the artistic potential in unconventional writing forms like cursive calligraphy, and promoting a broader appreciation for diverse artistic expressions while challenging societal judgments.

Keywords: Cursive Script, Cursive Script Aesthetics, Unconsciousness, Poetic Thinking, Brush Thinking, Realm of Freedom

Introduction

In regards to the connotation of aesthetic experience, calligraphy does not have an equivalent term in the Western context (Chen, 2021). Calligraphy, which refers to a form that is far from being considered a serious art form. "Serious art" refers to what exactly? In contrast to the previous statement of "highly decorative practical art," it can be understood as "non-serious art" or "playful art." The concept of "seriousness" is subjective and varies greatly, and it begs

the question of whether it enhances calligraphy or truly diminishes other art forms. The fact remains that calligraphy, throughout history, has never felt inferior due to its simplicity, nor has it boasted of its greatness.

If calligraphy is considered a "serious" art form, apart from seal script, clerical script, and regular script, calligraphy has a less serious child called "cursive script." Cursive script is inherently not serious and is often seen as mischievous and adorable. Cursive script is akin to poetry in literature: it is free-spirited in form, highly expressive, and allows for great freedom. In other words, the constraints and limitations are minimal, and there is ample space for subjective choices. However, precisely because of this, whether in copying or creating, cursive script is also considered the most difficult to master and manipulate. This demonstrates that as the artistic space and power given to the subject for creativity increase, so do the requirements for deep artistic engagement and self-organization. If we consider that calligraphy ultimately aims to express a sense of vitality, only objects imbued with vitality can move and captivate appreciators of vitality. The "freedom" and "lack of boundaries" in cursive script pose the most formidable challenge to the artist's awareness of life and their ability to organize it. Perhaps this is the essence of the difficulty in cursive script (Zhu, 2016; Qiu, 2022).

The sense of vitality possesses an aesthetic structure, and how cursive script creation constructs an aesthetic structure that aligns with its inherent nature is the most challenging aspect of cursive script's character. The constraints and conceptual limitations of cursive script are minimal. If we deliberately categorize subjective choices or refine the subject's expression, it is difficult to capture time-sensitive creative information, and the information may become ineffective due to changes in emotions. Therefore, the aesthetic structure of cursive script cannot be pieced together in a systematic manner. Perhaps, due to the vitality of cursive script, a gradual or indirect search for the aesthetic structure of cursive script that is more closely aligned with its inherent vitality would be more appropriate. Freud referred to the unconscious as "the place where we store our unfulfilled desires". Creative work that arises from the unconscious is precious to the creators as it represents the beginning of entering a certain mode of thinking. A significant portion of the aesthetic factors in cursive script stems from chance and the unconscious. Such a state was referred to by ancient scholars as the "divine brushstroke," and during the medieval period, artistic creations arising from the "unconscious" were considered to be the result of "divine inspiration" according to scholars like Plotinus (Anne, 2017).

The aesthetic structure of cursive script possesses an independent and vibrant vitality, undoubtedly serving as an energy supplement to the human spiritual world. The poetic thinking in cursive script exhibits rhythmic musicality, while the brushwork thinking displays a self-reflective quality. The state of freedom it embodies represents a spiritual realm that humans aspire to. However, to truly grasp the spirituality conveyed by cursive script, individuals need to consciously comprehend its aesthetic structure.

This article will progressively explore the three aesthetic structures of poetic thinking, brush thinking, and the realm of freedom, which carry the essence of the "unconscious." It is hoped that by doing so, it will allow for a deeper understanding of the aesthetic context of cursive script.

The Poetic Thinking of Cursive Script

Poetry is an art form, a creative act that resists the monotony of everyday life and expresses emotions and spirituality. Cursive script and poetry share more than just their expressive nature; they have numerous similarities that cannot be fully described using metaphors or other techniques.

Poetic thinking is not exclusive to poetry; it is the intuitive grasp of the sublime by life itself. It delicately portrays the moments to be expressed without falling into arrangement. It transforms the intended images into symbols, mastering rhythm and tone. It is the transference and projection of emotions and spirituality. Artistic creation raises many questions about the elements of art, such as whether emotions come first or spirituality. I believe that poetic thinking comes first. Poetic thinking possesses all the elements needed to construct art and is self-sufficient.

Poetic Thinking is the process by which creators transform their powerless and formulaic assumptions into emotional expressions. If these assumptions happen to intersect with genuine emotional revelations, it can make the viewers become emotional participants. Therefore, poetic thinking contains a significant element of performance. This performance element involves constructing individual and scattered words into an inseparable whole. Only such a holographic whole can align with the ideal state envisioned by the creator and attract the engagement of the viewers.

When the performance element involves emotional participation, it evolves into a deeper level of performance. At this point, both the creator and the viewers become participants in the essence of the artwork. Poetic thinking becomes the organizer of the words and the field in which the artwork takes shape. This field ultimately dissolves prejudices and delusions generated by ignorance and indifference.

Each individual character in cursive script embodies a vibrant existence. The paradigms of education instill a sense of vigilance and defensiveness in each character, resulting in a state of mental and emotional conflict resembling the increasingly impersonal urban inhabitants. Poetic thinking serves as the organizer of cursive script, an invisible life force that disperses sublime intuitions among the words. It warms the separated and scattered characters with emotions and spirituality, creating an organic movement that unifies them into a cohesive whole.

Cursive script is perhaps comparable to the zodiac sign Capricorn often quiet and even dull. However, its quietness differs from the serene nature of the three regular scripts: seal script, clerical script, and regular script. The tranquility of regular scripts is a habitual and deliberate slowness, a natural action that encompasses everything from daily tasks to sleep. The quietness of cursive script, on the other hand, can be attributed to laziness or even being asleep. When awake, its quietness or dullness is a result of constraint, only revealing its "freedom" when truly allowed, and it is a dynamic freedom.

If poetry and cursive script are remarkably similar, then among all the art forms in China, poetry and calligraphy have the longest and most profound history, enduring through the ages. In the Tang Dynasty, calligraphy and poetry reached an unparalleled peak. They were

not only the most popular forms of art but also the most mature ones during that period. Calligraphy and poetry complemented each other, sharing the same aesthetic temperament and serving as concentrated embodiments of the artistic spirit of the Tang Dynasty (Li, 2019).

It is quite remarkable that cursive script and poetry reached an unparalleled peak during the Tang Dynasty. Emperor Wen of Late Tang issued an imperial decree to bestow the titles of "Zhang Xu's Cursive Script," "Li Bai's Poetry," and "Pei Min's Sword Dance" to the entire nation, establishing them as the Three Unparalleled Arts of the Great Tang. They were both mature and widely popular, marking the first occurrence in history of an artistic phenomenon combining poetry, cursive script, and sports. So, what is it that gives poetry and cursive script the same aesthetic temperament and artistic spirit? Perhaps it lies in the entry point of both art forms: poetic thinking.

The inescapable element of stylization for creators is the constant medium of artistic state. We can only face it harmoniously, smiling at it, using the medium to express emotions and immerse ourselves in poetic thinking. This leads to self-expression and further evolves into profound performance, ultimately constructing and participating in the creation of the overall work.

If we consider the lines of cursive script, as well as the points, lines, and surfaces generated by these lines, as objective entities, then the essence of cursive script lies in being a medium for imagination and subjective emotions. In ancient times, alcohol was often used as a medium for cursive script creation, blurring the line between wisdom and foolishness, reality and illusion, clarity and ambiguity, often blurring the distinction between subject and object. When first appreciating cursive script (wild cursive), it is akin to reading poetry, generating a sudden and fleeting experience that may not immediately resonate or may induce a sense of trance. Similar to observing contemporary installation art, it may evoke past artistic memories through a momentary visual sensation. Memories strengthen our aesthetic experience, transforming us from mere spectators into participants of the artwork, immersing ourselves in the realm of poetry, and fully releasing our emotional and sensual response to the beauty of cursive script. It is irrelevant yet relevant to the dots, strokes, line quality, movement, rhythm, time, space, and illusions created by cursive script. This is the ultimate aim of aesthetic activity.

The Thinking Behind Brushstrokes in Cursive Script

During the late Han Dynasty, calligraphers devoted a great deal of effort to improving the brush, as noted by (Hua, 2009). The brush, a writing instrument that has seen little change over thousands of years, primarily serves calligraphy. While the external appearance of the brush has remained largely unchanged, its internal essence has silently evolved. It is evident that the brush is the primary tool of calligraphy, and the use of the brush is where calligraphy begins. Therefore, discussing the beauty of cursive script involves delving into the thinking behind brushstrokes.

Speaking of the use of the brush, calligraphy educators emphasize technique and are not fond of discussing emotional changes. In good works of art, emotions are the first to strike the viewer, followed by technique. However, emotional power is not innate. Emotions may exist in everyone, but the lack of emotional power is evident in a large number of people.

Crying does not necessarily indicate the presence of emotional power, and the inability to cry does not necessarily mean the absence of emotional power. Therefore, calligraphy educators are people who can shed tears, while calligraphy aestheticians are individuals who may not be able to do so. By comparing the two, it can be seen that aestheticians always maintain a broad perspective when discussing a specific aspect of calligraphy. These observations herald the birth of new calligraphic styles (Wang, 2010).

The use of the brush and structure began to emerge in Chinese calligraphy. The brush strokes in Chinese calligraphy encompass different techniques such as central strokes, side strokes, square brushes, round brushes, light and heavy touches, fast and slow movements, and various other distinctions. These variations are achieved through the use of simple dots and strokes, expressing rich inner emotions and the diverse forms of the world. It is similar to how music employs a few musical notes and follows the rules of harmony, rhythm, and melody to create countless compositions (Zong, 2020).

Based on my own creative experience, I divide the thinking of brushwork in grass script into the following points

First, Practice-oriented brushwork thinking: This involves borrowing someone else's brush, which can also be seen as a distorted or transmitted brush. When practicing calligraphy, beginners naturally adopt two approaches. First, they rely on their sensory intuition to imitate the ancient character models. Second, they may enroll in training classes and pay for instruction. Both approaches involve using someone else's brush and following the strokes of character models. The first approach relies on intuition, while the second approach is more passive and directly accepts the instructor's brushwork experience. Compared to the first approach, the second approach adds a medium, which means learning from others' brushwork through the guidance of another person. This method may seem faster in terms of learning, but one fact remains unchanged: this medium, regardless of its correctness, will always create a separation between one's own brushwork and that of others.

Second, text-oriented brushwork thinking: Also known as the brushwork of Chinese characters. At this stage, there should be no differentiation in one's mind regarding the characters. After going through the practice-oriented brushwork, the practitioner should have already practiced the brushwork of the five major script styles, with different distinctions based on each style. At this point, there is no division in brushwork, no division in script styles; it is simply observing calligraphy, perceiving characters intuitively, forgetting about other people's brushwork, practice-oriented brushwork, and allowing the brushwork to become dull, focusing only on the characters.

Third, non-character-oriented brushwork thinking: The dulling of brushwork makes one feel as if there are no characters or concepts of Chinese characters in their eyes. Sometimes, one may feel shallow and insignificant, to the extent of not even recognizing the characters, becoming like an elementary school student. In fact, this illusion is precious. The appearance of non-character-oriented brushwork is a self-reflective questioning, not the absence of characters.

Fourth, Character-oriented brushwork thinking: After the experience of non-character-oriented brushwork, one will inevitably cherish character-oriented brushwork even more.

Character-oriented brushwork is still non-character-oriented brushwork; it is the expression of cognitive speculation. The beauty of brushwork in calligraphy is undoubtedly the beauty of human expression. The beauty of humans always naturally reveals itself through inward observation and inherent qualities. Therefore, the beauty of characters is the beauty of the inner self.

In summary, the beauty of brushwork in calligraphy is the external manifestation of individual emotions. The skillful and meticulous technique serves as the material for the beauty of brushwork, but the material required to evoke individual emotions may undergo slight changes compared to its usual state. This is the subtlety of aesthetics, and it poses a challenge to craftsmanship.

The state of freedom in cursive calligraphy

The process of writing in Chinese calligraphy can create a certain mood or atmosphere. The calligrapher pauses for a moment in front of the material, which may appear like a brief moment of absent-mindedness. However, it is actually the calligrapher's way of invoking emotions or feelings. This is not a pretentious act. Chinese people have a shared emotional connection when it comes to written letters, so the calligrapher's moment of absent-mindedness is a preparation of emotions for the recipient of the letter. This moment of preparation will be reflected in the subsequent content and the strokes of the characters. The recipient will also empathize with the mood created by the content of the letter and the rhythm of the writing, experiencing emotions such as joy, anger, or sadness. An aesthete, Zong (2020), state that "When people are happy, their faces show a smile; when they are grieving, they emit a mournful sound." These internal emotions can also be expressed in Chinese calligraphy, just like in poetry and music. Other cultures' writing systems have not yet achieved this level of artistic expression. Why does Chinese calligraphy possess this characteristic.

Unrestrained cursive strokes whisper freedom's essence, liberation woven in ink. The four realms of calligraphic freedom included (i) the realm of flaws; (ii) the realm of stability; (iii) the realm of purity and (iv) the realm of transformation. The realm of flaws embraces imperfections and spontaneous brushwork, adding character to the artwork. The realm of stability focuses on balance, consistency, and mastering fundamental techniques. The realm of purity emphasizes cultivating inner peace and clarity to create serene and spiritually meaningful calligraphy. The realm of transformation encourages innovation, experimentation, and personal growth in the practice of calligraphy. Understanding these realms allows calligraphers to expand their artistic expression and create works that embody the essence of calligraphic freedom (Zhu, 2019).

Zhu (2015) mention that aesthetic sensibility arises from the intuition of forms. It has two elements: First, there is an appropriate distance between the present image and actual human life. Only contemplate this isolated and insulated image, without considering its relationship with other things or its usefulness to humans. Thinking and desire are temporarily suspended. Second, while contemplating this image, we are fully focused to the extent that we forget ourselves and the object. Inadvertently, my personal taste is transferred to the object, and the object's posture is transferred to me. This is an extremely free (as it is not

bound by practical purposes) activity. It can be called appreciation or creation. Beauty is the product of this activity and is not pre-existing.

Cursive calligraphy, being the externalization of one's inner self, is sincere and without pretense. It is like an electrocardiogram of the heart, where every heartbeat, every breath, and every gaze are recorded truthfully. Genuine and classical calligraphic art is like this, it must be like this! It is like a pure and pristine young girl, with no trace of calculation in her every expression. She blends harmoniously with her surroundings, and that is the beauty of calligraphic mood.

Ancient scholars described the freedom in cursive calligraphy in the following way: The brushwork is unrestrained, as if there is a suppressed energy that is eager to burst out from the tip of the brush. It flows downward like running water that cannot be stopped. Even though it is restrained and flowing, its posture still exudes a sense of control, with a carefree elegance. Some people may perceive cursive calligraphy as arrogant, but that's not the case. Cursive calligraphy is an expression of the inner self, and while it may appear wild on the surface, like madness, it is not. The outward appearance of cursive calligraphy is always controlled within reason. The forceful brushwork is like a bird bathing, remaining vigilant, and at times, it is like a vast beach welcoming strong winds and giant waves. Cursive calligraphy has a handsome and upright appearance, with simplicity in action and attire. Sometimes it may be emotionally driven, but it can still control the situation and adapt accordingly. Sometimes it resembles a man like the wind, and other times it resembles the serene forest after a rain, gentle and refreshing. Those who have seen the sea may compare cursive calligraphy to the spouting of a whale or the swift flight of a seabird over the water. Some people liken cursive calligraphy to a hermit in the deep mountains, a warrior on the battlefield, a falling stone on a high mountain, or a lightning flash across the night sky.

Ancient scholars also recorded the states of calligraphers during the creation of cursive calligraphy. Some lamented their inability to adhere to the rules of cursive calligraphy and used a brush to release their emotions. Some continued writing even after using up all the paper, still unsatisfied. So what did they do? They threw away the brush and shouted aloud to vent their remaining enthusiasm. Some felt the urge to write cursive calligraphy when they saw a white wall, especially after drinking alcohol. Suddenly, they would shout loudly, and within a short time, the entire wall would be filled with thousands of characters. This number is figurative, as ancient people also described the white wall as a pink wall, creating an atmosphere of enthusiastic art.

Motivation in Learning Calligraphy

Motivation is a crucial factor in learning calligraphy, as emphasized by (Filgona et al., 2020). It is the driving force that propels learners towards their learning goals. Without motivation, the success of learning is uncertain, as learners may lack the drive to push themselves and reach their full potential. Motivation is considered the single most important element of learning, as it determines the level of engagement and effort put forth by learners.

In the context of Chinese calligraphy, motivation becomes even more important due to its rich history and cultural significance (Yang, 2021). To foster motivation in calligraphy education, countermeasures are proposed, such as creating a supportive atmosphere,

improving teacher quality, and building a comprehensive calligraphy education system. These measures aim to enhance learners' motivation and create an environment conducive to their learning and development.

Additionally, Xiao (2021) examines the comparative results of different teaching approaches in learning Chinese writing, including calligraphy. The study highlights the challenges of learning Chinese as a second language, particularly the complex nature of the language and writing system. Advanced teaching methods, including the integration of digital tools and independent use of web services, are suggested to improve motivation and language learning outcomes. The study finds that a dynamic approach is effective in teaching hieroglyphics and pragmatic aspects of the language, while the academic classroom method is suitable for correct pronunciation.

In a successful pedagogical model of teaching Chinese calligraphy in a technology-enriched environment, Li (2021) emphasizes the role of motivation in the learning experience. The teacher's efforts to foster a pleasant learning climate, utilize technology for online classes, and provide timely feedback contribute to learners feeling confident, competent, and autonomous. The teacher's passion and dedication motivate learners to excel in Chinese calligraphy, and the absence of tuition fees enhances learners' appreciation for the teacher's time and commitment.

Motivation plays a crucial role in learning calligraphy. It is essential to recognize and influence learners' motivations to ensure their engagement and success. Creating a supportive atmosphere, improving teacher quality, and implementing effective teaching methods, including technology integration, are key strategies to enhance motivation in calligraphy education. By fostering motivation, learners are more likely to feel confident, competent, and autonomous in their pursuit of Chinese calligraphy proficiency.

Contribution to Cultural and Aesthetic Education

The aesthetic structure of cursive script, as highlighted in the literature Chen (2021); Zong (2020), contributes significantly to cultural and aesthetic education. Cursive script possesses an independent and vibrant vitality that supplements the human spiritual world, embodying a state of freedom and representing a spiritual realm that humans aspire to. The poetic thinking in cursive script exhibits rhythmic musicality, while the brushwork thinking displays a self-reflective quality. To fully appreciate the spirituality conveyed by cursive script, individuals need to consciously comprehend its aesthetic structure.

Chinese calligraphy, as an ancient character writing art, holds a special place in the aesthetic realm. Zong (2020) emphasizes its significance as a form of artistic expression that goes beyond writing and conveys profound meanings through strokes and composition. With its rich history and cultural heritage, Chinese calligraphy evokes emotions, creates visual harmony, and communicates the essence of the Chinese language. Acknowledging its ancient nature, Chen (2023) recognizes calligraphy as a distinctive art form that reflects the inner thoughts, personality, and cultural heritage of the calligrapher. The beauty and elegance of Chinese calligraphy lie in its precision, rhythm, balance, and the artistic skills of the calligrapher. The progressive aesthetic structure of cursive script enhances people's understanding of it to a spiritual level. It embodies vitality and spirituality, adding new interest

and brilliance to human aesthetics and spiritual needs. By appreciating the aesthetic structure of cursive script, individuals can develop a deeper connection with this traditional art form and gain insights into the wisdom of the grass-roots community, reflecting the soul of Chinese culture (Jian et al., 2020).

Chinese calligraphy is not only a form of character writing but also a cherished art form highly esteemed in East Asia include China. Zhang et al. (2019) highlight the effectiveness of their system in producing visually pleasing calligraphy that preserves the unique style of the user. By utilizing various input handwriting, the system successfully captures the essence of calligraphy and allows individuals to express their artistic creativity while maintaining their personal touch. Chinese calligraphy, being part of the historical heritage and worth conserving, plays a significant role in cultural preservation. It is considered a traditional art form and a manifestation of Chinese wisdom. Through the study of traditional calligraphy theories and vernacular translations, researchers aim to delve into the rich history and cultural significance of Chinese calligraphy (Lin, 2022). Despite its connected writing style, research on text recognition for cursive images in calligraphy is relatively limited (Qin et al., 2019).

Moreover, calligraphy education in China has undergone historical changes, with a focus on both brushes and hard pens. The emphasis on elementary school calligraphy education aligns with the requirements of quality education and contributes to the inheritance and promotion of Chinese cultural traditions (Qiu & Perey, 2021). By integrating calligraphy education into the curriculum, students can develop an appreciation for the artistic and cultural aspects of Chinese calligraphy, fostering a deeper understanding and connection with their own cultural heritage.

The aesthetic structure of cursive script in Chinese calligraphy contributes significantly to cultural and aesthetic education. Its vitality, spirituality, and unique artistic qualities enhance people's understanding and appreciation of this traditional art form, promoting cultural preservation and providing valuable insights into the wisdom of Chinese culture. By incorporating calligraphy education into the curriculum, individuals can develop a deeper connection with their cultural heritage and foster a greater appreciation for the artistry and cultural significance of calligraphy.

Conclusion

In sum, many criticisms of cursive calligraphy in ancient times. Some believed it was useless and merely scribbling, and those who enjoyed cursive calligraphy were accused of neglecting their proper responsibilities and indulging in frivolous pursuits. Some literary figures criticized cursive calligraphy as wild, eccentric, deviating from rules and lacking in etiquette. However, regardless of the evaluations, this is the realm of freedom in cursive calligraphy. The progressive aesthetic structure of cursive script enhances people's general understanding of cursive script to a spiritual level. The aesthetic structure of any art form embodies vitality and spirituality. The progressive aesthetic structure of cursive script finds its harmony within non-conflicting individuality, creating an independent and expansive vitality unique to cursive script. As a result, it adds new interest and brilliance to human aesthetics and spiritual needs. In further research, researchers will delve into the poetic thinking, rhythmic musicality, and reflective qualities of brushwork thinking within cursive script. Researcher will also investigate

how cursive script represents a spiritual realm, embodying freedom and acting as an energy supplement to the human spiritual world. By understanding the aesthetic structure of cursive script, researchers can contribute to a deeper appreciation and comprehension of this ancient art form.

Corresponding Author

Zhu Leigang

Linyi Cultural Center, Linyi Culture and Tourism Bureau, China

Email: 16689738@qq.com

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