

Analysis of Xi'an City Image and Micro-Film Narrative

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Abstract: It is important to share the city's story in order to improve the city's image and its ability to communicate. This paper draws on theories and previous research regarding city image and urban narrative. Based on theories and previous research on city image and urban narrative, this paper examines the five dimensions of “people, things, objects, places and situations” in a five-dimensional narrative framework. The five-dimensional narrative framework is used to analyze the micro-images of Xi'an that “tell the story of Xi'an” and to compile a five-dimensional narrative corpus of Xi'an's urban image.

1. Introduction

Due to the increasing acceleration of economic globalization in the 21st century, China has seen a significant increase in its urbanization process. According to studies, the rate of urbanisation has increased from 36.2% to 51.3% in the period from 2000 to 2011. In developed countries, it is predicted that by 2050 the urbanization rate will reach 86%, while China's urbanisation rate is expected to exceed 70% [1]. In addition to its natural resources, a city's human connotations, living standards, and history are reflected in its image, which can have a significant economic and social impact. Various media channels have been used to convey the image of a city, which is essential to raising its profile and attracting foreign investment and tourists. It was in 2013, at China's National Propaganda Conference, The strategic concept of “telling the Chinese story and spreading the Chinese voice” was proposed. This concept was quickly identified as a national strategy. It was immediately identified as a national strategy, and for cities, following the national strategy and telling a good city story is a means of strengthening their image and improving their discourse skills.

The focus of this study is on understanding the city and its branding from the perspective of storytelling, based on Zhan Zhuo's theory of the 'city as story'[1]. In this study, urban cinema and television are analyzed in order to understand what dimensions Xi'an's city story is comprised of, what stories are representative of these dimensions, and what kind of spirit and culture they convey.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Narrative, Story and Urban Storytelling

It was in 1969 when the French structuralist writer Kevin Lynch (1969) coined the term 'Narratology', which marked the formal emergence of Narratology as a discipline[2]. Narrative Narratology is a structuralist-influenced theory for studying narrative, with stories, narrative

discourses, and narrative acts as its objects. Storytelling, narrative discourse, and narrative behavior are all aspects of narrative. The field of narrative theory is often divided into two stages of development: classical Narratology and post-classical Narratology. Narrative works are viewed as closed symbolic systems in classical narratology, in which the author seeks to clarify the relationships between the different elements of the narrative text as a purely textual study in a closed environment by examining their structure, patterns, laws, and other relationships. Compared to structuralist linguistics, classical narratology borrows a whole set of linguistic terms and research categories from structural linguistics, as well as a whole range of linguistic terms and research perspectives.

In addition, the paradigm of narrative linguistics is similar to that of structuralist linguistics in that it involves the study of non-contextual grammar in a closed, independent, and self-sufficient manner. In contrast to classical narratives, which emphasize the story (text, discourse) itself, a key characteristic of post-classical narratives is that the meaning of the things themselves does not determine the meaning of the finished narrative, which is usually a reconstructed system of meaning that is constructed by the author. Thus, post-classical narratology does not primarily concern itself with the contents of a story or its presentation, but rather with its specific manner in which it is presented. Each work can be regarded as a concrete application and embodiment of narrative rules, and the meaning of a story text is developed through the exchange and reception of narrative texts [3].

Zhang Nan (Zhongnan University) first proposed the 'urban storytelling theory'[4]. According to the urban story theory, the essence of urban stories lies in the integration of three aspects: the integration of people and the natural environment, the integration of people and history and culture, and the integration of people's interaction activities. The city unites people's collective memory at the level of time and space, and it is the integration of events with the spatial environment that makes people truly aware of their place in the environment, enhances their sense of identity, and brings them closer to the urban environment.

Professor Zhang Nan and the Cambridge Centre for the Study of Narrative Environments in the UK have jointly researched and proposed a classification of urban narrative elements into four categories: natural elements, artificial elements, human elements and event elements [4]. The four elements on urban narrative space go beyond the five material level elements proposed by Lynch (1969) in *Urban Imagery*, and achieve the unification of material form and ideology [2]. The theoretical implications of urban storytelling theory allow for a deeper integration of the disciplines of spatial narrative and urban design. The theory of urban storytelling takes people, their activities, history and culture, and the urban environment as the subjects of the narrative, while the urban space, in turn, becomes the stage for the narrative. In order to analyze the spatial structure and characteristics of urban narratives, it is necessary to incorporate a number of factors, including human activities, history, and culture, as well as the urban environment.

2.2 The Five Dimensions of Urban Storytelling

In his description of urban imagery, Kevin Lynch identifies five components: the path, the edge, the district, the node, and the landmark. It is a behavioural approach to urban imagery, in which the city is essentially understood as a physical form, without adequate consideration of human initiative and activism (1999) [2]. According to Professor Zhang Nan of Central South University, the 'Urban Story Theory' attempts to elevate the simple materiality of a city to the level of an urban event, in order to realize the pursuit of urban meaning [4]. As part of his theory, he proposes the psychological mechanism of "object/field/event" urban storytelling theory, which integrates people with their natural environment, people with history and culture, and their interaction activities to

build a perception of city life. In the initial semantic division of urban narrative, the spatial elements are divided into the following categories: natural, human, and artificial, and events.

As part of his examination of Lynch's Five Elements of Urban Imagery, Zhan Zhuo (2018) incorporates a critical examination of Professor Zhang Nan's urban storytelling theory [1]. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a blueprint for research on the psychology of environmental memory, which includes identifying the five dimensions of the story city construct: people, events, things, places, and situations. Essentially, a story city is an organic combination of people, events, buildings, spatial places, contexts, and time, and reading stories is reconstructing the urban ecosystem, which is a combination of people, events, objects, actions, and contexts. People are the soul of the city, events are its memory, objects are its body, fields represent its actions, and context is its ethos.

In summary, the above-mentioned scholars' perspectives have been synthesized, and an analysis has been conducted of the cultural branding of Xi'an's urban stories in five dimensions: people, things, objects, fields and realms. Internet technology and mobile smart terminals have profoundly changed the mode of mass communication as a result of the development of new media technologies. Through its fragmentation, interactive nature, and personalisation, it has enabled new forms of communication. Microfilms, microdocumentaries, and short videos have become a new form of visual expression associated with new media, with microfilms, microdocumentaries, and short videos becoming new forms of visual expression [3].

3. The Analysis of Xi'an's Stories from Five Perspectives

This is an indication of the “micro” era of image creation and expression in the new media context, and as new forms of image expression and dissemination, they are generally referred to as “micro-images”.

Since Xi'an is considered to be one of the four most famous ancient capitals in China, its image has been superficial and it has been referred to as an “ancient capital” for a long time. The purpose of this study is to examine the narrative discourse of 100 video works relating to the city of Xi'an, and the ways in which they convey the story of Xi'an in five dimensions: people, events, objects, scenes and situations.

3.1 Dimensional Analysis of People

A key feature of this study is the use of Zhan Zhuo's (2018) research approach, in which urban citizens are divided into three types: citizens of the city, foreign migrants, and foreign tourists, representing city stories as places to live, work, and visit [1]. Twenty-one percent of the micro-images tell two or more Xi'an stories; the stories of cities as tourist destinations are the most popular among the 100 urban micro-images, comprising 87 percent of all micro-images. More than half (62%) of micro-images depict cities as places of living and 41%) depict cities as places of employment. In terms of micro-images, most people are interested in “Datang City of Night”, “Datang Furong Garden”, “Xi'an Bell and Drum Tower”, “Xi'an Ming City Wall”, “Xi'an West City”, and “Xi'an West City”. Most of the entries, such as “Datang West City,” were made by tourists who used Xi'an as a place to visit to tell their stories of the city. A city full of historic heritage, as well as a city filled with modern technology and vitality, Xi'an is viewed by tourists as a city full of historical heritage. According to their accounts, Xi'an is a city with a unique charm and appeal that is a combination of a historic heritage and a contemporary feel.

3.2 Dimensional Analysis of Events

Based on Zhan Zhuo's (2018) categorisation of the narrative dimensional analysis of pairs of events in urban storytelling, this study examines five dimensions: cultural events, economic events, sports events, political events, and comprehensive events [1]. There is a connection between the deep historical and cultural heritage of the Xi'an city story and content with a certain degree of interest in the narrative (See Table 1).

Table 1: The Table of Events Analysis

Type of city event	Events
Cultural events	East Asia Cultural Capital; Silk Road International Film Festival,; China-US Tourism Year; Xi'an Silk Road International Art Festival
Economic events	China International Building Intelligence Summit; The 3rd International Cooperation Summit; The 3rd Silk Road International Cooperation Summit; The 16th China New Energy International Expo and Summit; The China (Xi'an) International Forestry Expo and Forestry Industry Summit
Sports events:	Xi'an International Marathon; Xi'an City Wall International Marathon; The 14th City Games; Xi'an World Women's Chess Masters Summit; China National Snooker Team Championship; China Taekwondo International Open
Political Events	Eurasian Economic Forum; Xi'an Economic; Trade and Cultural Tour for Global Ambassadors in China
General events	The Datang City of Night was selected as a national model pedestrian street; Xi'an was selected as a "double centre" city.

Among the most frequently mentioned events is the Silk Road International Film Festival. There is no doubt that the Silk Road International Film Festival is the longest-running and most successful international film festival in Xi'an. "Cultural events are an integral part of a city's identity, reflecting its culture and image as a whole. "As a historical and ancient capital and a cultural city, Xi'an has a large number of cultural events depicted in its micro-images, which is associated with its heritage, and is also in sync with its rapid economic growth and cultural co-prosperity in recent years.

3.3 The Physical Dimension

The memory of a city is comprised of several important elements, including ancient ruins, traditional buildings, historic districts, as well as folk art and city life. History and memory can be found in every inch of the city, in every piece of land, in every building, on every street, in every corner of every area [1].

Urban memory consists of two parts - the material and the immaterial - and it also reflects the cultural values of a city. The Big Wild Goose Pagoda, Xingqing Palace, the Tang Furong Garden and the Ming City Wall are the most frequently seen physical images in Xi'an's micro-video works, and they are also the physical materials that carry the city's memory. The Big Wild Goose Pagoda appears as a symbol of Xi'an in many of the city's promotional films. Unfortunately, however, in the Xi'an micro-images, especially in the promotional films, the stories of these objects are not told directly, but rather they are used as the backdrop for the films.

3.4 Dimensional Analysis of the Field

The urban storytelling site also serves as a platform for storytelling in the city of Xi'an. There are several successful examples of this, but White Deer Plain Film and TV City has been one of the most successful. In 2016, the Shaanxi Travel Group completed the development of the film and television city, which covered an area of 1,050 mu and cost RMB 600 million (Li J, 2018)[5]. As part of the adaptation of the novel "White Deer Plain" into a film and television series, the city was

constructed in accordance with the description of the space and scenes described in the novel and was reconstructed in a realistic manner, including the White Deer Village as well as Zishui, which became the primary location for filming and television productions. It has now become one of the most well-known scenes in Xi'an and has been recognized as a key cultural project in Shaanxi Province due to the success of a series of cultural IP products such as the White Deer Plain film and television series. In order to incorporate film and television creation, cultural leisure and rural tourism into a scenic spot themed on folk culture, the White Deer Plain Film and TV City focuses on architecture, patriarchy, village layout, and folk culture of the Xi'an area, including music, food and housing. Bailu Yuan Film and Television City, which has been long anticipated, is also expected to become an important venue for presenting the story of Xi'an in the future.

3.5 Dimensional Analysis of the Realm

As a result of this, the “realm” reflects the mood, temperament, and image of a city as a whole. This is reflected in the city's promotional films as a representation of the city's overall appearance and position. As presented in Xi'an's micro-video works, the description of the realm is both reminiscent of a classical painting from the Tang Dynasty and a modern urban scene dominated by tall buildings.

4. Conclusion

In order to stay within the time and resource constraints of this study, only one city, Xi'an, was selected as the subject of this study. It appears that the five-dimensional construct of the story city used is more relevant for the study of Xi'an, but further research and verification are required to determine whether it is generalization to other cities.

Furthermore, this paper includes 100 micro-images that represent a variety of genres, including city propaganda films that introduce the city's politics, economy, culture, history, and humanity, as well as short city tourism videos that introduce the city's attractions. In addition, it is worth exploring whether there is any difference in the narrative discourse used by the different types of micro-images in their narratives about urban life.

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