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From the Indus River to the Chao Phraya River: A Case Study of Social and Cultural Communication through Thai Chess

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Abstract: This research, entitled "From the Indus River to the Chao Phraya River: A Case Study of Social and Cultural Communication through Thai Chess," aimed to: (1) examine the relationship between Thai chess and socio-cultural communication contexts from the Indus Valley Civilization to the Chao Phraya River Basin; (2) investigate the development of board-game culture in ancient India, the emergence of Chaturanga, and its diffusion and cultural adaptation into Thai territories; and (3) analyze factors contributing to changes in the forms, pieces, and rules of chess within socio-cultural communication contexts. Historical research was combined with qualitative interpretive analysis. The researcher distinguished findings supported by evidence from interpretive conclusions, thereby avoiding claims beyond the evidence. The findings indicate that (1) Thai chess functions as a socio-cultural communication system comprising a sender, a message, a receiver, a channel, symbols, and a space for interaction. In terms of diffusion and cultural adaptation, chess pieces, the chessboard, rules, terminology, and strategic patterns are interpreted through play, while instruction and manuals transmit knowledge and facilitate cultural adaptation; (2) Indus Valley materials support the presence of play activities but do not establish direct continuity with Chaturanga or a documented route into Thai territories. Social networks offer an interpretive explanation requiring evidence for specific stages; and (3) changes in Thai chess may be related to learning, repeated practice, and communication of rules. The proposed socio-cultural communication model is an interpretive framework, not a verified historical route.

Keywords: Thai chess, Socio-Cultural Communication, Cultural Diffusion, Human communication, Communicology, Cultural heritage.

INTRODUCTION

Social and cultural communication involves using language, symbols, media, and shared practices to create, exchange, and interpret meaning. It helps sustain relationships and shared understanding (Carey, 2009; Hall, 1997), while community knowledge and practices may be recreated as circumstances change (UNESCO, 2003). Language, objects, and actions acquire meaning through shared use (Mead, 1934), and those meanings may change through interaction and interpretation (Blumer, 1969).

Rogers (2003) identifies communication channels, time, and social systems as elements of diffusion. In this study, these elements guide the examination of possible networks through which knowledge of Thai chess may have been transmitted. The researcher also examines communicators, recipients, messages, symbols, and opportunities for feedback in accounts of play and instruction. Drawing on Blumer's (1969) account of meaning-making through interaction and Carey's (2009) view of communication and shared culture, the study interprets how players may develop and revise meanings associated with

moves, terminology, and practices. These theories provide analytical perspectives; they do not themselves document Thai chess practices or historical routes.

Contact between people from different cultures raises questions about how meanings are understood and adapted (Kaewthep, 2014). Rogers's diffusion framework directs attention to communication channels, time, and social systems (Rogers, 2003), but does not establish a historical route for chess. Cultural transmission may occur from parents to children, among peers, or from other older individuals to younger people (Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, 1981). These concepts help examine how Thai chess knowledge may pass among families, teachers, players, and communities; each proposed form of transmission requires evidence for the case concerned.

Thai chess has distinctive pieces, starting positions, moves, pawn promotion, and counting rules, described in Thai chess manuals (Boonthai, n.d.). This study examines pieces, the board, rules, terminology, and strategies as media and symbols. Play, teaching, and competition provide settings in which people may exchange knowledge and interpret one another's actions. This approach considers symbols, interaction, and social context together (Craig, 1999).

Previous studies address chess history (Murray, 1913), board games as cultural activities (Bell, 1979), changes in chess pieces (Yalom, 2004), and Thai chess as a resource for communicating cultural heritage (Rodloytuk, 2024). This study connects these subjects with communication, learning, and adaptation. Indus Valley objects associated with play indicate an ancient gaming culture (Kenoyer, 1998), but do not establish the rules of Chaturanga or a continuous line of development to Thai chess. Claims about diffusion and change must therefore be evaluated against evidence from each period.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the relationship between Thai chess and the contexts of social and cultural communication from the Indus Valley Civilization to the Chao Phraya River Basin.
2. To investigate the development from the board-game culture of ancient India to the formation of Chaturanga and its diffusion and cultural adaptation about how knowledge of Thai chess may be received and modified in Thai territories.
3. To analyze the factors influencing the transformation of the form, pieces, and rules of Thai chess within social and cultural communication contexts.

Conceptual Framework

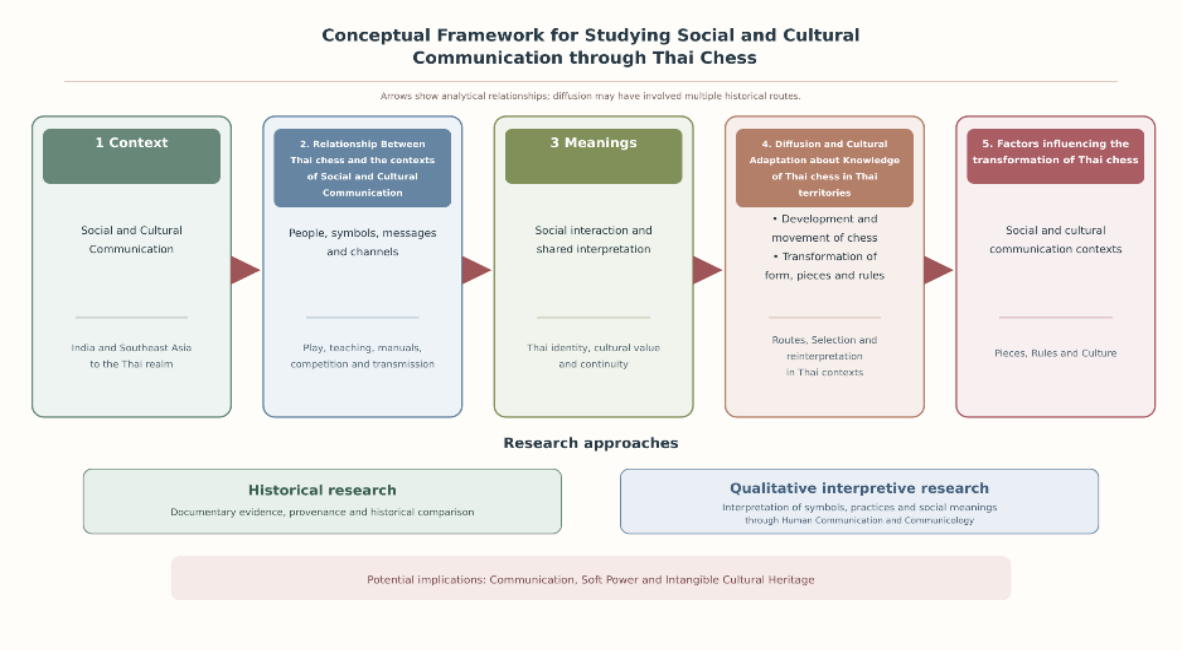

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Studying Social and Cultural Communication through Thai Chess

Definition of Terms:

- Thai Chess: A traditional Thai strategy board game whose pieces, rules, forms, and practices reflect Thai social and cultural identity.
- Socio-Cultural Communication: The process through which people create, exchange, interpret, and transmit meanings, values, knowledge, and cultural practices within society.
- Cultural Diffusion: The process by which cultural ideas, practices, symbols, or innovations spread from one society or cultural context to another.
- Human Communication: The process by which people create, exchange, and interpret messages and meanings through verbal and nonverbal symbols.
- Communicology: The systematic study of human communication as an embodied process of creating, expressing, and interpreting meaning.
- Cultural Heritage: Tangible and intangible cultural resources inherited from the past, recognized by communities as valuable, and transmitted to future generations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is constructed on three main concepts involving relationship between Thai chess and the contexts of social and cultural communication, development of chess culture and its diffusion and cultural adaptation, and factors influencing the transformation of Thai chess within social and cultural communication contexts.

First, communication is understood as a process that creates and sustains shared meanings (Carey, 2009). Human communication involves communicators, messages, media,

and social contexts (Littlejohn et al., 2017), while communicology examines relationships among perception, symbols, expression, and interpretation (Lanigan, 1992). Symbolic interactionism explains how meanings arise and change through interaction (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). In Thai chess, pieces, the board, terminology, rules, and moves can thus be examined for meanings depending on shared conventions and practices. Following Schramm (1954)'s and Kaewthep (2009)'s concepts, the field of experience in chess playing helps explain how players interpret these shared conventions and practices through what they know in common.

Second, diffusion and cultural adaptation provide questions about how knowledge of chess may be received and modified. Rogers (2003) identifies communication channels, time, and social systems as elements of diffusion. Historical scholarship discusses Chaturanga and later chess forms (Murray, 1913), but neither this framework nor evidence of games in the Indus Valley establishes a continuous historical route into Thai territories. Communication between participants, including verbal and nonverbal exchanges, offers a way to examine how knowledge might be shared within particular settings (Satavetin, 2003).

Third, social learning and cultural transmission explain how practices may persist or change. People can learn selectively from others (Laland, 2004) and socially learned knowledge and behavior may be transmitted across individuals and generations (Boyd & Richerson, 1985; Mesoudi, 2011). For Thai chess, this directs attention to observation, instruction, shared play, and strategic practices. Following Pisanutanongsak & Watanasawad's concepts (2020), chess manuals can record knowledge, while research on Thai chess has examined how knowledge is acquired, organized, shared, and used by participants, including online players.

Together, these concepts guide the interpretation of communication, continuity, and change in Thai chess. Since this is a communication research study, it cannot validate historical claims or evidence about specific routes, periods, or events about Thai chess in Thai territories.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study combines historical research with qualitative interpretive document analysis to examine the development of chess and the role of social and cultural communication. Source criticism is used to assess historical claims (Howell & Prevenier, 2001). The interpretation of symbols and practices considers their meanings in the contexts documented by the evidence (Geertz, 1973). The sources comprise primary evidence, such as inscriptions, archival records, chronicles, literary works, official documents, chess manuals, images, and archaeological objects, and secondary sources, such as books, scholarly articles, theses, and cultural reports. Materials were obtained from document repositories, publications, and databases with identifiable creators or custodians. Sources were selected for their relevance to the research objectives and questions, identifiable authorship and date, contextual suitability, and traceability. For each item used, the researcher recorded its type, creator, year, edition or version, repository, and the page number or image location of the relevant information (Howell & Prevenier, 2001).

External criticism assessed each source's provenance, date, and authenticity. Internal criticism examined its content, purpose, perspective, and consistency (Hantrakul, 2004). Evidence from different sources and periods was then compared; documents drawing on the same original source were not counted as independent corroboration (Tosh, 2015). The units of communication analysis were texts, images, piece names, chess pieces, rules, and descriptions of teaching or play. Where the evidence permitted, the researcher recorded communicators, recipients, messages, symbols, channels, transmission networks, and processes of shared meaning-making. Symbols and practices were interpreted in relation to their documented contexts (Geertz, 1973). Each conclusion was linked to a source record and the location of the supporting information (Howell & Prevenier, 2001). The analysis distinguished statements directly supported by evidence from interpretive conclusions and propositions requiring further evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This research received approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Shinawatra University, under approval number 2025001, dated 1 May 2025. It was conducted within the scope and procedures approved by the committee, with attention to the rights, privacy, and confidentiality of the individuals concerned. The study used existing documents and evidence; it did not involve interviews or experiments with research participants. The researcher respected copyright, image rights, and repository requirements by identifying the sources of all texts, images, and objects used. Reconstructions or images created for presentation were clearly distinguished from original historical evidence.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Findings Research Objective 1: The relationship between Thai chess and the contexts of social and cultural communication. The findings identify three dimensions: society and culture, cultural identity, and learning and the transmission of traditional knowledge. First, in the social and cultural communication dimension, the pieces, rules, and patterns of play provide a way to examine representations of roles, relationships, and power. Chess strategies also involve analysis, anticipation, planning, and experience. Hall's (1997) concept of representation provides a basis for examining shared meaning. In this study, the language and imagery used to explain Thai chess strategies are interpreted through that perspective. Second, in the cultural identity dimension, pieces, terminology, rules, and accounts of the game can communicate meanings associated with Thai chess. Human chess further presents the game through performance and offers audiences another way to encounter its history and cultural value (Rodloytuk, 2025). Third, in the learning and transmission dimension, players may share knowledge through observation, instruction, play, competitions, and online interaction. Following Pisanutanongsak & Watanasawad (2020)'s concepts, research on Thai chess knowledge management documents processes of acquiring, organizing, sharing, and using such knowledge. These settings can also support relationships and networks among players. Littlejohn et al. (2017) provide perspectives on human communication and communicology. Drawing on these perspectives, this study examines Thai chess across interpersonal, group, media, and cultural settings, determining to understand social and cultural impacts on chess players and society. Thai scholarship on media and cultural studies provides a further basis for examining how communication participates in the creation and

transmission of cultural meanings (Kaewthep, 2014). Communication helps participants develop shared understandings of rules and terminology while allowing meanings and practices to change. This is an interpretation of Thai chess as a communicative practice; it does not establish a continuous historical connection between the Indus Valley and the Chao Phraya River Basin.

Findings Research Objective 2: The development from ancient Indian board-game culture to the formation of Chaturanga and its diffusion into Thai territories. Contact among societies provides a context for examining how chess knowledge, forms of play, and meanings may have been transmitted and adapted. Following Kaewthep's concept (2014), changes in chess piece names and meanings can be interpreted through a cultural communication perspective. Castells's (1996) concept of networks offers a perspective for asking how contacts among communities might have enabled cultural exchange. In the present study, ports, trading centers, and royal courts are considered possible settings for further investigation, rather than documented stages in a verified route of chess diffusion, but it still remains inclusive as to the historical route for chess.

Human communication and communicology likewise help examine the interaction, symbols, and interpretation involved in transmitting a game (Littlejohn et al., 2017; Lanigan, 1992). Indus Valley sites have yielded objects associated with play, including dice, playing pieces, and gameboards (Kenoyer, 1998). These support the existence of a gaming culture but do not provide rules identifying any game as Chaturanga. They therefore offer historical contexts, not evidence of continuous development from the Indus Valley to the Chao Phraya River Basin. Historical scholarship examines Chaturanga and chess forms in different regions (Murray, 1913), while a Thai chess manual documents aspects of play and strategy in the Thai context (Boonthai, n.d.). Comparing these sources allows the study to propose how elements of chess may have been received and adapted. Differences in game forms alone, however, cannot establish when changes occurred, who transmitted them, or which route the game took into Thai territories. It still remains inclusive as to the particular periods and places of chess.

Findings Research Objective 3: Factors influencing the transformation of the forms, pieces, and rules of Thai chess within social and cultural communication contexts. Social learning offers a way to examine changes in Thai chess. People may learn selectively by observing others (Laland, 2004), while repeated practices and transmissions can allow some patterns to persist and others to change (Boyd & Richerson, 1985). When applied to Thai chess, these perspectives direct attention to observation, discussion, instruction, competition, and shared play as possible channels of transmission. Evidence from a particular period is needed to establish which channels operate then. Historical and reference works describe chess forms in different regions (Murray, 1913; Hooper & Whyld, 1992). This study compares Shatranj, Chess, Xiangqi, Janggi, Shogi, and Thai chess. Differences in piece names and forms, moves, and rules invite questions about how societies selected and adapted game elements. It still remains inclusive as to the development or a route of diffusion.

For Thai chess, the study considers changes in form, pieces, and rules alongside players' practices, instruction, shared learning, and acceptance within playing communities. Cultural evolution research connects learning and transmission with changes in practices (Mesoudi, 2011). Communication perspectives further direct attention to the

symbols, interactions, and meanings involved in play (Craig, 1999; Lanigan, 1992). The study thus proposes, as an interpretive conclusion, that changes in Thai chess may involve both ways of playing and the construction of social and cultural meaning. It still remains inclusive as to which particular factor caused a specific change.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Findings 1: How is Thai chess related to the contexts of social and cultural communication? A further question is: How has communication contributed to its transmission and transformation? The findings identify three dimensions of communication in Thai chess. First, society and culture: players use pieces, rules, moves, and strategies to convey and interpret meanings. DeVito (2019) provides a framework for examining interpersonal interaction. In this study, moves, gestures, and responses in chess play are considered possible forms of interaction. Strategic knowledge can also be discussed, practiced, and shared. Second, cultural identity: piece names, forms, and rules provide material through which players may interpret meanings associated with Thai chess. Schramm's (1954) concept of shared experience helps frame questions about how players understand symbols. Fine (2015) examines relationships within chess communities. For Thai chess, this study considers how shared play may support relationships, without assuming that every community functions in the same way. A study of human chess describes Wai Khru (paying homage to the teacher ceremony), music, gestures, and performance as means of communicating cultural meaning (Rodloytuk, 2025). This example does not imply that Wai Khru occurs in every Thai chess community. Third, learning and transmission: teaching, observation, and play provide opportunities to learn pieces, rules, and strategies. Learning through practices accords with Dewey's account of experience (Dewey, 1938). The intangible cultural heritage framework recognizes practices that communities transmit and continually recreate (UNESCO, 2003); heritage may also acquire new meanings in new contexts (Smith, 2006; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004). Thai chess has been recorded on Thailand's national intangible cultural heritage inventory; national recognition is distinct from inscription on a UNESCO list. Overall, communication may help players build shared understandings, relationships, and knowledge across generations. It still remains inclusive as to the particular periods and places of chess.

Findings 2: How did Chaturanga develop from the context of board-game culture in ancient India. A further question is: How did it diffuse through social and cultural networks into Thai territories? The findings of the diffusion framework examine what is transmitted, through which channels, over what time, and within which social systems (Rogers, 2003). It helps frame questions about how chess knowledge might have moved between societies but does not establish a historical route. Objects associated with play, including dice and gameboards, have been found at Indus Valley sites such as Mohenjo-daro and Harappa (Kenoyer, 1998; Possehl, 2002). They indicate a broader gaming culture but provide no rules identifying a game as Chaturanga. The study therefore cannot infer direct development from an Indus Valley game to Chaturanga. Historical scholarship examines Chaturanga in later Indian contexts and compares chess forms across regions (Basham, 1954; Murray, 1913). Questions about its dating and origins remain subject to assessment of the evidence (Eales, 1985; Li, 1998). In particular, the available sources do not demonstrate that an Indus Valley game became Chaturanga during the Gupta period. Trade, travel, diplomacy, and

religious contact are possible avenues for investigating diffusion into Thai territories. It still remains inclusive as to the development or a route of diffusion.

Findings 3: What factors have influenced the transformation of the forms, pieces, and rules of Thai chess within social and cultural communication contexts? The findings about communication among players, teachers, organizers, and organizations enables knowledge of pieces, moves, strategies, and rules to be shared. Players may learn by observing others (Laland, 2004), while repeated practices and transmissions may preserve or change established patterns (Boyd & Richerson, 1985). When applied to Thai chess, these concepts suggest that teaching, shared play, competitions, and published rules may serve as channels through which knowledge and practices are transmitted or modified. Establishing whether any of these channels changed the rules in a particular period requires evidence specific to that period. Contact between societies and interpretations of piece names and forms in Thai culture may also influence how game elements are selected and adapted. These are possible factors, not proven causes of every change. The updated Rules of Thai Chess CE. 2026 issued by the Thai Sports Association of Thailand under Royal Patronage illustrates how common rules are communicated and applied. The guidelines for revising Thai chess rules in 2026 and the association's policy for developing the sport will pave the way for Thai chess to reach national and international levels.

NEW KNOWLEDGE

By integrating the key elements of the research objectives, research questions and synthesizing the findings through historical research in conjunction with qualitative interpretive research, the researcher developed the “Socio-Cultural Communication Model through Thai Chess.” The model comprises nine components: 1) Socio-Cultural Context; 2) Diffusion; 3) Transformation and Adaptation; 4) Communication System; 5) Socio-Cultural Interaction; 6) Learning and Transmission; 7) Cultural Identity and Heritage; 8) New Values and Meanings of Thai Chess; 9) Thai Chess in Model Context.

The model’s nine components interact rather than follow a fixed sequence. 1.Socio-Cultural Communication Context shapes how chess is received and understood. Historical research examines 2.Diffusion and 3.Transformation and Adaptation, while interpretive research examines 4. Communication System, through which people share rules, skills, and values. 5.Socio-Cultural Interaction connects players, families, communities, schools, and sports organizations through play and shared meaning. 6. Learning and Transmission carry knowledge across generations, supporting 7. Cultural Identity and Heritage when communities continue to value the game. UNESCO recognizes that traditional sports and games can involve community knowledge, skills, and participation (UNESCO, n.d.). Through these processes, 8. New Values and Meanings of Thai Chess may emerge as the game is understood as a sport, traditional knowledge, a learning space, or a cultural resource. Its representations of military strategy may also be communicated in relation to Thai culture and soft power (Rodloytuk, 2024). Finally, 9. Thai Chess in Model Context, including digital media and cultural spaces, creates opportunities for further interpretation. New meanings feed back into communication, adaptation, learning, and transmission, sustaining the model’s dynamic cycle.

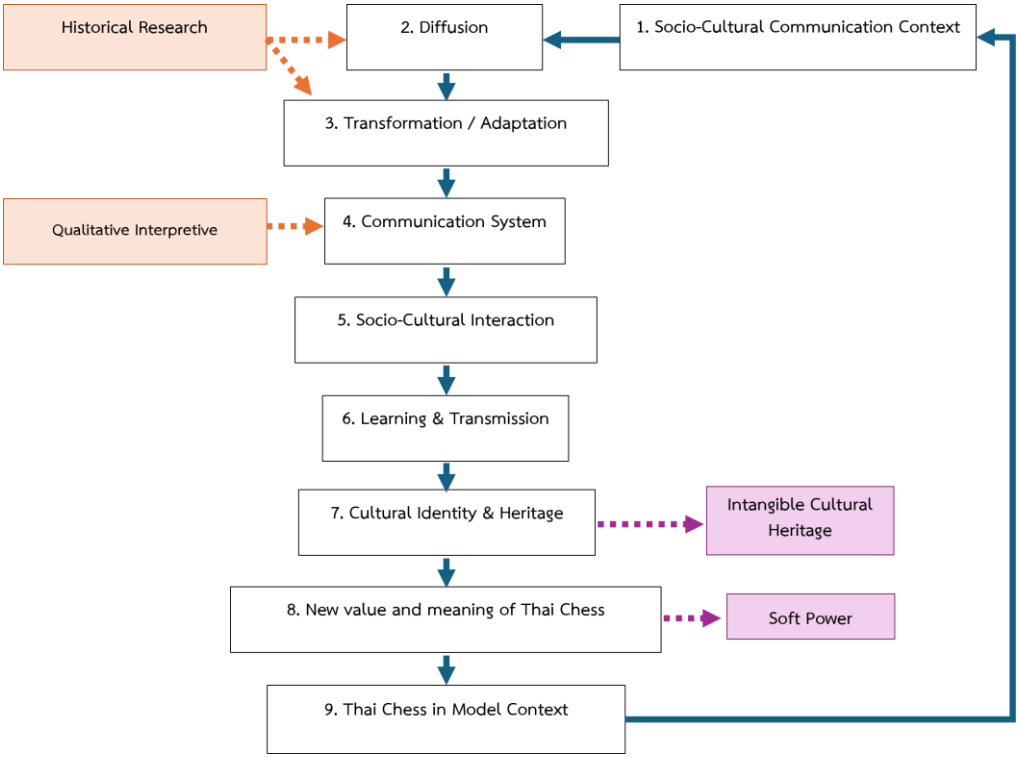

Figure 2: Socio-Cultural Communication Model through Thai Chess

NEW KNOWLEDGE

Recommendations for the Application for Research Findings

For the first research objective, teachers, clubs, and relevant organizations should use Thai chess to teach history, terminology, symbols, strategies, and cultural values through activities and media suited to different learners. For the second research objective, academic publications, museums, manuals, and public media should distinguish established evidence from inference and uncertainty, particularly regarding Indus board games, Chaturanga, and routes into Thailand. For the third research objective, players, teachers, athletes, referees, and organizations should participate in revising standards, with the reasons and revised rules communicated clearly for competition and cultural understanding.

Recommendations for Future Research

For the first research question, observation, interviews, and analysis of interaction should examine how different groups of players engage in a communication system that creates and transmit knowledge, relationships, identity, and meaning. For the second research question, future studies should compare evidence concerning the people involved, the rules and symbols communicated, the channels of exchange, and changes in meaning across ports, river networks, courts, religious sites, and trading communities. Geographic information systems may help map possible connections among these settings, provided that the certainty of each proposed route is clearly stated. For the third research question, future research undertakings should assess how online platforms, chess programs, and artificial intelligence affect play, teaching, strategy transmission, and the communication of cultural values.

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