

# The Construction of City Memory in Sound Media

## -- Taking the Local Narration of Xi 'an Podcast as an Example

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### ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of new media technology, audio media has gradually become an important medium for constructing urban memory and disseminating local culture. This paper takes podcast programs focused on Xi'an's urban culture on the podcast platform "Xiao Yu Zhou" as its research object, exploring how audio media participates in the shaping and dissemination of urban memory through local narratives. The study found that Xi'an podcasts utilize sound elements such as dialects, environmental sound effects, and oral history, combined with narrative strategies that integrate individual experiences and collective memory, to construct a multi-dimensional and three-dimensional urban image. This sound practice not only strengthens listeners' perception and identification with Xi'an's local culture but also activates the dynamism of urban memory through emotional resonance and participatory dissemination, becoming an important pathway for the inheritance and innovation of urban culture in the new media era. This paper provides empirical references for understanding the role of sound media in the construction of local memory and offers insights for urban cultural digital dissemination strategies.

### KEYWORDS

Sound Media; Urban Memory; Local Narratives; Xiao Yu Zhou Platform.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Under the background of globalization and rapid urbanization, the protection and inheritance of urban memory is facing severe challenges. Large-scale urban transformation leads to the gradual disappearance of local characteristics, and the loss of urban memory has aroused widespread concern in academic circles and all walks of life. At the same time, the rapid development of new media technology provides new possibilities for the construction and dissemination of urban memory. As a unique way of perception, sound media can arouse the emotional resonance of the audience through dialect, environmental sound effects, oral history and other elements, and become an important carrier of urban memory construction.

With the development of science and technology, contemporary people are in the era of visual and auditory integration, and various forms of sound media have emerged, such as podcast, audio books and other audio platforms. As a unique way of perception, sound can arouse the inner emotional resonance of the audience. Take Chinese podcasts as an example. For example, as of 2024, there will be 74,000 Chinese-language podcasts. Among them, more than 40,000 podcasts are produced in Mainland China [1], and the audience size is expected to exceed 150 million in 2025 [2]. Among them, podcasts focusing on urban culture have constructed multidimensional urban imagery for listeners through sound narratives. However, research on sound media and urban memory construction in the field of geography in China is still weak. Therefore, this study takes the podcasts

of Xi'an urban culture in the podcast platform "Small Universe" as the object of research, and explores how the sound medium participates in the shaping and dissemination of urban memory through local narratives, so as to provide empirical references for the understanding of the role of the sound medium in the construction of local memory.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. Sound Medium**

Sound media refers to the technology and form of using sound (including language, music, noise, etc.) as a carrier for information transmission, emotional expression and cultural practice. Early on, sound was "decontextualized" by text, causing auditory culture to gradually give way to visual centrism.

However, in the 1960s, the scholar McLuhan began to call for the return of the auditory sense, and in his book *Understanding the Medium*, he proposed a priori that the greatest change people would experience at the dawn of the electronic media age would be the transition from the eye to the ear, the return of acoustic space [3]. Friedrich Kittler pointed out that the emergence of the phonograph and the radio made it possible for sound to be materialized and stored, which subverted the concept of linear time and broke through the limitations of time and space. The study of sound media has gradually become a topic of concern for scholars. Thibaud studies the sound paradigm in urban environments, pointing out that sound can create a unique urban atmosphere through the three links of tuning, unfolding and positioning [4]. Atkinson studies the sound ecology of cities, analyzing the spatial and temporal order of the sound phenomenon in cities and its social impact [5]. Gallagher M, MacFarlane K, Kanngieser, Holloway, Revill et al. point out that sound media play an important role in geographic research, and geographic research should embrace the world of sound beyond the text, and emphasize the research of sound geography [6].

In recent years, domestic academics have also gradually noticed this research trend, and some scholars have gradually shifted their research perspectives to "auditory communication" "auditory culture" and other fields, and have begun to pay attention to the functional scale of the human auditory sense, and to seek for the overall sensory balance under the unification of audiovisual and other multi-sensory [7]. The balance of the senses is sought under the multi-sensory integration of audiovisual and other senses. In China, scholars mostly take media environmentalism as the basic theoretical support and combine it with Schaeffer's soundscape theory. In geography, scholars study soundscape from multiple perspectives. Liu Aili, Zhang Jie, Zhu Hong, and Li Dawei explore the application of soundscape in tourism [11]; Kou Lirong explores the soundscape experience of rural tourism practitioners and its impact on health [12]; Deng Zhiyong explores the study of soundscape from the perspective of cultural geography [13]; Liu Chao studies the construction of Chengdu's local imagery in songs [14].

### **2.2. Urban Memory**

"Cities live on memory" [15]. Urban memory is the process of interaction between urban subjects and objects in the intersection of space and time [16]. In the 1970s, geography shifted from traditional spatial analysis to a focus on the construction of culture, meaning, and identity, promoting a rethinking of the concepts of "place" and "space". The theory of "place attachment" proposed by Duan Yifu lays the foundation for the study of urban memory. Generally speaking, domestic scholars do not make a strict distinction between collective memory and urban memory, and the phenomenon of mixed use often occurs [17]. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs proposed the concept of "collective memory" in *Collective Memory* (1925), emphasizing the social and spatial nature of memory. Foreign scholars Land J, Tchoukaleyska, Adzich, etc. study how events such as colonization and immigration shape urban memory through material carriers such as monuments, ruins, street

names, etc[18].F.inlinson researches the impact of aerial photographs in photo archives on public memory in communities[21].

In recent years, along with the rapid advancement of globalization and urbanization, the contradiction between urban construction and development and the protection of urban memory has become more and more acute. Numerous historical capitals, cultural cities, ancient streets and lanes and traditional dwellings have become the victims of large-scale old city renovation and new city construction. As a result of large-scale demolition and construction and single imitation, urban form and function are becoming increasingly homogenized, local characteristics are gradually disappearing, and urban memory containing rich historical information and cultural connotations is constantly lost, which has triggered extensive concern in the academic community and all walks of life. Domestic scholars have paid attention to such topics as urban memory and cultural heritage [23], and community cultural memory under tourism development[24].

To sum up, domestic geographers' attention to urban memory is influenced by the "emotional turn" and "non-representation theory" of cultural geography and human geography, and the research gradually expands from material space (such as buildings and blocks) to non-material memory carriers, but still focuses on visual analysis, and the discussion of sound media is relatively marginalized[25]. Generally speaking, the research on urban memory construction based on sound media in geography field is relatively weak. Therefore, under the research background of auditory regression, this paper breaks through the "visual center" of the existing research, combines the relevant research of sound media theory, cuts into the theoretical framework from the perspective of sound narration, and takes the audio-visual communication of urban exploration programs in the small universe podcast platform as the research object to explore and analyze the internal logic and connection between the sound landscape presented by the small universe podcast and the urban memory construction of the podcast users on this platform.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **3.1. Text Analysis**

Take 10 podcasts focusing on Xi'an urban culture on the small universe platform, encode and analyze their contents, and extract the theme, strategy and emotional expression of voice narration.

#### **3.2. In-Depth Interview**

Through semi-structured in-depth interviews with users/creators of the small universe platform, we can understand people's views and feelings about the small universe platform and sound, and more intuitively understand the auditory environment of the small universe, the influence of sound narration on people's self-presentation, identity and value exploration.

#### **3.3. Questionnaires**

By issuing questionnaires, people's opinions and attitudes about the voice narrative function of the small universe podcast platform can be understood more intuitively, so that the research conclusions can be supported by more accurate realistic basis.

#### **3.4. Participatory Observation**

By experiencing the content of the small universe platform, I can personally feel the audio content presentation, sound environment and user usage of mobile audio, which means providing some different perspectives and persuasiveness for this paper.

## **4. RESEARCH CONCLUSION**

### **4.1. Multi-dimensional Narration of Sound Elements**

Xi 'an Podcast constructs city memory through various sound elements, including the following three ways:

- (1) Dialect: The use of dialect strengthens the uniqueness of local culture and arouses the audience's sense of regional identity.
- (2) Environmental sound effects: such as the bell of the bell tower, the hawking sound of Huimin Street, etc., through the time and space reproduction of sound, activate the sensory memory of the audience.
- (3) Oral history: individual and collective narratives interweave, transforming urban history into perceptual sound stories.

### **4.2. The Blending of Individual Experience and Collective Memory**

Through the combination of personal experience and urban history, podcast creators form the interaction between "micro-narrative" and "macro-narrative". For example, a podcast connects urban changes and individual life history through the dictation of an old Xi 'an person, which arouses the emotional resonance of the audience.

### **4.3. Emotional Resonance and Participatory Communication**

The intimate nature of sound media makes the audience feel strongly substituted. According to the questionnaire survey, 78% of the audience said that the content of the podcast evoked their emotional memories of Xi 'an, and 62% of the audience re-recognized the cultural connotation of Xi 'an through podcasting.

## **5. DISCUSS**

### **5.1. Theoretical Significance**

#### **5.1.1. The Return of Auditory Culture and the Construction of Urban Memory**

Mcluhan's theory of "acoustic space" points out that sound can break through the linear time limit, activate emotional resonance, and make urban memory more immersive and penetrating in time and space. Sound media (such as podcasts) expand urban memory from static visual symbols (such as buildings and photos) to dynamic auditory experience through dialect, environmental sound effects, oral history and other elements, enriching the multi-dimensional expression of urban culture.

#### **5.1.2. The Innovative Path of Local Narration**

Schaefer's "Soundscape" theory shows that urban sounds (such as dialects and street noises) are an important part of local characteristics and can shape unique urban images. Through the combination of individual experience and collective memory (such as local stories in Xi 'an podcast), the sound media reshapes the "Place Attachment" and strengthens the cultural identity of residents and tourists to the city.

#### **5.1.3. Supplementary Means of Urban Cultural Protection**

Under the background of globalization, sound media records intangible cultural heritage (such as dialect and traditional folk art) that is easily ignored by visual culture, which provides a new way for the digital preservation of urban memory.

## **5.2. Practical Significance**

### **5.2.1. Enlightenment to Local Tourism**

(1) Audio guided tour and immersive experience: Develop audio guided tour of urban theme (such as "Sound Map of Xi 'an Huimin Street"), and combine dialect narration and environmental sound effects in podcasts to enhance tourists' perception of local culture. For example, Old Town of Lijiang has built a "sound museum" through the recording of Naxi ancient music and street sounds to enhance the uniqueness of tourism experience.

(2) Emotional marketing and brand building: tell the stories of the minority in the history of the city by podcasting (such as "the old craftsman under the city wall"), and attract tourists with deep cultural depth through emotional resonance. Cooperate with the tourism platform to launch the theme of "sound travel", such as the small universe platform and Xi' an Cultural Tourism Bureau jointly planning the series of "Listening to Chang' an".

### **5.2.2. Promotion Strategy for Audio Platform**

(1) Technology optimization and content stratification: vertical classification of "urban memory" is added, and regional content (such as "Xi 'an Sound Scene" and "Chengdu Dialect Story") is recommended through algorithms to meet the local cultural needs of users. AI technology is introduced to realize the dynamic tagging of sound content (such as automatic identification of dialects and environmental sounds), which is convenient for users to search.

(2) Community interaction and UGC encouragement: launch a "city voice collection" activity to encourage users to upload local voice clips (such as morning market hawking and dialect nursery rhymes) to form a participatory memory bank. Establish a creator alliance, support local cultural podcasts, and provide traffic and financial support (such as "Small Universe × Urban Cultural Creator Plan").

(3) Cross-media linkage: cooperate with the short video platform to transform the podcast content into a short video of "sound+picture" (such as the city scenery dubbed by dialect) and expand the spread range.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Through local narration, sound media has become an important carrier for the construction and dissemination of urban memory. The practice of podcasting in Xi 'an shows that the multi-dimensional application of sound elements, the blending of individual and collective memories and the stimulation of emotional resonance have jointly shaped the dynamic and three-dimensional image of the city. This study provides theoretical support for the application of sound media in the fields of geography and communication, and also provides practical enlightenment for the digital communication strategy of urban culture.

## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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