

Physics, Society, Representation: A Study on the Spatial Production Mechanism of Hankou Lifen in the Micro-documentary Han Yun Jin Feng

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Abstract: Taking Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad dialectics as the theoretical framework, this study systematically analyzes the internal mechanism of visual media participating in the spatial production of Hankou Lifen by combining the author's creative practice of the micro-documentary Han Yun Jin Feng. The micro-documentary completes the material reproduction of physical space, relational integration of social space and meaningful production of representational space of Hankou Lifen through multimodal audio-visual language. Adopting a three-part comparative structure of "Traces of Time—Modern Style—Future Outlook", the film breaks the single narrative mode of traditional historical district documentaries and objectively presents the diverse fates of Hankou Lifen in the process of urban renewal. The research shows that as a form of cultural representation in the digital age, micro-documentaries are not only tools for recording urban spatial changes but also active forces participating in urban spatial production. The vision of harmonious coexistence between history and modernity constructed through images provides new theoretical perspectives and practical paths for the protection and development of historical districts.

Keywords: Spatial Triad Dialectics; Hankou Lifen; Micro-documentary; Spatial Production; Visual Representation; Cultural Inheritance.

1. Introduction

Hankou Lifen is the material carrier of the integration of Chinese and Western cultures in modern Wuhan and the cultural crystallization of citizen spirit. It possesses unique architectural aesthetic value and profound historical heritage, bearing the century-old collective memory of Wuhan citizens and the distinctive "Han-style" cultural characteristics [1-2]. Against the background of China's urban space transformation from "incremental expansion" to "stock renewal", Hankou Lifen is facing multiple challenges including demolition and reconstruction, functional replacement, population loss, and cultural hollowing out, with irreversible profound changes taking place in its spatial form and social structure.

Compared with traditional documentaries, micro-documentaries have the advantages of focused themes, concise forms, and convenient dissemination, making them more accessible to Generation Z. However, existing studies mostly discuss their narrative strategies and communication effects from a communication perspective, rarely analyze the internal mechanism of visual media participating in urban spatial production from the dimension of spatial theory, and especially lack practical reflection and theoretical refinement from the creator's first-person perspective. Therefore, this study takes the micro-documentary Han Yun Jin Feng (Figure 1) created and published by the author on Bilibili as the research object, adopts text analysis and creative practice reflection methods, and based on Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad dialectics, systematically explores how micro-documentaries participate in the spatial production of Hankou Lifen through visual representation from the three dimensions of physical space, social space, and representational space. This study regards visual media as an inherent component of urban spatial production, reveals the active role of micro-

documentaries in the cultural inheritance of historical districts, and breaks the binary opposition thinking between the protection and development of historical districts by objectively presenting the diverse fates of Hankou Lifen.

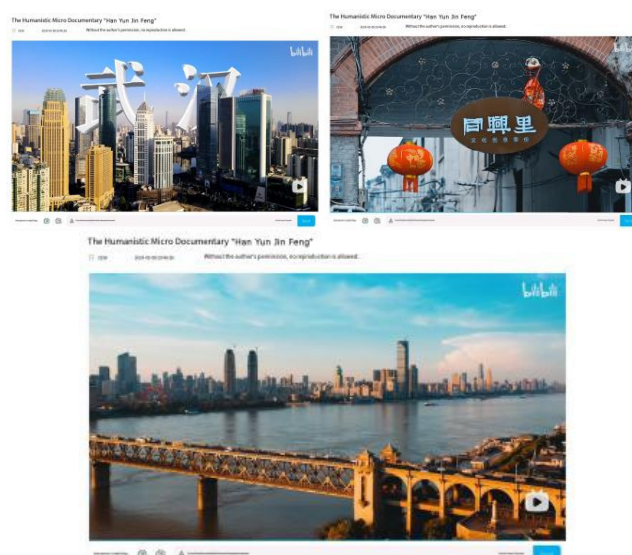


Figure 1. Screenshot from Bilibili

2. Physical Space: Visual Reproduction of Hankou Lifen

Lefebvre argues that Spatial practice (perceived space) is the space that we experience through our senses, the space lived by the body in the practice of production and reproduction. It is directly grasped through the body's sensory-practical activities and, as the ever-present foundation, constitutes the starting point of social spatial production [3]. As a visual medium, the primary function of

micro-documentaries is to reproduce urban physical space through technical audio-visual language. During the pre-production research phase, the author conducted field investigations on more than 20 existing Lifan in Wuhan and finally selected three representative samples: Sande Li, Kunhou Li, and Tongxing Li. In the mid-production stage, shooting was carried out using equipment such as the DJI Mini 3 Pro drone, Nikon Zf mirrorless camera, and DJI RS 4 Pro stabilizer. In the post-production stage, editing with Final Cut Pro, color grading with DaVinci Resolve, and special effects production with After Effects were performed to achieve accurate restoration and creative construction of the material form of Hankou Lifan. This technical reproduction is not a simple copy of reality but shapes the audience's perception and cognition of the physical space of Hankou Lifan through the selection, organization, and presentation of space.

2.1. Reproduction of Spatial Relations Through Multi-scale Cinematography

Han Yun Jin Feng adopts multi-scale cinematography combining macro, meso, and micro perspectives to construct the complete spatial topological structure of Hankou Lifan. At the macro scale, aerial shots from 500 meters above the ground (Figure 2) show the panoramic view of Wuhan and the overall layout of the Lifan architectural complex. The film opens with the modern urban landscape of skyscrapers, quickly flashes iconic buildings such as the Yellow Crane Tower, Optics Valley Square, and Jiangnan Road, and then the camera rapidly descends to cut into the dilapidated scenes inside the Lifan. This sharp transition from the "God's eye view" to the "ground view" creates a strong visual impact, highlighting both the spatial position of Hankou Lifan in the modern city and the rupture between historical and modern spaces.

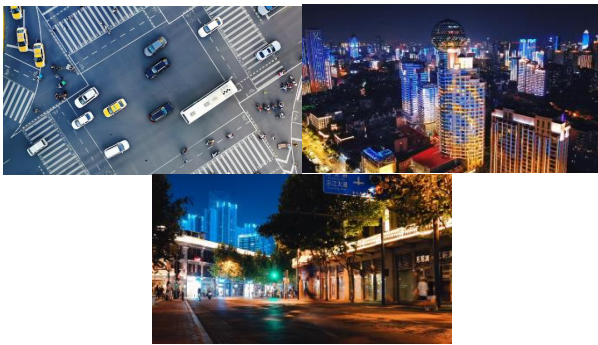


Figure 2. Night view of Sanyang Road Intersection and its surroundings in the film

At the meso level, moving shots such as push, pull, pan, and track are used to show the "fishbone-shaped" street structure and row-house residential form of the Lifan, and long takes are employed to present the spatial hierarchy and depth within the Lifan. At the micro level, close-ups and macro shots capture architectural details. As Lefebvre states, For it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived—and produced[3]. These details can evoke the audience's bodily memory and sensory experience, making them feel as if they are in the Lifan space.

2.2. Reproduction of the Historical Dimension of Space Through Temporal Technologies

Time is inscribed in space, and space is the sedimentation

and visible manifestation of time[3]. The film integrates the historical dimension into the images through temporal technologies such as vintage film effects, 2D animation, and time-lapse photography, showing the development and changes of Hankou Lifan. Film effects and animation sort out the historical context of Lifan from its birth after the port opening in the late 19th century to its contemporary transformation.

Time-lapse photography is the core means to activate the temporal dimension of space. The author used time-lapse photography to shoot the sunrise and sunset on both sides of the Yangtze River and the Yangtze River shipping scenes, condensing a day's time into dozens of seconds of footage. In particular, the aerial time-lapse shot at the end of the film (Figure 3) records the lighting changes on both sides of the Yangtze River from dusk to night, linking the fate of Hankou Lifan with the development of the entire city and highlighting its status as an important part of Wuhan's urban history.

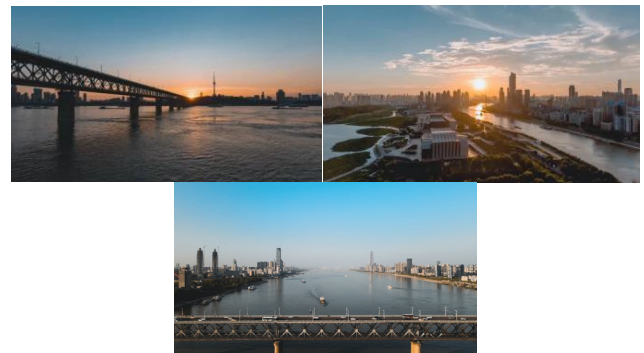


Figure 3. Scenery of both banks of the Yangtze River in Wuhan in the film

2.3. Visual Empowerment and Authentic Presentation of Material Details

In the process of urban renewal, many historically valuable material details of Hankou Lifan are rapidly disappearing. By visually recording these disappearing material details, the film endows them with new life and value. When shooting the soon-to-be-demolished Sande Li and Kunhou Li, the author focused on recording material traces such as old slogans on the walls, old doorplates, wooden window grilles, and old locust trees in the courtyards, making them permanent carriers of residents' collective memory.

Meanwhile, the film objectively presents the material status quo of the Lifan, showing not only their historical beauty and cultural value but also not avoiding practical problems such as dilapidation, overcrowding, and backward infrastructure, avoiding romanticized and sentimentalized expressions and constructing the visual authenticity of Hankou Lifan.

3. Social Space: Integration of Social Relations in Hankou Lifan

All space is social space; it implies, contains and dissimulates social relations. Social relations have a spatial existence; they project themselves into a space, becoming inscribed there, and in the process producing that space itself.[3]. As the "conceived space", social space is a relational space constructed by different subjects through power and knowledge. Han Yun Jin Feng not only records the physical form of the Lifan but also reproduces its social space through the presentation of human activities and social interactions, and reveals the power relations and interest games among

different subjects in the process of urban renewal through the objective presentation of multiple subjects and collective memory.

3.1. Discourse Presentation of Multiple Subjects and Mapping of Power Relations

The social space of Hankou Lifen is jointly constructed by multiple subjects such as long-term residents, young merchants, artists, and tourists. The film is not limited to a single perspective but endows different subjects with equal discourse power through differentiated cinematography. Eye-level medium and close-up shots are used for long-term residents (Figure 4) to present their nostalgia for the past prosperity and helplessness about demolition.



Figure 4. Three interviewed long-term Lifen residents in the film

Meanwhile, the film records the creative insights of graffiti art enthusiasts on the dilapidated walls of Kunhou Li, as well as the shop operators in Tongxing Li who have opened men's barbershops, cafes, and vintage camera stores. The juxtaposition of discourses from different subjects objectively presents the complexity and diversity of the Lifen's social space.

3.2. Visual Translation of Collective Memory and Reconstruction of Identity

Collective memory is the core bond maintaining group identity. Scholars such as Zhao Yawen point out that micro-documentaries realize the construction path of cultural memory from perception, deepening to identification through diverse symbolic presentations, multi-dimensional scene narratives, and multiple value writings [4]. Han Yun Jin Feng precisely activates the collective memory of Hankou Lifen through this path.

The life scenes recalled by long-term residents, such as enjoying the cool in the alleys in summer, neighbors visiting each other, and children playing in the lanes, transform individual memories into group collective memory and evoke the audience's nostalgia for past life. Meanwhile, the film reproduces the traditional lifestyle of the Lifen through recording daily life scenes such as residents chatting, buying groceries, and cooking in the alleys. These ordinary daily life scenes constitute the most authentic life picture of Hankou Lifen, which can arouse the audience's emotional resonance and enhance residents' cultural identity with the Lifen.

Furthermore, the film does not avoid the inherent contradictions of urban renewal and clearly presents the diverse fates of the Lifen through horizontal comparison: Sande Li and Kunhou Li are facing demolition and showing a state of decline; Tongxing Li has achieved organic renewal with harmonious coexistence of old and new residents. Meanwhile, when presenting commercial transformation

cases such as Hubu Alley, Lihuangpi Road, and Hong Alley (Figure 5), the film objectively points out problems such as the dissipation of life atmosphere and disturbance to aboriginal life caused by excessive commercialization, triggering in-depth reflection on the transformation mode of historical districts.

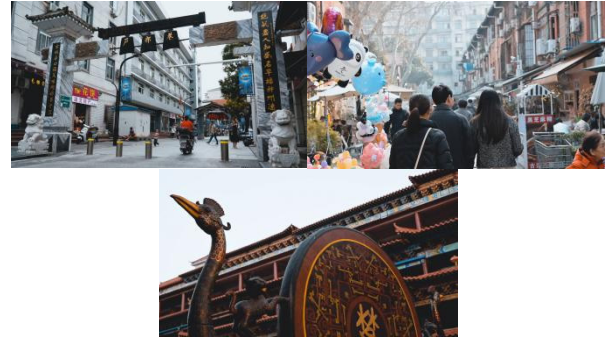


Figure 5. Scenery of Hubu Alley, Lihuangpi Road, and Hong Alley in the film

4. Representational Space: Visual Production of Cultural Meanings of Hankou Lifen

As Lefebvre argues, representational spaces, or lived spaces, are space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of "inhabitants" and "users". As the most dynamic and creative dimension of spatial production, they are "redolent with imaginary and symbolic elements" and "contain potentialities of works and of reappropriation" [3]. Micro-documentaries not only record real space but also construct new spatial meanings and cultural imaginations through images. Through its unique narrative structure, multimodal audio-visual language, and non-representational sensory experience, Han Yun Jin Feng produces the cultural vision of "harmonious coexistence of history and modernity", providing value guidance for the future development of Hankou Lifen.

4.1. Significance of the Comparative Narrative Structure

Breaking the linear sentimental narrative of traditional historical district documentaries, the film adopts a three-part comparative structure of "Traces of Time (0:40-5:27)—Modern Style (5:28-6:29)—Future Outlook (6:30-7:18)", forming a dialogue between history and the present. The first part presents the diverse fates and practical dilemmas of the Lifen, the second part shows successful cases of organic renewal, and the third part links the development of the Lifen with the overall fate of the city, progressively demonstrating that history and modernity are not opposed but can achieve organic unity.

4.2. Embodied Experience Through Multimodal Audio-visual Language

The film mobilizes the audience's senses through the collaborative design of color and sound. In terms of color application, cool gray tones and low saturation are used when shooting the soon-to-be-demolished Sande Li and Kunhou Li to create a sad and helpless atmosphere; warm yellow tones and high saturation are used when shooting successfully transformed places such as Tongxing Li and Lihuangpi Road to create a vibrant and hopeful atmosphere.

In terms of sound design, the film not only pays attention to the clarity of character interviews but also attaches importance to the recording and application of environmental sounds. Footsteps, wind, rain, neighbors' chatting, children's laughter, and the sound of the Yangtze River flowing in the Lifen constitute the "soundscape" of Hankou Lifen. They can evoke the audience's auditory memory and bodily experience, making them immerse themselves in the life atmosphere of the Lifen (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Screenshot of the film's post-production

4.3. Construction of Spatial Aesthetics from the Non-representational Dimension

Traditional visual research mostly focuses on the symbolic and representational nature of images, while scholars such as Li Li point out that digital images from the non-representational perspective introduce the "unintentional, non-discursive, and elusive" nature of the everyday world into artistic creation. In this dimension, digital images are no longer confined to objectively depicting the real world but create a new type of relationship connecting reality [5].

The film uses a large number of moving shots and subjective shots to simulate the audience's walking perspective in the Lifen, conveying bodily spatial experience. For example, the handheld follow shots used when filming the Lifen alleys allow the audience to feel the narrowness and twists of the alleys as well as the unevenness of the ground as the camera moves. Meanwhile, capturing light and shadow changes constructs the poetic beauty of the Lifen, touching the audience's emotions with a perceptual power beyond language and fully conveying the poetry and charm of the Lifen.

5. Micro-documentaries and the Spatial Reproduction of Historical Districts

Different from traditional material spatial production methods such as urban planning and architectural design, micro-documentaries, as a form of cultural representation in the digital age, have unique paths in participating in the spatial production of historical districts. Scholars such as Zhang Feiyue believe that micro-documentaries, with their "unique narrative techniques, timely perspectives, and rich presentation methods that meet audience psychology", can effectively improve cultural communication effects and are an effective way to inherit historical culture [6]. However, micro-documentaries' participation in urban spatial

production is a double-edged sword, with both positive active roles and inherent limitations.

On the one hand, they can break through time and space constraints, which aligns with the point made by scholars such as Feng Jie that under the background of the rapid development of digital technology and the new media wave, cultural communication forms are undergoing transformation, and audience demands are gradually evolving towards fragmentation, stratification, and diversification [7]. Through rapid dissemination on the Internet and social media platforms to reach young groups, they activate the collective memory of historical districts and enhance public awareness and recognition of their cultural value; meanwhile, they provide a voice channel for ordinary residents who are in a disadvantaged position in urban renewal, transforming their interest demands into public issues to promote the realization of spatial justice; furthermore, they can construct the cultural imagination of "harmonious coexistence of history and modernity" through visual narrative, providing value guidance for the organic renewal of Hankou Lifen and proving that the protection of historical districts is not simply freezing preservation but can achieve functional reconstruction and vitality regeneration on the basis of inheritance.

On the other hand, their participation in spatial production also has three limitations: First, visual representation has inevitable selectivity, and the creator's subjective cognition and value judgment will lead to simplification or beautification of real space, which may cause audience cognitive bias; second, there is a risk of landscapeization and symbolization of historical districts under the logic of consumerism, overemphasizing visual symbols while ignoring their real life connotations and deep-seated social problems; third, their role in spatial production is indirect and limited, only affecting public cognition and social opinion, and cannot directly change urban material space and social relations. The protection and development of historical districts still require the coordinated promotion of the government, developers, residents, and social organizations.

6. Conclusion

This study argues that as a form of cultural representation in the digital age, micro-documentaries have transformed from mere spatial recording tools into active subjects of spatial production. They can break through the limitations of time and space, activate the cultural memory of historical districts, enhance public cultural identity, provide a platform for marginalized groups to speak out, and promote the realization of spatial justice. However, micro-documentaries' participation in urban spatial production also has certain limitations; they inevitably carry the creator's subjectivity and carry the risk of landscapeization and symbolization of historical districts. Future research can further explore the comparative impact of different types of visual media on urban spatial production and the specific practical paths of micro-documentaries participating in the protection of historical districts. Meanwhile, combining new technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence, we can explore new models of cultural inheritance and innovation of historical districts in the digital age, making greater contributions to the protection and development of historical and cultural heritage.

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