

# Challenges and Opportunities of Sichuan Opera Face Changing in Haidilao in Cultural Communication

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## Abstract:

As companies integrate intangible cultural heritage into brand promotion, Sichuan opera is face-changing and representative of traditional Sichuan culture, and it is widely used in commercial marketing. However, balancing cultural heritage and commercial promotion has become an important issue. This study explores the communication effect of Haidilao's integration of Sichuan opera face-changing, a regional traditional culture of Sichuan, into brand promotion and analyses the advantages and shortcomings. Through quantitative and qualitative research, this paper conducts a questionnaire survey of the nationwide audience and structured interviews on consumers' satisfaction levels and positive and negative attitudes in different regions. It is found that Haidilao has enhanced its brand's competitive advantage and promoted the dissemination of intangible cultural heritage through Sichuan Opera Face Changing. Still, the depth of dissemination needs to be improved due to the oversimplification and entertainment of the culture in a commercial environment, resulting in the sacrifice of cultural values. In addition, the promotion of Sichuan Opera Face Changing in different regions shows a lack of cultural adaptability, especially in areas with significant differences in cultural backgrounds, where the audience's acceptance of this cultural form is low. In this regard, this paper proposes a regionalized traditional culture promotion strategy and a model of brand-culture symbiosis. This study provides new ideas for effectively disseminating traditional culture in national commercial promotion.

**Keywords:** Cultural communication; commercialization; opportunities and challenges; win-win situation.

## 1. Introduction

In today's Chinese market, where multiple cultures mingle and consumer experiences are increasingly affluent, combining traditional culture and modern business is becoming a unique landscape. Haidilao, as a leader in the catering industry, is famous for its unique brand culture and innovative service concept. Integrating traditional Sichuan opera face-changing art into Haidilao's services is an innovative inheritance of traditional Chinese culture and a bold attempt to explore new paths for integrating modern business and culture. As the country's cultural self-confidence continues to rise and the public desires to return to traditional culture, the face-changing art form of Sichuan opera, which contains a profound cultural heritage, is gradually taking on a new lease of life. However, in the fast-paced modern life, how to balance the essence of traditional culture with the aesthetic needs of modern consumers and how to maintain the purity of art in the process of commercialization are challenges that Haidilao has to face in the process of spreading Sichuan Opera Face Changing. At the same time, with the strong brand influence and comprehensive market coverage of Haidilao, Sichuan Opera Face Changing has also ushered in unprecedented development opportunities, becoming a bridge connecting tradition and modernity, culture and business.

The paper will start from the multi-dimensional aspects of cultural identity and market demand and mainly focus on the challenges and opportunities of Haidilao's Sichuan Opera Face Changing in Chinese market communication. Questionnaire surveys and interviews are the main research methods. The use of a questionnaire survey method to investigate the geographical area, age, and other ranges more comprehensively, with vital statistical significance of the data, can provide a large number of adequate data for the study of this paper; the interview research method has the advantage of face-to-face questioning, more controlling, can be a deep understanding of this paper's research problems and explore, based on the questionnaire data and then more in-depth analysis, conducive to the study of the research. The model of "regional traditional culture + business" has a positive effect on the dissemination of traditional culture and enterprise development, and it is hoped that the research in the paper can provide new ideas and directions for the modern dissemination of conventional culture and promote the win-win development of the cultural industry and business economy.

## 2. Literature Review

Through a review of the relevant literature, the current research of scholars can be divided into two categories, the first of which is the influence of regionality on the for-

mation and dissemination of culture. The 'Sichuan Opera Face Changing' performance service launched by Haidilao Hot Pot Restaurant is itself a manifestation of regional culture, which is the historical and cultural differences triggered by the geographical environment and natural conditions, as well as the unique cultural characteristics and atmosphere closely related to a specific geographical location [1]. Regional culture plays a vital role in the formation and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, and the economic development and population mobility of different regions have contributed to the diversity and unity of regional cultures, which are formed and distributed by the combined influence of the living environment, geographic conditions, and historical background [2]. Distinctive regional cultures can contribute to forming business behaviors [3]. However, the uniqueness of regional culture also makes it face certain limitations in the dissemination process. Li's research shows that the more economically developed the region, the stronger the demand for spiritual culture and the higher the acceptance. Through the strategy of artistic or cultural performances, the audience can be effectively expanded, and the number of viewers can be enhanced [4]. Thus achieving an increase in the consumer base.

The second category is the impact of the commercialization of culture, where culture drives economic development and is accompanied by a series of challenges, such as the erosion of cultural values. The literature points out that using cultural elements in fine dining restaurants has become increasingly important as business and culture merge, with fine dining restaurants leading innovation and setting new standards in the industry. In addition to providing a well-designed environment and ambiance and professionally trained staff, such restaurants have become 'the ideal place for consumers seeking a culinary experience and enjoyment [5]. Based on these innovative practices, more and more restaurants are incorporating cultural elements, making cultural offerings essential to enhancing the customer experience. When culture drives business activities, it can contribute to economic development, helping young people from different regions build their identities through cultural products like Haidilao's Sichuan Opera Face, Changing and profoundly impacting local cultural practices [6]. However, the commercial value of cultural capital is usually gained at the expense of its spiritual value. With increasing consumerism, the commercialization of culture has led to a gradual erosion of its intrinsic spiritual value [7]. Meanwhile, the commercialization of intangible cultural heritage has been criticized for potentially compromising its cultural integrity and authenticity. In this process, scholars have suggested maintaining a balance between tradition and modernity in the pursuit of modernization and commercialization, especially in the case of theatre-based ICH, where the

application of technology may be a means of resolving its existential dilemma [8]. In the process of cultural inheritance and dissemination, it is essential to flexibly use both innovative and traditional means of dissemination, as well as to keep up with the trend of media convergence and the development of new media to expand the paths of cultural dissemination, and to innovate the means of dissemination, which is an essential strategy for solving the challenges posed by the commercialization of culture [9]. Overall, scholars' studies have focused on the impact of regional culture on the dissemination of ICH and the challenges posed by the commercialization of culture. These studies reveal the advantages of regional culture in commercial communication and highlight its limitations in cross-regional promotion. Integrating culture and commercialization may have sacrificed culture's intrinsic value in promoting economic development [10]. Especially in cultural commodification, balancing commercial interests and cultural preservation has become an important issue. Existing research provides a necessary theoretical foundation for understanding the application of ICH in the modern commercial environment. However, there are still some gaps in the existing research when exploring the sustainable development model of symbiosis between ICH and commercial brands. Based on these research ideas, this paper will analyze in depth the advantages and limitations of Haidilao in utilizing the intangible cultural heritage of Sichuan Opera Face Changing to fill the research gap on balancing the conflict between cultural

heritage and commercial interests. By exploring the case of Haidilao, this paper hopes to provide new theoretical perspectives for future cultural promotion and branding strategies and propose a feasible promotional model for the symbiosis of culture and commerce to provide a more systematic solution for the sustainability of cultural communication.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Questionnaire Survey

According to the core research questions for designing the "questionnaire survey on the satisfaction of Haidilao Sichuan Opera Face Changing", after the preliminary completion of the questionnaire, the reliability of the questionnaire was tested under the guidance and advice of the relevant experts. Then it was distributed in the form of questionnaire star. A total of 211 surveys were received, of which the number of valid questionnaires was 167, with an effective rate of 79.1%. Among them, the sample structure is as follows:

Distribution of the number of people who have seen Haidilao's Sichuan Opera Face Changing: 64.6% yes, 35.3% no.

The distribution of the resident geographical area is as follows in Figure 1.

The distribution of the age is as follows Figure 2.

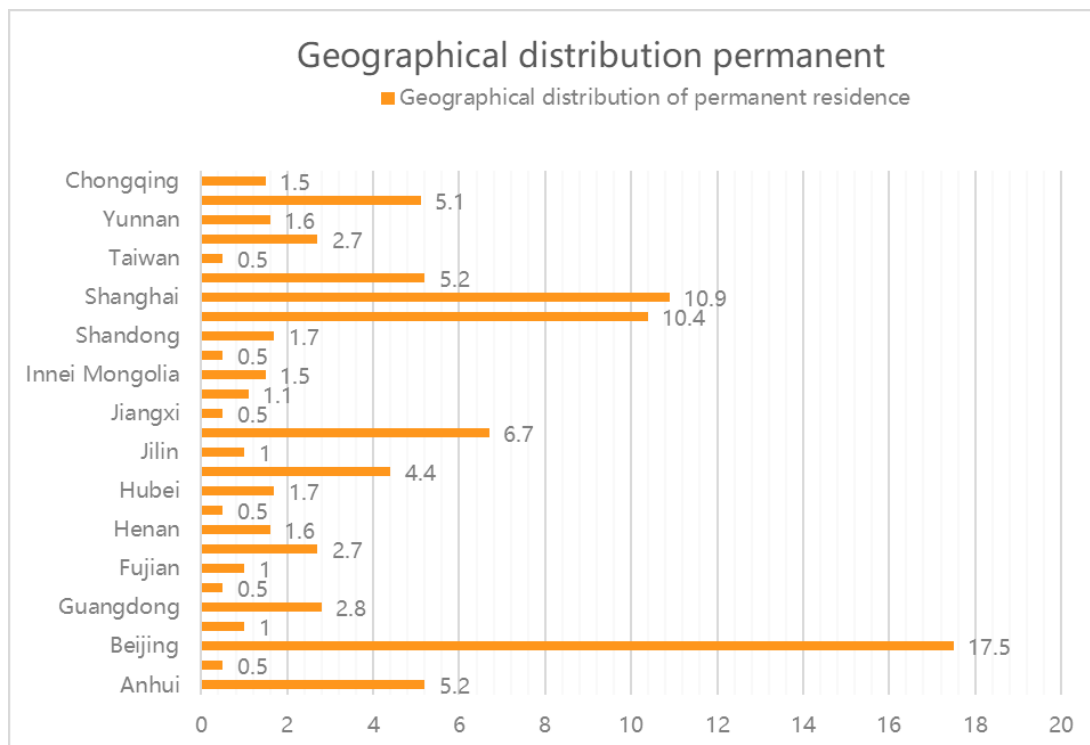


Fig. 1 Geographical distribution permanent



Fig. 2 Age distribution

### 3.2 Interview Survey

The results of the questionnaire survey show that young people have a richer interest and personal understanding of this topic. As one of the main driving forces of the Haidilao consumer group, they can also reflect to some extent the attitude of Haidilao consumers towards watch-

ing the cultural performance of Sichuan opera face changing during meals. Therefore, through online recruitment of interviewees, 8 young consumers from various parts of China participated in this in-depth interview, including 4 males and 4 females. The information of the interviewees is as in Table 1.

Table 1. The information of the interviewees

| Number | Gender | Age | Region                        | Enjoying watching Sichuan opera’s face-changing in Haidilao (Yes/No) |
|--------|--------|-----|-------------------------------|--|
| F1     | Female | 21  | Zunyi, Guizhou Province       | Yes  |
| F2     | Female | 22  | Shenzhen, Guangzhou Province  | Yes  |
| F3     | Female | 26  | Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province    | No   |
| F4     | Female | 21  | Harbin, Heilongjiang Province | Yes  |
| M1     | Male   | 21  | Jinan, Shandong Province      | No   |
| M2     | Male   | 26  | Beijing                       | Yes  |
| M3     | Male   | 25  | Tianjin                       | No   |
| M4     | Male   | 22  | Wuhan, Hubei Province         | Yes  |

## 4. Research Findings

### 4.1 Positive Effect

Haidilao has a positive effect on the dissemination of Sichuan Opera Face Changing, and at the same time, Sichuan Opera Face Changing also brings new competitive advantages for Haidilao, and the two promote each other.

It is a successful attempt to innovate the way of combining the catering industry and traditional culture, which has a reference value for other enterprises.

In the questionnaire collected, the question “How do you think the Sichuan Opera Face Changing Show affected your dining experience?” had 4.6% of consumers saying that it greatly diminished the dining experience, 5.5% thought it reduced the dining experience, 19.4% were neu-

tral, 38.8% thought it enhanced the dining experience, and 31.4% thought it greatly enhanced the dining experience. In the question “Do you think the Sichuan Opera Face Changing Show has helped you understand and accept Sichuan culture?” 4.6% of the consumers think it has helped them understand and accept Sichuan culture. 4.6% of consumers thought it was not helpful, 10.1% were neutral, 50.9% thought it was helpful, and 34.2% thought it was very helpful.

According to the data, it can be seen that consumers are highly satisfied with Haidilao’s Sichuan opera face-changing service and have a high degree of acceptance of the use of Sichuan opera face-changing performances to spread the culture of Sichuan opera, which also reflects consumers’ high willingness to learn about the culture of Sichuan.

Based on the data, it is clear that consumers are highly satisfied with Haidilao’s Sichuan opera face-changing service and are highly receptive to the use of Sichuan opera face-changing performances to spread the culture of Sichuan opera, which also reflects consumers’ high willingness to learn about Sichuan culture.

The finding is highly consistent with the feedback received in the interviews. Many consumers believe that the Sichuan Opera Face Changing Show successfully spreads traditional culture in Haidilao’s catering environment and can increase the customer’s dining experience and Haidilao’s unique competitive advantage, achieving the dual goals of cultural dissemination and commercial benefits. As interviewee F2 (F, 22, Guangzhou-Shenzhen) said, she believes that Sichuan opera face changing, as a cultural card of Sichuan, combines very well with hot pot; such integration promotes the culture of Sichuan Opera while enhancing the quality of Hai Di Lao’s service features, creating a win-win situation. In addition, M2 (Male, 26,

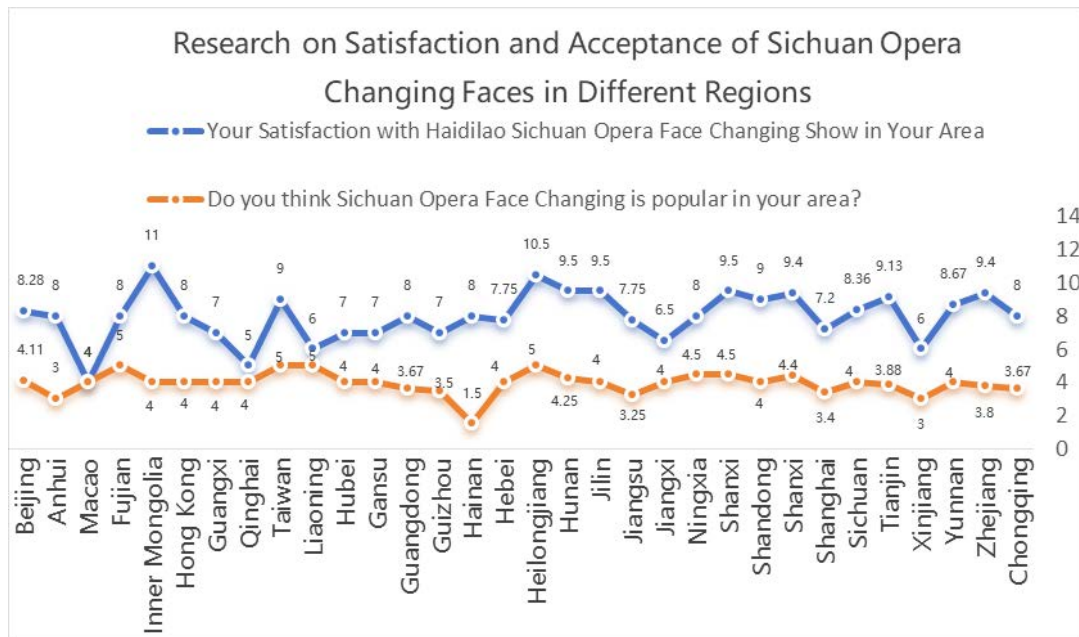
Beijing) also highlighted the uniqueness of Sichuan Opera Face Changing in the same industry in the interview, and he believes that there is no such novel combination in the same industry, which is the competitive advantage of Haidilao, and a new form to enhance the influence of Sichuan Opera. Interviewee M4 (Male, 22, Wuhan, Hubei), on the other hand, expressed his recognition of Haidilao’s innovative form of adding cultural performances to its food and beverage offerings, suggesting that it is rare to see this kind of interaction in the food and beverage industry, which is very novel to consumers, and shows that Haidilao’s Sichuan Opera face-changing performances do indeed have a unique appeal.

#### 4.2 Communication Barriers

Regional culture will primarily affect consumers’ recognition of Haidilao’s Sichuan opera’s face-changing communication mode.

From the effective questionnaires collected, it is evident that consumers in different regions treat the face-changing performance of Haidilao Sichuan Opera very differently. The overall satisfaction of the question “Your satisfaction with the face-changing performance of Haidilao Sichuan Opera in your region” scored an average of 7.98 (out of 11 points), “Do you think the face-changing performance of Sichuan Opera is popular in your region?” The average overall acceptance score is 3.95 out of 5. Among them, Macao, Qinghai, Liaoning, Xinjiang, Jiangxi, Guangxi, Hubei, Gansu, Guizhou, Shanghai, Hebei, Jiangsu, Hainan, Xinjiang, Anhui, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Guizhou, Guangdong, Chongqing, Zhejiang, Tianjin, the satisfaction is lower than the average. The acceptance is lower than the average.

The specific values of each province can be seen in Figure 3 below:



**Fig. 3 Research on satisfaction and acceptance of Sichuan opera changing faces in different regions**

Taking typical data as an example, the satisfaction and acceptance of Xinjiang and Guizhou are both lower than the average, indicating that consumers in less-developed areas are less willing to accept Sichuan culture or foreign culture. Therefore, Haidilao should make the face-changing performance of Sichuan Opera in such areas more exciting and arouse customers' curiosity. The average satisfaction of Macao, Qinghai, Liaoning, and Jiangxi is lower than 7 points. Still, their acceptance is higher than the average, which indicates that consumers in economically developed areas are more receptive to foreign cultures and have a certain degree of inclusiveness. Therefore, the Haidilao brand mainly needs to improve the quality of its Sichuan Opera face change service to improve satisfaction. The average acceptability of Hainan, Anhui, Jiangsu, and Shanghai is lower than 3.5 points, which mainly indicates that developed cities on the southeast coast pay more attention to local culture and have a low acceptance of foreign culture. Therefore, Sichuan opera should be appropriately reduced to change the face of the performance and provide this service on demand. To sum up, Haidilao brands must improve cultural communication strategies and marketing programs according to customers' needs and desires and the specific conditions of different places. Similarly, the interview results also show that the regional cultural differences among the interviewees have a significant impact on the spread of the face-changing performance of the Haidilao Sichuan Opera. Some interviewees are familiar with Sichuan opera culture and think it is a positive experience in the dining environment. For

example, F1 (female, 21, Zunyi, Guizhou) from Guizhou Province is more familiar with Sichuan Opera culture because her dialect and Sichuan dialect belong to the South-west Chinese language family, so she felt very familiar with Sichuan Opera when she experienced the change of face in Haidilao up-close. She believes that such cultural interaction increases the pleasure of dining, which shows the positive impact of regional cultural familiarity on customer experience. In contrast, F4 (female, 21, Harbin, Heilongjiang), although she is not familiar with Sichuan Opera culture, thinks that the face-changing performance of Sichuan opera can promote the atmosphere of the restaurant and make the dinner party more lively and pleasant. She is willing to experience it again. It also shows that even for non-local cultures, customers can be attracted to novel forms of performance.

However, not all consumers are willing to accept such a dining experience, and some respondents feel that the performance is inappropriate because of cultural differences. F3 (female, 26, Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province) thinks that the performance of Sichuan Opera will affect the dining experience. She ignores Sichuan Opera. She prefers the traditional Ou Opera, so she is unwilling to accept such a communication mode combining non-local culture and dining experience. Similarly, M3 (male, 25, Tianjin) also said that the sudden appearance of the face at the dinner party would interrupt the conversation between friends, which makes them feel uncomfortable. The above two people's answers also confirm the view that cultural preferences of different regions will affect customers' accep-

tance of Sichuan opera's face change and show that when cultural performances are spread in the catering industry, interactive rhythm should be considered to avoid interfering with customers' dining experience.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Existing Strengths and Limitations of Haidilao's Sichuan Opera Face Changing

By incorporating Sichuan opera's changing faces and the traditional culture of Sichuan into its global brand, Haidilao has gained wider exposure to this regional cultural symbol. Introducing Sichuan opera face-changing enriches the customer dining experience, enhances the brand's entertainment and cultural connotations, and creates a differentiated competitive advantage for Haidilao. However, the success of this cultural communication mainly stayed at the surface level, and consumers' understanding, and identification of Sichuan opera culture did not deepen with it. Due to the simplification and commercialization of the performance form, Sichuan Opera Face Changing has been over-entertained in this commercial environment, losing its traditional cultural depth and significance. Consumers are only exposed to a 'performance' rather than the true essence of Sichuan opera culture, resulting in a superficial cultural experience. It fails to effectively spread the culture of Sichuan opera, exacerbates the 'de-meaning' of the cultural symbols, and gradually dilutes its deep cultural value.

### 5.2 Challenges Faced by Haidilao's Sichuan Opera Changing Face

In the process of Haidilao using Sichuan Opera's Changing Face as a commercial marketing tool, the value of traditional culture is inevitably sacrificed. The unique cultural symbol of Sichuan Opera Face Changing has been simplified to attract consumers' attention, losing its original artistry and cultural connotation and becoming more of a form of entertainment. It reflects the conflict that commercial brands face in cultural communication, i.e., the depth of culture is often overlooked when meeting the demands of commercialization. Brands focus more on attracting eyeballs through this performance rather than indeed passing on and promoting traditional culture. At the same time, Haidilao tries to promote Sichuan culture in different regions through this cultural form. Still, due to the differences in cultural background and consumption habits, Sichuan Opera Face Changing could be more suitable in some areas. This lively performance contrasted with their expectations, especially among consumers

who preferred a quieter dining environment, leading to a disconnect between the cultural experience and consumer demand. It weakens the brand's market performance and may cause consumers to feel alienated and misunderstand traditional culture.

### 5.3 Communication Opportunities for Haidilao's Sichuan Opera Face Changing

Haidilao can further refine its cultural promotion strategy and implement 'regionalized cultural promotion' to cope with the challenges posed by cultural differences. In areas with high cultural acceptance, Haidilao can strengthen the promotion of Sichuan Opera Face Changing by adjusting the form and frequency of performances according to local consumer preferences and ensuring cultural integrity and authenticity, for example, by setting up a specific stage space for the performances. In areas where cultural acceptance is low, Haidilao can gradually increase the elements of Sichuan opera culture and enhance consumer acceptance by integrating local culture or organizing cultural exchange activities. This regionalized promotion strategy reduces cultural conflicts and improves the efficiency of cultural communication. At the same time, in the face of the conflict between culture and commercialization, Haidilao can explore the new model of 'symbiosis between culture and business.' Under this model, cultural elements should not only be used to attract customers but should complement the brand's commercial value. Haidilao can cooperate with cultural organizations and artists to develop unique products or services based on Sichuan opera cultures, such as unique dishes themed on Sichuan opera, cultural festival activities or costume fitting experiences, etc. so that somebody can integrate culture into the core operation of the brand. This symbiotic model enhances the brand's uniqueness and creates a win-win situation for cultural and commercial values.

## 6. Conclusion

This study found that Haidilao's Sichuan opera face-changing program has significant advantages in enhancing the brand's cultural value and differentiated competitiveness. Still, it also faces the challenges of regional cultural adaptability and weakened cultural value. The added value of culture as a brand usually means that the cultural value of the components of intangible cultural heritage gradually diminishes, is removed from its original context, and loses its functional, symbolic, and artistic values, among others. The poor communication effect of Sichuan opera with changing faces is also very much related to the corporate culture of Haidilao itself. As a nationally famous hotpot brand, Haidilao has made sig-

nificant changes to the taste, restaurant environment, and service quality based on Sichuan hotpot, which happens to have lost the characteristics of the regional specialties of the restaurant, and the characteristics and significance of the regional cultural communication are also lost when Sichuan opera with changing faces is attached as a culture to the original corporate brand. In the future, Haidilao will need to innovate its restaurant through innovation. In the future, Haidilao needs to find a new balance between culture and business through innovative cultural experiences and localization strategies to achieve cultural communication and brand enhancement in the true sense. The limited sample capacity of this study may impact the ability to generalize the geographical results, and future studies can further expand the sample size and increase the geographical scope to obtain more comprehensive conclusions.

#### Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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