

## **Cultural Resonance and Emotional Connection: The Image Expression and Characterization of Chinese Travel Documentary**

Yang Huayuan\*

Department of Broadcasting and Hosting, College of Culture and Media, Huanghuai University, Zhumadian City, Henan Province, 463000, China  
15518299620@163.com

**Abstract:** China is one of the four ancient civilizations, and its cultural connotation is extensive and profound, covering all aspects of society, culture, science, customs and so on. Chinese culture is brilliant and long-standing, demonstrating tenacious vitality in the rolling river of history, which is the basis of the cultural identity of the Chinese nation. National cultural identity requires contemporary people not only to learn to perceive traditional culture and learn the wisdom of our ancestors, but also to adhere to the principle of seeking common ground while reserving differences, actively communicate with foreign cultures, practice the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, find commonalities and experience differences with cultures of other countries in the world, and achieve prudent absorption and be inclusive, so as to promote the growth of cultural forest and cultural resonance across time and space. Emotional connection is a two-way emotional connection, with the subject not only limited to human beings in an alternate space and time, but also the emotional connection between human beings and nature, and human beings in the misaligned space and time. Due to China's vast territory and abundant resources, most people cannot personally experience the distinctive culture and different living environments of other regions. Therefore, travel documentary quickly become the high-quality tool and medium for most people to understand other regions of the world with its advantages of authenticity and high quality content. With the ingenious design of the professional film crew or the honest and straightforward sharing of the net friends with low skill level, the travel documentary can enable people in different regions to see the different natural scenery and feel the regional culture, achieving a momentary resonance of the soul, "seeing" the cultural integration at the present moment, enjoying the emotional connection jointly caused by cultural diversity and commonality, and obtaining novel experiences. This paper will discuss cultural resonance and emotional connection through image expression and characterization in Chinese travel documentaries. This paper will take "Hexi Corridor", "North Latitude 30°·China Journey", and "Another Me in the World", which are relatively representative of Chinese travel documentaries, as examples to discuss in detail the cultural resonance and emotional connection of the world shown by the audience and works, audience and lens in travel documentaries.

**Keywords:** Cultural resonance; Emotional connection; Travel documentary; Image expression; Characterization

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Hexi Corridor is an important passage in ancient China that connected the inland areas with the Western Regions. It holds significant political, economic, and cultural importance for ancient China in terms of exchange. The documentary series "Hexi Corridor," co-produced by the Gansu Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Science and Education Channel of CCTV, focuses on this historical route. The series revolves around the passage of time and uses various perspectives to vividly narrate the cultural and historical changes in China's western regions over nearly two thousand years, from the Han Dynasty to the present (Wale & Bishaw, 2020).

Accompanied by unique and grand yet desolate music, the series allows viewers to immerse themselves in the tragic, vast, and magnificent landscapes of the northwest desert. The documentary consists of ten episodes, each exploring a different theme: "Envoys," "Passage," "Waystations," "Roots," "Sculptures," "Silk Road," "Dunhuang," "Alliance," "Livelihood," and "Treasure." The content ranges from envoys' diplomatic visits to the development of the Hexi Corridor and the significant contribution made by the First Well of the Laojunmiao oil field in modern times, encapsulating the historical essence of this ancient region spanning centuries. Through various artistic techniques, the series depicts the emotional connection among the people and their land along this vital transportation route, as well as the corridor's role in promoting cultural prosperity (Cao, 2021; Cao, 2022).

### 1.1 Highlight The Cultural Inclusivity By Describing The Cultural Emphasis Of The Same Location In Different Periods

The episodes "Roots" and "Sculptures" in the documentary series "Hexi Corridor" are highly representative of the cultural transformations in China. They succinctly depict the profound influence and complex development of Confucianism and Buddhism on the people's spirituality and thoughts in ancient China. Presented in reverse chronological order of the characters' appearances, these episodes provide a concise and comprehensive overview of the development and integration of various cultures in this region (Heidari, 2020; Zhou et al., 2022).

For example, in the episode "Roots," it tells the story of Confucianism, established by the renowned philosopher Confucius, taking root and flourishing in the enigmatic Hexi Corridor after facing challenges during

the pre-Qin period. While the famous Yongjia Rebellion was taking place in the Central Plains, the lives of the people in the Hexi Corridor remained relatively stable and unaffected. As a result, a significant number of people migrated to this region, particularly from areas west of Luoyang and Guanzhong. One notable scholar, Guo He, led many disciples through Wuwei until they arrived at Linsong Xiaye, at the foot of the Mati Mountain in Zhangye Commandery. They decided to settle there after a long and arduous journey (Yaffe et al., 2021).

Amidst the dust and hardships of the thousand-mile journey, Guo He found inner peace upon seeing the green mountains and valleys, which was the tranquil dwelling he had envisioned. Like Guo He, the families that migrated westward established their roots in this land and no longer returned eastward. Gradually, they became prominent local clans, known as the "Hexi Aristocracy." The news of Guo He's arrival quickly spread among the scholarly community in the Hexi Corridor. In the year 350, Guo Yu left his hometown of Dunhuang for the first time. He embarked on a journey and arrived in Zhangye, at the foot of Mati Mountain. Unlike the dry climate of his hometown, Zhangye's lush surroundings brought a sense of tranquility to Guo Yu's mood (Bashith & Amin, 2017).

By this time, Confucianism was flourishing in the Hexi Corridor, and he had come a long way to seek out the renowned scholar Guo He. In the year 370, while Guo Yu, a grand academician, was peacefully contemplating in the deep valleys of the Qilian Mountains, he was suddenly disturbed by the chaotic noises from outside. At that time, the Central Plains were experiencing bloody and tumultuous battles. Guo Yu, as a grand academician, became the coveted target for those in power, seeking talented individuals. Many years later, Guo He was repeatedly invited by Zhang Zuo, the former king of Liang, but eventually ended up being marginalized within the palace. Guo Yu learned from his teacher's lesson and wrote two works, "Spring and Autumn Mo Yu" and "Mistakes and Corrections in the Classic of Filial Piety," in the Hexi Corridor.

With the fall of the Han Dynasty, the turmoil and bloodshed in the Central Plains dealt a significant blow to Confucianism as the official school of thought. However, Confucianism in the Hexi Corridor remained distinctive and thrived. Guo Yu carried on the practices of his teacher, Guo He, and, in the serene valleys of the Hexi Corridor, imparted knowledge, education, and guidance to his disciples. He dedicated himself to what he had learned, diligently cultivated his own spiritual practice, and promoted Confucian culture, allowing the people to understand the true essence of Confucian thought (Schinke et al., 2018).

## 1.2 Present The Historical Process Through Film And Television Interpretation Techniques

"Hexi Corridor" is a documentary series that focuses on human history. Its creative materials mainly come from a vast amount of historical literature. Traditional documentaries often unfold through a single narrative form, which clearly cannot cover the extensive content of this series. Therefore, "Hexi Corridor" not only incorporates the commonly used technique of scene reenactment in historical documentaries but also includes a significant amount of character simulation and portrayal, capturing the grand and magnificent natural landscapes. The powerful voiceover narration eloquently delivers insightful commentary. Furthermore, the music and background sounds in "Hexi Corridor" have also received widespread acclaim. This storytelling approach, while preserving the essence of historical events, presents history in a more direct and easily digestible manner, appealing to a wider audience (Zheng & Lei, 2016). For instance, in the aforementioned episode "Roots," it begins with a fast-paced and mysterious music, creating a chaotic and tense atmosphere. Through character portrayal, it vividly depicts the grand academician Guo Yu, who, in order to avoid the persistent invitations from the ruling authorities, reluctantly leaves behind his peaceful seclusion in the Qilian Mountains and hurriedly takes refuge in a cave. Outside the cave, the frequent and rapid switching of scenes between messenger armies and Guo Yu's disciples resisting creates a tense confrontation, with the imminent threat of a clash. This storytelling technique sets up a major suspenseful development at the beginning, capturing the audience's attention and enticing them to continue watching, arousing their desire and curiosity. The use of an impulsive and tense atmosphere enhances the audience's immersion, attracting their focused and careful viewing of the film's content. It efficiently achieves the goal of conveying historical culture and presenting captivating stories from the unknown desert. The success of the documentary series "Hexi Corridor" is the result of an organic combination of film and cultural traditions, utilizing the advantages of film culture as a medium for dissemination and platforms to achieve widespread promotion of "Silk Road culture (Landkammer et al., 2019; Zhou, 2021)."

## 1.3 Enrich human culture content by shaping historical figures

The biggest difference between "Hexi Corridor" and other historical documentaries is that it is not "stiff, dry, lifeless, and cold." Instead, it is rich in humanistic content. In the episode "Passage," it starts with a bustling scene of childbirth, using the birth of a baby as a starting point to narrate

the historical events of the ambitious Han Dynasty's conquest of the Hexi Corridor and the opening of the vital transportation passage. This baby is the famous young general, "Huo Qubing." Such an introduction in the documentary naturally foreshadows his extraordinary future and the remarkable life that future generations will remember, planting the seeds of the thrilling historical events associated with him in the minds of the audience.

After recounting the story of Huo Qubing, the film concludes with numerous shots of the natural scenery, accompanied by precise and thoughtful narration, symbolizing the end of his short yet brilliant life. The serene and magnificent landscapes of the present-day Hexi Corridor console the aspirations of this young general who once declared, "Without annihilating the Xiongnu, I cannot consider myself at home," while the footage of rapid modern development responds to his courage and perseverance to go to battle at the age of 17, declaring, "There is no end ahead; my country needs this road." As the film states, he "shone like a dazzling comet, illuminating the sky as it swiftly disappeared into the vast night" (Bresler, 2021; McPhail & Rata, 2019).

The documentary "Hexi Corridor" presents a remarkably accurate portrayal of historical figures, capturing their essence with great precision. This is one of the reasons why the documentary is highly acclaimed by viewers. The film not only provides a detailed account of Huo Qubing but also introduces numerous other renowned historical figures. For instance, in the opening segment titled "Envoys," the documentary vividly recounts the eventful life of the first envoy to the Western Regions, "Zhang Qian." It also explores the story of the monk "Xuanzang" from a religious and cultural perspective, highlighting his remarkable talent as he started preaching at the age of 12 and made significant contributions to the spread, development, and localization of Buddhism in China. Additionally, the documentary mentions the translation works of "Kumarajiva," who famously rendered the phrase "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form" .

## 2. A LINEAR EXAMINATION OF REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND HUMANITIES STYLES

The North Latitude 30° is a fascinating line geographically. It passes through six ancient civilizations, including Chinese civilization, ancient Indian civilization, ancient Persian civilization, Mesopotamian civilization, ancient Egyptian civilization, and Mayan civilization. It also intersects with

the birthplaces of four major religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The geographical, cultural, and historical wealth it contains is incredibly abundant (Burwell et al., 2019).

The documentary series "North Latitude 30°·China Journey" starts from the Zhoushan Archipelago in Zhejiang and travels westward to the Ali region in Tibet. Along the way, it traverses nine provinces and autonomous regions, including Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Anhui, Hubei, Hunan, Chongqing, Guizhou, Sichuan, and Tibet, covering a total distance of over 20,000 kilometers.

With the themes of "nature, homeland, and culture," the series follows the style of the previous documentaries "Border Journey" and "Coastal Journey," incorporating the strengths of various program genres such as news, features, and documentaries. It aims to win viewers with authenticity and emotional storytelling. Unlike past travel documentaries and programs that superficially and singularly showcase the routes and destinations, "North Latitude 30°·China Journey" takes a unique approach. It extends the filming duration and provides a comprehensive and three-dimensional record of the lives of people along the North Latitude 30° line (Kirmayer, 2022). It consists of a large-scale series of 189 episodes, each lasting 45 minutes. This documentary expands and enriches the language of storytelling by employing new observational perspectives, narrative logics, and specific forms of presentation. This approach sets it apart from other travel documentaries and allows it to reach a broader audience and have a greater impact (Auernhammer & Roth, 2021; Rodríguez-Bravo et al., 2020; Zhao, 2022).

This filming style not only captures the breathtaking landscapes of the land but also focuses on the daily lives of ordinary people in the local communities, capturing the emotional connections between people and their hometowns. "North Latitude 30°·China Journey" presents three perspectives: humanistic spirit, the relationship between humans and nature, and the connection between people and traditional culture. It explores various dimensions, such as human nature, the pursuit and longing for a happy life, personal values, the study of life philosophy, the importance of spiritual well-being, and reflections on the meaning of life. It also highlights the promotion and inheritance of excellent traditional culture. The series provides a vivid portrayal of the lives and historical culture of the Chinese people along the North Latitude 30° line.

## 2.1. Humanity design of travel routes

"North Latitude 30°·China Journey" chose a travel route that had never

been planned or selected before. It is not just a route showcasing natural landscapes but also a route that encompasses human geography and cultural scenery (Nasritdinova, 2021; Yeh et al., 2019).

The documentary comprehensively presents the public and private spaces of the people living along the North Latitude 30° line, which exhibit significant regional differences. It meticulously portrays the collective memories, regional cultures, and distinctive features, arousing a sense of cultural identity among the masses despite regional and cultural unfamiliarity. It also creates cultural resonance based on the understanding of a diverse Chinese culture, both internally and externally, showcasing the rich and colorful regional cultures of China to the world and promoting the dissemination of Chinese culture.

This is the humanistic spirit that the film aims to showcase, taking a unique aesthetic approach. It explores the commonalities and differences of cultures by focusing on the beauty of human nature and the environment. Through the documentary form, it allows people living along the North Latitude 30° line and other regions to find common cultural foundations, understand unknown cultures, and serve as a platform for cultural resonance and emotional connections.

## 2.2. The humanistic perspective of travel experience

"North Latitude 30°·China Journey" takes the perspective of journalists who simultaneously act as tourists, leading curious viewers to gradually uncover the mysteries along this route. The narrative unfolds through the eyes and experiences of the journalists, who explore and observe while walking.

This storytelling approach enhances the audience's immersion, allowing them to feel as if they are personally traveling with the journalists.

The production team of "North Latitude 30°·China Journey" abandoned the previous "arranged," "planned," and "designed" approach, allowing the journalists and the public to freely and authentically act in front of the camera. This natural and immersive style of documentary filmmaking resonates strongly with the audience.

The use of a civilian perspective in the documentary accurately conveys the emotions and psychological changes of the individuals featured. Through its visual storytelling, "North Latitude 30°·China Journey" seamlessly and comprehensively showcases the diverse and distinctive regional cultural characteristics along the North Latitude 30° line in China. It provides a platform for these cultures to shine, not only locally but also nationally and even globally.

### 3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CLUE CHARACTERS AND THE THEME OF TRAVEL DOCUMENTARY

"The Other Me in the World" is a self-produced travel documentary by a netizen named Yang Fan. It premiered on CCTV Documentary Channel in 2015 and has released three seasons by 2020, receiving enthusiastic responses. The film is directed by Yang Fan, who embarks on a global motorcycle journey.

During his travels, Yang Fan seeks out friends from around the world who share the same birthday as him, but have different cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, work environments, and lifestyles. He captures their life ideals and ordinary lives on camera (Guo, 2021).

Over the course of two and a half years, Yang Fan manages to find 23 individuals who meet his criteria. They come from various countries, including Mongolia, Russia, and the United States. Among them are both males and females, people with illnesses and healthy athletes, dropouts working odd jobs, and individuals pursuing further education. The documentary highlights the diverse personalities and vastly different life trajectories of these unfamiliar individuals, showcasing the chemistry and stories that unfold between them, which serves as the main attraction of the film.

#### 3.1 The story of the main perspective characters from narrative Angle

The protagonists in the documentary "Another Me in the World" share the same "birthday starting point" but have different destinies, even contrasting personalities and thoughts. Through the subtle entry point of "same birthday," the film showcases the diversity of world cultures. Although they are all born in the 1990s, they have distinct paths in life. There is Basen Hu, who became a mother at the age of 21 and Mark, who remained optimistic, positive, and grew up despite being abandoned by his mother at the age of 13.

There is Martin, who suffers from Down syndrome but persists in creating music and pursuing his life ideals. And there is Les, a supermodel who is diligent, disciplined, and had the courage to make her way to the Victoria's Secret fashion show in New York at the age of 20. These characters demonstrate resilience, perseverance, and a longing for a better life. Exploring their differences through the commonality of being born on the same day, the documentary ultimately reveals the character traits of the post-90s generation, which include breaking generational stereotypes,



having independent and trendy personalities, and possessing unconventional "thinking" thoughts.

### 3.2 The expression of the main perspective characters experience under color image design

The documentary "Another Me in the World" adopts a presentation style that relies on deformations, exaggerations, and novel unconventional shots. For instance, the film uses a fisheye lens to show the audience the scene of cycling through the jungle. Under this technique, the originally orderly and tranquil jungle is instantly filtered with solemnity and serenity. Through the use of an ultra-wide-angle fisheye lens, the film not only captures the beauty of the jungle but also reflects Yang Fan's excitement and exhilaration, as well as his personalized and lively visual style, aligning with the creative characteristics of self-produced travel-themed documentaries.

The significant visual impact of the distorted and exaggerated images captured by the fisheye lens, compared to the natural appearance, creates a sense of freshness and uniqueness for the audience, extending their sensory experience. The film also cleverly employs lighting, colors, and special effects shots. Proper use of lighting and colors not only helps alleviate visual fatigue for the audience but also restores the authentic colors and visual impressions of the world as witnessed by the protagonist Yang Fan, presenting a sense of realism. Additionally, it highlights the director's and protagonist's expressions of thoughts, bridging the gap between the audience and the director/protagonist, enabling them to "share" the beauty of different landscapes with Yang Fan.

In the process of filming and post-production editing, the clever use of zoom-in shots, zoom-out shots, and other techniques controls the rhythm of the entire film and creates appropriate pauses and still frames, transforming rigid footage into dynamic storytelling. During Yang Fan's cycling journey, when he encountered problems along the way, he received help from foreign friends and made a friendship with a motorcycle enthusiast who was always ready to assist others without expecting anything in return. Yang Fan was deeply moved by his genuine kindness. When portraying this story, Yang Fan first uses zoom-in shots to vividly depict the exhilarating scenes of off-road motorcycles speeding during his journey. The zoom-in shot also freezes the moment when he was rescued and deeply touched, allowing both himself and the audience to savor the brilliance and pride of human nature in that moment, magnifying the beauty of that instant. The film is also akin to a synchronous visual study

conducted from the perspective of the narrator's birthday, penetrating cultural differences between countries through a horizontal view, understanding the variations in character traits caused by different social conditions. Furthermore, within the framework of globalization, it focuses on the survival conditions of various groups, fostering cross-cultural identities among different ethnicities, races, genders, and classes, thereby demonstrating cross-cultural inclusiveness. Travel documentaries, while expanding the meaning of tourism, have transcended the limitations of time and space, creating a resonance of human cultures and allowing viewers to emotionally connect with the world captured on screen. From the vast deserts with solitary smoke and the sun setting over the long river, to the current bustling Northwestern Dunhuang and Zhangye along the circular tourist route, a series of well-established tourism industries have emerged.

The documentary "Hexi Corridor" has played an indispensable role in this transformation. It brings viewers back from beloved coastal areas, forests, and ancient cities to the long-forgotten desert landscapes. It vividly showcases the historical vicissitudes of the Hexi Corridor, a strategic region in ancient China spanning two thousand years. Through exceptional visual expression and meticulous character portrayals, the documentary allows audiences and tourists to experience the grandeur of history. It reveals what oases the ancient people found in the boundless desert, the incredible achievements they accomplished, and the precious heritage they left behind. From the snow-covered Qilian Mountains, known as a hidden paradise, to the ongoing development of the Silk Road and the mysterious and enigmatic Mogao Grottoes, which depict the imprint of ancient Dunhuang and even the entire China. Along this thirty-degree north latitude line in China, there are forests, seas, deserts, grasslands, and snow-capped mountains. Such travel documentaries make people feel both the insignificance and the greatness of humanity. In the context of the world, travel themes that contrast the "other self in the world" between Chinese and foreign cultures broaden viewers' perspectives, encourage open-mindedness, and embrace the world. This is the significance of travel documentaries in promoting cultural resonance and emotional connection, and it embodies the humanistic meaning of travel.

#### References

- Auernhammer, J., & Roth, B. (2021). The origin and evolution of Stanford University's design thinking: From product design to design thinking in innovation management. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 38(6), 623-644.

- Bashith, A., & Amin, S. (2017). The effect of problem based learning on EFL students' critical thinking skill and learning outcome. *Al-Ta Lim Journal*, 24(2), 93-102.
- Bresler, L. (2021). Qualitative paradigms in music education research. *Visions of Research in Music Education*, 16(3), 10.
- Burwell, K., Carey, G., & Bennett, D. (2019). Isolation in studio music teaching: The secret garden. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 18(4), 372-394.
- Cao, Y. (2021). Cross-cultural Communication and Cultural Variation. *Cultura*, 18(1), 41-54.
- Cao, Y. (2022). How Technology is Revolutionizing Sports Training and healthcare teaching. *Journal of Commercial Biotechnology*, 27(4). <https://doi.org/10.5912/jcb1317>
- Guo, X. (2021). Documentary innovation strategy and value expression--Taking the "Another Me in the World" as an example. *Chinese newspaper industry*(08), 72-73.
- Heidari, K. (2020). Critical thinking and EFL learners' performance on textually-explicit, textually-implicit, and script-based reading items. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 37, 100703.
- Kirmayer, L. J. (2022). Suicide in cultural context: an ecosocial approach. In (Vol. 59, pp. 3-12): SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England.
- Landkammer, F., Winter, K., Thiel, A., & Sassenberg, K. (2019). Team sports off the field: Competing excludes cooperating for individual but not for team athletes. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2470.
- McPhail, G., & Rata, E. (2019). The knowledge democracy connection and music education. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 27(2), 112-132.
- Nasritdinova, M. (2021). Pedagogical components and stages of health of develop children through music education. *Galaxy International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 9(05), 251-258.
- Rodríguez-Bravo, A. E., De-Juanas, Á., & García-Castilla, F. J. (2020). Effect of physical-sports leisure activities on young people's psychological wellbeing. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 543951.
- Schinke, R. J., Stambulova, N. B., Si, G., & Moore, Z. (2018). International society of sport psychology position stand: Athletes' mental health, performance, and development. *International journal of sport and exercise psychology*, 16(6), 622-639.
- Wale, B. D., & Bishaw, K. S. (2020). Effects of using inquiry-based learning on EFL students' critical thinking skills. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 5, 1-14.
- Yaffe, Y., Levental, O., Arey, D. L., & Lev, A. (2021). Morality and values in sports among young athletes: the role of sport type and parenting styles—a pilot study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 618507.
- Yeh, Y.-c., Rega, E. M., & Chen, S.-Y. (2019). Enhancing creativity through aesthetics-integrated computer-based training: The effectiveness of a FACE approach and exploration of moderators. *Computers & education*, 139, 48-64.
- Zhao, Y. (2022). Analysis on the narrative language of Online self-made travel themed documentaries--Taking the "Another Me in the World" as an example. *Voice and Screen World*(10), 60-62.

- Zheng, Y., & Lei, Y. (2016). The image communication strategy of Silk Road Culture -- A case study of the documentary of "Hexi Corridor". *News Research Guide*, 7(23), 8-9.
- Zhou, C. (2021). The cultural value and communication of travel documentary--Taking the "North Latitude 30°·China Journey" series as an example. *Journalistic front*(09), 27-29.
- Zhou, J., Jung, J., Kueh, C., & Lin, Y. (2022). Personalized mobile health and fitness apps guidance model for students. *Journal of Commercial Biotechnology*, 27(5), 201-214.