

# *On the Application of Literary Imagery to City Image Construction-- Take the Arcade as an Example*

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**Abstract:** The imagery of a city constitutes the city's external image, reflecting its the historical changes and core temperament. As one of the city symbols of Guangzhou, the arcade appears in different kinds of literary works at high frequency. It records the civil memories of city development and reflects the cultural openness of Guangzhou.

## 1. Introduction

By analyzing the connotation of Guangzhou arcade in literary works and considering the influence of literature, this study aims to activate the arcade as imagery in fast spreading literary works and explore the significant value of the arcade in the urban construction of Guangzhou.

The imagery of a city is a cognitive impression of the city's physical environment, mechanism, culture and other factors, which can be intuitive, perceptual or visual.<sup>[1]</sup> City imagery exists in a tangible or intangible form, which reflects various aspects of a city's history, humanity and society. The arcade building is one of the representative forms of modern commercial streets in Guangzhou. In "Ci Hai", the "arcade building" is explained as "an architectural form of buildings facing the street in rainy and hot areas in south China. The lower part of the building is built as a covered colonnade or sidewalk, that provides a shelter for people from rain, sun and traffic, and the upper part is the major building part built above the sidewalk. The arcade building in Guangzhou was first proposed by Zhang Zhidong, governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi in late 19th century, and gradually became one of the most featured and impressive urban imagery of Guangzhou. This paper will comprehensively summarize the cultural connotations of arcade building in literary works, and discuss how to use the influence of literature to stimulate the value of urban imagery in literary works in current city construction.

## 2. The Cultural Connotations of Arcade

The arcade building appeared in Guangzhou at the beginning of the 20th century, so as imagery of Guangzhou city, it mainly appears in focuses on contemporary literature, and its cultural connotations include the following aspects.

### 2.1 Civil Life

In The Folk Culture of Lingnan, the early arcade in the early period was described as "not only bringing conveniences to pedestrians, but also providing a shelter for adjacent shops, so that shop

owners can open the door and display goods in showcases to attract customers.”<sup>[2]</sup> It serves as one of the most important places for business activities, and the special structure of the arcade provides a convenient shelter for pedestrians. Therefore, the arcade simple daily life of Guangzhou citizens.

Because of the structural features of the building, the arcade in literary works at the same time presents the civil life with trade exchanges and interpersonal communication. As depicted in an essay that “especially on rainy days, people walking on the street or going on bike would shelter from the rain under the arcade. Around me are people in the same situation, where loving pieces of Cantonese opera are drifting from windows above and outside the arcade building it is drizzling endlessly, while outside the arcade there is endless rain.”<sup>[3]</sup> Scenes of Lingnan people’s daily life are vividly presented, so that the mention of the arcade building will remind people of the Xiguan customs of Guangzhou citizen's life. For example, in the essay “Fashion Iguana”, it is said that “when a foreign traveller walks into the arcade, he would feel like entering other people’s home, especially when he sits down at the coffee table, He would feel like being a welcomed guest rather than a strange customer.”<sup>[4]</sup> This description highlights the commercial characteristics of the arcade building, where the trade is not a simply interests-oriented but with a kind of interpersonal warmth.

On the whole, these literary works reproduce of the real life in arcade buildings life, enabling people to feel both the commercial atmosphere of the “Millennium Business Capital” and people’s daily life in Guangzhou. These arcade images convey the local people’s nostalgia for the old Guangzhou, and serves as a medium for the travellers to know more about the warm and commercial life in Guangzhou.

## 2.2 Open Spirit

Arcade architecture was first popular in southern Europe and the Mediterranean area. After the Opium War, this style of architecture was introduced to Guangzhou. The arcade building was early regarded as “colonial architecture” when the exotic western style of architecture was brought into China with violent invasion,, therefore it was resisted and criticized by the literati. For example, in the poem “Under the Arcade Building”, the poet criticized the arcade building to express his dissatisfaction with the colonial oppression and rule.<sup>[5]</sup> However, Guangzhou has not always been extremely resistant to the foreign culture, but chose to accept and transform it with open attitude. As Xu Sheng mentioned in his essay “If You Love Guangzhou, You Will Love Arcade Buildings”, “the business in the arcade street with foreign flavor is indeed prosperous. Since then, neighboring southern cities and even Southeast Asia have been competing to follow this mode<sup>[6]</sup>. This kind of arcade building with a combination of Chinese and Western styles has therefore become the spiritual symbol of Guangzhou’s cultural openness and inclusiveness. In addition, the unique design of the building which allows people living upstairs and shops opening downstairs is also conducive to narrowing the distance between people and creating an open cultural atmosphere.

Therefore, in the process of collision and fusion with local culture in Guangzhou, the arcade building has gradually formed an architectural complex system with unique regional features. This imagery shows the open spirit of Guangzhou culture in literary works. It is this spirit of cultural openness that is quite consistent with the fact that Guangzhou has seized the opportunity in the development of modern times.

## 3. Advantages of Applying Arcade as Literary Imagery to City Image Construction

As the representative regional architecture of Guangzhou, the arcade building is deeply favored by literati. The arcade building has inherent advantages in connecting the city image construction with literary works and building the image of Guangzhou in a more comprehensive way with the spread of literature. The advantages are as follows.

On the one hand, the arcade building represents a kind of nostalgia for old Guangzhou. When you are traveling in Guangzhou, there are many attractions that you can't miss, including Shangxiajiu Pedestrian Street, Dongshankou and Enning Road. There you can see many typical arcade buildings. The arcade building has an inseparable connection with Guangzhou because it has become an integral part of the city and formed the urban impression of Guangzhou. Every bricks and tiles of the arcade give a glimpse of the civil life and cultural customs of the neighborhood. Arcade building is an important part of life for most people living in Guangzhou, and a symbolic element of Guangzhou for those not living there. This also means that the arcade building has a solid and broad mass base. With the arcade building as a carrier to convey emotions, it can be quickly accepted by the public.

On the other hand, the arcade in literary works has a great potential in conveying broader connotations. At present, the arcade building is applied in a single way. For example, the arcade has more often been depicted as a symbol of local customs than of an open and inclusive Guangzhou. However, in the current urban construction, the development and protection of the arcade building should not only pay attention to its long history, but also develop its ~~have~~ unlimited potential to unleash the vitality of the new era. It is a pity that new connotations of the arcade building are rarely seen in the literary works.

Therefore, whether as a witness of Guangfu culture or to reflect the development in the new era, imagery of the arcade in literary works needs to be elaborately constructed. Through shaping a diversified arcade, the city image can be better conveyed and created in accordance with the urban development.

#### **4. Strategies of Applying the Imagery of Arcade to City Image Construction**

It has become an irresistible trend for literature to actively participate in the construction of new era. Meanwhile, the city image is of great importance to the city construction. The characteristics of literature and the construction of the city image naturally coincide, and the literary imagery can introduce the city image to the public in an intuitive way. Combined with the application of arcade in literary works and its own advantages, the following aspects should be paid attention to in the construction of city image.

First, the commercial characteristics of arcade building need to be emphasized. Commercial function is the most important function since the arcade style was formed. Although the commercial function of arcade buildings has reduced somewhat with the historical changes, the arcade buildings still have a long history for business use and good visibility that cannot be ignored. Fall behind the times, the arcade building must give play to its huge utility and bring economic and cultural benefits to urban construction. Therefore, in the literary creation, the basic commercial function of the arcade building should be strengthened so as to enhance the image of Guangzhou as a commercial capital.

Second, the characteristics of folk customs should be highlighted. Folk customs is an inexhaustible resource to improve people's morality and knowledge. With the deepening of urbanization, local folk customs gradually decline. Most young people know little about local folk customs, so the inheritance and development of folk customs are threatened. Arcade records the simple and honest folkway of old Guangzhou, many of which are accompanied by the arcade. Cantonese Opera, Lion Dance, Xiguan's Hammering Copper Art and other cultural customs take the arcade as the main place for activities or play an auxiliary role in the life of citizens in the arcade buildings. Therefore, the literary works should emphasize the folk features in the building. It will not only arouse travellers' curiosity about Guangzhou, but also enhance the cohesion among local people.

Third, the symbolic role of literary imagery needs to be given full play to. Symbols are always used to express meanings. By symbolizing things, people can perceive the abstract existence. In literary creation, the arcade building can be symbolized to arouse readers' resonance, deepen people's understanding of the image of Guangzhou, thus achieve the effect of associating the arcade building with Guangzhou as an international metropolis of openness, inclusiveness and vitality.

In conclusion, the arcade reflects a specific stage of Guangzhou's historical and cultural development, and is an integral part of city's memories. Through the intervention of literature, the physical buildings of the city gradually evolve into cultural symbols, and with the help of its rich cultural connotation, the construction of the city image will be greatly promoted. In this process, the imagery construction in literary creation should be closely related to the city's own characteristics and its symbolic role should be given full play to, so that it can be well accepted by the audience and arouse wide resonance.

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