

Research on Street Photography and the Construction of Urban Cultural Memory

Han Chen

School of Photography, Communication University of China, Nanjing, China

Abstract: This paper, from the perspective of visual culture dissemination, defines the core connotations of street photography and urban cultural memory, analyzes the functions of recording, screening, dissemination and reconstruction of street photography in the construction of urban cultural memory, explores the current predicaments such as homogenization and commercialization faced by street photography in memory construction, and proposes targeted practical optimization paths. The research aims to clarify the intrinsic connection between street photography and urban cultural memory, providing theoretical references and practical guidance for the inheritance of urban culture and the strengthening of identity through visual media.

Keywords: Street Photography; Urban Cultural; Memory Visual Communication

1. Introduction

Under the backdrop of rapid urbanization, the iteration of urban space is accelerating, and the disappearance of traditional cultural carriers poses challenges to the inheritance of cultural memory. As a vibrant public space in the city, the streets gather diverse life scenes and regional folk customs, serving as a "living carrier" of cultural memory. Street photography captures fleeting moments through the lens, transforming abstract memories into concrete images. With its advantages of intuitiveness and appeal, it has become an important way to construct and disseminate the cultural memory of a city. Street photography has now evolved from a niche and specialized field to a diverse and popular one, but the accuracy and depth of memory construction still lack. Therefore, studying the construction of the connection between the two and exploring the optimization path is of great practical significance for safeguarding the cultural roots of a city and

enhancing its cultural soft power.

2. The Core Function of Street Photography in the Construction of Urban Cultural Memory

2.1 Record Retention Function: Capturing the Cultural Texture of the City

The core function of street photography is to record the original state of urban development and preserve vivid visual materials for the cultural memory of the city. Against the backdrop of rapid urban space renewal, material cultural carriers such as old districts, old factories and traditional shops are constantly disappearing. Street photography has become an important means to capture these endangered cultural landscapes. For instance, through long-term photography of the street layout, architectural details and shop signs in the old urban area, photographers have preserved the historical trajectory of the evolution of urban space. By documenting scenes such as breakfast stalls, shoe repair shops, and neighborhood chats in the daily life of the city, it captures the living customs and social patterns of a specific era. These images are not only direct records of the material and behavioral culture of the city, but also carry the emotional memories of urban residents, providing an irreplaceable visual archive for the inheritance of urban cultural memory ^[1].

2.2 Symbol Extraction Function: Strengthen Cultural Identity Recognition

Street photography, through the screening and refinement of street scenes, transforms cultural elements with regional characteristics into iconic visual symbols, strengthening the cultural identity recognition of the city. Different cities have unique street cultural characteristics, such as the hutong fireworks in Beijing, the lane charm in Shanghai, and the leisurely market life in Chengdu. Street photographers focus on these distinctive scenes and distill recognizable visual symbols. For instance, taking the grey tiles and

blue bricks in Beijing's hutongs and the vendors selling sugar-coated haws as the subjects of photography, visual symbols representing the old Beijing culture are formed. Taking the covered bowl tea and mahjong tables in Chengdu teahouses as the core scenes, it presents the leisure cultural characteristics of Chengdu.

2.3 Dissemination and Diffusion Function: Expand the Audience Range of Memory

Street photography, leveraging the dissemination advantages of visual media, breaks the temporal and spatial limitations of the inheritance of urban cultural memory and expands its audience range. The traditional inheritance of urban cultural memory mostly relies on word-of-mouth and local experiences, and its audience is limited to the residents within the city. Street photography works can reach a wider audience through various channels such as photography exhibitions, album publications, and social media dissemination. For instance, domestic and international street photography exhibitions, city-themed photography competitions and other activities enable the public from different regions to understand the city's culture through images. Street photography accounts on social media platforms spread urban street scenes in the form of short videos and photo groups, evoking emotional resonances across regions.

2.4 Value Reconstruction Function: Endow Memory with the Connotation of the Times

Street photography is not a simple replication of urban scenes, but rather an interpretation and reconstruction based on the value perspective of the photographer, endowing the cultural memory of the city with new contemporary connotations. Street photographers of different eras have distinct creative perspectives. In the new era, while documenting traditional urban culture, street photography also focuses on new scenes and phenomena in urban development, such as modern urban landmarks, new lifestyles, and diverse social groups. For instance, photographers present the changes of The Times in urban development by comparing the scenes of old districts and new business districts. By photographing the street lives of migrant workers, new urban residents and other groups in the city, the inclusiveness of urban culture is demonstrated.

3.The Practical Predicaments Faced by Street Photographyin Constructing Urban Cultural Memory

3.1 Homogenization of Creation and Lack of Regional Cultural Characteristics

At present, there is a clear tendency of homogenization in street photography creation, and there is a lack of in-depth exploration of regional cultural characteristics. Some photographers blindly follow the popular shooting subjects and styles, such as overly focusing on the check-in spots of Internet celebrities and imitating the creative models of foreign street photography, while neglecting the unique cultural texture of local streets. For instance, most street photography works in cities focus on modern landmarks and commercial districts as their subjects, while paying insufficient attention to scenes with regional characteristics such as old districts, folk activities, and daily life.^[2]

3.2 Commercialalienation, The Authenticity of Memory Construction is Impaired

Under the influence of the commercialization wave, street photography has gradually fallen into the misunderstanding of "traffic orientation", damaging the authenticity of the construction of urban cultural memory. Some photographers, in pursuit of traffic, deliberately pose for street scenes and guide their subjects to cooperate, which violates the documentary principle of street photography. Some commercial institutions use street photography as a marketing tool, over-packaging "internet-famous street scenes" and creating false cultural symbols. For instance, some so-called "old market scenes" are deliberately set up as shooting bases by commercial institutions, rather than real scenes of citizens' lives. Some street photography works, in order to cater to the public's aesthetic standards, overly beautify the city's image and avoid the practical problems in urban development.

3.3 Fragmented Dissemination Makes it Difficult to form a Memory System

In the context of social media communication, the dissemination of street photography works shows fragmented characteristics, making it difficult to form a complete urban cultural memory system. Street photography on social

media platforms is mostly spread in the form of single pictures and short video clips, lacking a complete interpretation of the cultural background and creative context of the works. The reading behavior of the audience also has the characteristic of fragmentation, making it difficult to form a systematic cognition of urban cultural memory through scattered image fragments. For instance, when taking a photo of an old teahouse, if it lacks an interpretation of the history of the teahouse and the regional tea culture, the audience can only perceive the surface scene information and cannot understand the cultural connotation it carries behind it.

3.4 Insufficient Public Participation and a Single Subject for Memory Construction

At present, the construction of urban cultural memory still mainly relies on professional photographers, with insufficient public participation, resulting in an insufficiently diverse memory connotation. The creative perspective of professional photographers has certain limitations and is difficult to comprehensively cover the cultural scenes of different social strata and regions in the city. As the direct participants of urban life, ordinary people can better capture the street details with the warmth of life, and their creative perspectives can enrich the connotation of urban cultural memory. However, at present, the channels for the public to participate in street photography are limited. There is a lack of professional guidance and display platforms. Most of the street photography works created by the public are difficult to enter the public communication field and cannot participate in the construction process of the city's cultural memory.

4. Practical Optimization Paths for Street Photography in Constructing Urban Cultural Memory

4.1 Delve Deeply Into Regional Culture and Explore Distinctive Creative Materials

To enhance the regional cultural recognition of street photography, it is necessary to guide photographers to delve deeply into local culture and explore distinctive creative materials. On the one hand, efforts should be made to enhance the research and popularization of regional culture. By holding regional culture lectures and

organizing urban cultural field trips, photographers can gain a deeper understanding of the local historical evolution, folk customs, and spatial characteristics, and find representative shooting subjects. On the other hand, photographers are encouraged to focus on "niche" local scenes, such as characteristic streets and alleys, traditional handicraft workshops, and local folk activities, to avoid blindly following popular subjects. By deeply exploring the regional cultural characteristics, street photography works can present a unique urban cultural texture, providing support for the construction of personalized urban cultural memories [3].

4.2 Adhere to the Original Intention of Documentary and Avoid the Influence of Commercial Alienation

Strengthen the documentary core of street photography and avoid the damage to the authenticity of memory construction caused by commercial alienation. First, clarify the creative ethics of street photography, advocate the creative concept of "true documentation", oppose behaviors such as deliberate staged shooting and false packaging, and formulate creative norms through industry associations to guide photographers to adhere to their original intention of documentary. Secondly, establish non-commercial display platforms, such as public welfare photography exhibitions and urban cultural archives, to provide dissemination channels for pure documentary street photography works and reduce the impact of traffic orientation on creation. Thirdly, enhance the public's awareness of the documentary nature of street photography, popularize the value of documentary photography through photography education, guide the public to view street photography works rationally, and reject overly commercialized false cultural symbols[4].

4.3 Optimize the Communication System and Build a Complete Memory Chain

To break through the predicament of fragmented communication, it is necessary to build a complete communication system of "images + interpretation + interaction" and form a systematic chain of urban cultural memory. In terms of dissemination content, street photography works should be equipped with complete textual interpretations, including

information such as the shooting background, cultural connotations, and scene history, to help the audience understand the cultural memory behind the images. In terms of dissemination forms, forms such as "group picture narrative" and "image thematic" are adopted to integrate scattered photographic works into logically related thematic content, presenting a complete urban cultural scene. In terms of communication and interaction, an online and offline interactive platform should be established to encourage the audience to share their personal memories related to the images, forming an interactive communication of "works + audience memories", and enriching the connotation of the city's cultural memory.

4.4 Encourage Public Participation to Broaden the Subjects of Memory Construction

To broaden the construction subjects of urban cultural memory, it is necessary to encourage the public to participate in the creation and dissemination of street photography. On the one hand, build a platform for public participation, hold city-themed street photography competitions open to all citizens, offer public photography training courses, and provide creative guidance and display opportunities for ordinary people. On the other hand, a city cultural image archive should be established, and street photography works should be collected from the public. Outstanding mass creations should be included in the archive to enrich the visual materials of the city's cultural memory. In addition, a mass street photography dissemination matrix should be created through social media platforms to encourage the public to share the urban street scenes around them. Through the creation and dissemination by multiple subjects, a more comprehensive and more life-like urban cultural memory should be constructed.

5. Conclusion

Street photography, as a concrete visual medium, plays a core role in recording, extracting, disseminating and reconstructing the cultural memory of a city. It is an important way to safeguard the cultural roots of a city and strengthen identity recognition. At present, street photography is confronted with practical predicaments such as homogenization of creation and commercial alienation in constructing urban cultural memory. It is necessary to achieve optimization through in-depth exploration of regional culture, adhering to the original intention of documentary, optimizing the communication system, and encouraging public participation. In the future, with the development of visual communication technology, the creation and dissemination forms of street photography will continue to innovate. We should further explore its deep connection with the cultural memory of the city, so that street photography can better serve the inheritance of urban culture and help build modern cities with unique identity recognition.

References

- [1] Lian Yixuan. Dynamic Expression of Urban Tea Culture Landscape: The Evolution from Street Photography to Urban Photography [J]. *Fujian Tea*, 2020,47(12):104-106.
- [2] Shen Jie. Research on the Creative Path of Shanghai's Red Images from the Perspective of Urban Memory [J]. *Shanghai Vision*, 2025,(03):101-108.
- [3] Da Guan. Street Photography Captures a Romantic Autumn [J]. *Digital Photography*, 2024,(10):120-123.
- [4] Jia Huiling. Light and Shadow Dialogue: A Perspective on He Fan's Street Photography Schema [J]. *Tourism and Photography*, 2022,(12):160-162