

Research on the Construction and Shaping of the City Image of "Charming Chongzuo" in Visual Communication

Linghao Jiang

Guangxi Minzu Normal University, Chongzuo, Guangxi, 532200

ABSTRACT

To highlight the unique charm of a city and enhance its popularity, utilizing visual works for external publicity has become one of the key strategies in shaping the city's image. With the booming development of the mobile internet era, information acquisition channels have become increasingly diversified. Among the various information dissemination pathways, visual communication has gained increasing favor from communicators and audiences due to its unique visual expression. This study aims to provide valuable references and insights for the shaping and dissemination of Chongzuo's city image by deeply analyzing the city's image portrayed in visual works.

KEYWORDS

visual works; shaping of city image; Chongzuo City

1 Introduction

Cities, as the convergence and center of core elements such as regional politics, economy, culture, and population, are the products of human civilization's evolution and development, representing an advanced settlement form distinct from rural areas. In the wave of urbanization, promotion plays a pivotal catalytic role. In recent years, the importance of visual works as a promotional medium has become increasingly significant, especially in shaping and disseminating the image of cities. For Chongzuo, an emerging city, fully leveraging the promotional potential of visual works is a key path to showcasing its city image.

Chongzuo City, located in the southwest of China's Guangxi province and bordering Vietnam on three sides, enjoys a unique geographical advantage and strategic position as it connects the coast and ASEAN. This city not only has a long history, with the Xiang Prefecture established as early as the Qin Dynasty over 2,000 years ago, alongside the Guilin Prefecture and Nanhai Prefecture, known as the three prefectures of Lingnan, but is also an important birthplace of the Luoyue civilization, nurturing a rich and colorful ethnic culture. In addition, Chongzuo boasts magnificent natural scenery, historical relics of the border region, and unique tourism resources such as Zhuang culture, Sugar Capital culture, Rosewood culture, Huashan culture, and Tianqin culture, constituting vivid cultural landscapes.

City image refers to the urban form and characteristics that can touch people's emotions and ideological activities. It is a comprehensive embodiment of a city's inner strength, outward vitality, and development potential, encompassing multiple dimensions such as politics, economy, and culture. Visual works, a collective term for film and television art, convey specific ideological content through a series of sound or silent image combinations and are displayed using projection equipment or other dissemination means.

The connection between city image and visual works can be traced back to the birth of cinema in 1895. The "Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat" filmed by the Lumière brothers in France captured scenes of urban architecture, streets, and city life, albeit with a somewhat vague city image at that time. Since then, visual works have become an important carrier for recording urban changes, while city image has become an indispensable source of material and expressive object for visual creation. An excellent visual work has immeasurable value in enhancing the popularity and influence of a city's image. Through elements such as the city's theme, background scenes, and character images, visual works directly or indirectly shape and convey the unique charm of the city.

2 Analysis of the City Image of Chongzuo in Visual Works

The city image is a multidimensional and multi-layered concept that encompasses natural landscapes, regional culture, economic and political characteristics, as well as the image of its citizens. This paper will delve into the city image of Chongzuo portrayed in various types of visual works.

2.1 The City Image of Chongzuo in TV Dramas

Although elements directly related to Chongzuo, such as scenes, lines, and background music, are relatively limited in

TV dramas, and TV dramas with Chongzuo as the main filming location are rare, some well-known dramas such as "Chinese Odyssey", "A Taste of Home", "Silk Worm, Silk Dream", and "The Journey of Flower" have filmed scenes at Detian Falls in Daxin County, Chongzuo. Detian Falls, the largest transnational waterfall in Asia and the fourth largest in the world, is also a AAAA-level tourist attraction in China. Its magnificent natural landscape has added much to the appeal of these dramas.

From the filming backgrounds, Chongzuo is not only blessed with beautiful mountains and rivers but also enjoys a pleasant environment with blue skies and white clouds all year round. Its unique natural landscapes featuring strange mountains, beautiful caves, clear waters, and exquisite stones are fully showcased in dramas like "The Journey of Flower". The popularity of these dramas, coupled with the halo effect, has not only attracted a large audience but also triggered extensive media coverage of Chongzuo, thereby enhancing the city's fame. For example, the press conference for "The Journey of Flower" was held in Daxin County, Guangxi, in 2014, attracting coverage from many major media outlets across the country. This media convergence effect significantly increased Chongzuo's tourism exposure, bringing new development opportunities to the city.

2.2 The City Image of Chongzuo in MV Videos

MV, as an art form that takes music themes and structures as its creative source and combines imaging technology and digital media, is also an important part of visual works. In Chongzuo, traditional festivals like the Song Festival are highly valued, and local songs and folk songs have attracted more audiences through the MV platform.

The MV version of "Beautiful Chongzuo", sung by well-known singers Liao Hongfei and Shu Chunxiu, showcases the new urban landscape of Chongzuo, including high-rise buildings, developed transportation, and spacious and clean streets, conveying the message of Chongzuo's rapid economic development. At the same time, the MV incorporates elements unique to Chongzuo, such as kapok flowers, antiphonal folk songs, Huashan rock paintings, Detian Falls, and Tianqin singing. The vocals, subtitles, images, and tones complement each other, creating a feast for the eyes and ears. This MV not only showcases Chongzuo's ethnicity, borderland characteristics, and modernity but also highlights its positioning as an eco-tourism city.

Furthermore, the Longzhou Tianqin Ensemble has made a name for itself in major performances both domestically and internationally. In their MV "Singing Heavenly Songs", the Tianqin women's ensemble, dressed in black Zhuang costumes and holding exquisite Tianqin instruments, sing and dance while playing, showcasing the city image of Chongzuo's people who are skilled in singing and dancing and value the preservation and promotion of local ethnic minority cultures. As the "Hometown of Chinese Tianqin Art", Longzhou has made Tianqin a cultural brand of Chongzuo.

2.3 The City Image of Chongzuo in Promotional Videos

City image promotional videos are a special form of advertising aimed at enhancing a city's reputation and influence by showcasing its unique features. A successful promotional video should have beautiful scenes, authenticity, and city-specific characteristics.

The tourism promotional video "The Beauty of Chongzuo" is a successful example. It focuses on showcasing the rarity, antiquity, mystery, and uniqueness of Chongzuo's tourism resources, including the ancient white-headed langurs, the majestic Detian Falls, the picturesque landscape corridors, natural plant tapestries, the thousand-year-old Tianqin musical instrument, the mysterious Zuojiang Huashan rock paintings, the elegant Zuojiang Leaning Tower, and the historic Friendship Pass. It comprehensively displays Chongzuo's natural scenery and cultural landscapes. The core message of the promotional video, "Chongzuo nurtures beauty and creates beauty; Chongzuo becomes more mysterious because of its antiquity and more beautiful because of its youth," not only reflects the city's approach to developing tourism but also successfully shapes Chongzuo's tourism image in visual works.

2.4 The City Image of Chongzuo in Movies

When discussing the pathways through which visual works disseminate city images, scholars such as Zhou Kai emphasize the need to rationally utilize movie media in the new urban communication and marketing landscape, exploring innovative channels for city image dissemination. As a powerful tool for cultural dissemination, movies can subtly convey hidden information about exotic customs, natural landscapes, and other aspects while audiences enjoy entertainment, thereby exerting a profound impact on city images. Movies vividly showcase the unique charm of urban culture through the combination of sound and images.

Take the movie "Tianqin Beauty" as an example. It tells a series of stories about three urban men who travel to Longzhou to meet online friends, sightsee, and encounter local "Tianqin Beauties", cleverly incorporating tourism elements of Longzhou County to promote the tourism industry in Longzhou, Chongzuo. However, as a carrier for city

image dissemination, a movie's appeal in storyline, the acting skills of actors, and the clever use of background scenes are all crucial.

Regrettably, "Tianqin Beauty" falls short in its plot design, lacking novelty and suspense. The actors are not well-known and their acting skills are inadequate, significantly diminishing the overall appeal. Furthermore, the overly stiff lines in the movie, such as "Longzhou's mountains are the most beautiful in the world, Longzhou's waters are the clearest, and Longzhou's skies are also the bluest," not only fail to effectively convey the unique charm of Longzhou but also appear tedious and bland, with the promotional intent being too obvious.

Although Longzhou in the film resembles a utopia, it also exposes issues such as inconvenient transportation and poor dining and accommodation conditions. The rudimentary accommodation conditions and inadequate facilities at the Longzhou homestays shown in the movie will undoubtedly make audiences question the local tourism reception capacity.

2.5 The City Image of Chongzuo in Microfilms

Microfilms, as short video films tailored for new media platforms and suitable for viewing on mobile devices and during short leisure times, have quickly won the favor of a wide audience due to their concise and engaging format, uniqueness and novelty, strong storytelling, clear and singular themes, and diverse content. Utilizing microfilms to construct a city's image can either use the city as a real backdrop or revolve around a specific theme related to the city, achieving a subtle yet effective communication effect.

The microfilm "An Unregrettable Choice" produced by China Southern Power Grid Chongzuo Power Supply Bureau, with the theme "I Love My Job," showcases the dedication of veteran employees to their work and their selflessness in prioritizing the power industry over their personal lives, as well as the aspirations of the newer generation of power grid workers to carry on this legacy. The film not only highlights the tremendous changes that have occurred since the establishment of Chongzuo Power Supply Bureau a decade ago but also presents a positive corporate atmosphere of beautiful Chongzuo and a happy Southern Power Grid.

In the film, leaders of Chongzuo Power Supply Bureau eat, live, and work alongside their employees, fostering a harmonious corporate culture. The leaders are portrayed as decisive, hardworking, attentive to employees' opinions and suggestions, and approachable. This transmission of positive energy is more likely to touch the audience's hearts, evoke a sense of beauty, and set a good example for Chongzuo's corporate image. This has positive implications for Chongzuo's investment attraction, retaining talent, and enhancing the city's image.

2.6 The City Image of Chongzuo in Documentaries

Chongzuo boasts a long history, beautiful landscapes, and abundant cultural tourism resources. To delve deeper into local characteristics, human history, Zhuang ethnic customs, border charm, and natural scenery, and to enhance Chongzuo's fame and influence, Chongzuo Television Station launched a cultural tourism documentary series titled "Chongzuo Nalai."

"Chongzuo Nalai," a high-definition television cultural documentary series, takes its name from the Zhuang language, where "Nalai" means "good," "beautiful," "impressive," and other complimentary meanings. Since its premiere on October 2, 2017, the series has aired weekly, simultaneously on television channels and the WeChat app, with both Zhuang and Mandarin versions available. To date, it has broadcast 100 documentary films or specials, including "Taiping Ancient City," "Luoyue King Festival," "Stone Forest," and "Fairy Qin," which have been well-received by audiences.

Notably, "Taiping Ancient City" and "Luoyue King Festival" were selected for the 2017 Guangxi Key Original Online Content Project Library, with "Taiping Ancient City" further recognized as an outstanding work in the 2017 Guangxi Key Original Online Audiovisual Program Elite Program Library, receiving funding support from the Regional Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television. "Fairy Qin" garnered over 60,000 views on the "Huashan TV" app, and "National Flag Guard" won the second prize in the 2017 Guangxi Radio and Television Excellent Works Award for Social Education Documentaries.

The influence of "Chongzuo Nalai" extends beyond China, also playing a role in international dissemination. China and Vietnam share borders, similar customs, and a common language, allowing Vietnamese border residents to watch the program online. Furthermore, the program is popular among international students from Southeast Asian countries studying at Guangxi Normal University for Nationalities.

Chongzuo also attracts many travelers to stop and watch by playing city image promotional videos and documentaries on the Huashan World Heritage application at Nanning East Railway Station and Nanning Wuxu International Airport, which have high foot traffic and many international visitors. Additionally, leveraging the platform of the World Heritage City Television Alliance, remarkable achievements have been made in external publicity work. Among them, "Discovering the Landscapes of Chongzuo: Fulfilling the Dream of a Unique Guilin" has been broadcast multiple times on Tianhe Television in Australia and Macau Television.

In December 2017, Chongzuo Television Station successfully hosted the "Media Convergence Era: The Dissemination and Inheritance of World Cultural and Natural Heritage" forum and the "Landscapes of Chongzuo and Rock Paintings of Huashan" media familiarization tour.

The forum invited experts from 27 broadcasting and television media outlets within the "China Radio and Television Media Alliance for World Cultural and Natural Heritage Cities" and from five universities, including the University of Science and Technology of China and Renmin University of China.

During this period, Macau Television produced and broadcast three news promotional videos about the landscapes of Chongzuo, and various media outlets, including Tianhe Television in Australia, joined in disseminating the unique charm of Chongzuo's landscapes. Leveraging the media advantages of the "World Heritage Radio and Television Media Alliance," Chongzuo Television Station has made positive contributions to comprehensively promoting Guangxi's only World Heritage site, fostering an atmosphere of conscious protection of World Heritage sites within society, and striving to enhance the domestic and international influence of the Huashan cultural tourism brand.

2.7 The City Image of Chongzuo in Dance Videos

Integrating local ethnic culture into dance is not only a form of cultural inheritance and innovation but also an effective initiative for promoting city culture. Huashan Rock Art in Chongzuo, as a mysterious carrier of the splendid culture of the Zhuang ancestors, contains profound historical and cultural connotations.

"Huashan," a musical dance poem created by Zhao Ming, successfully presents Zhuang culture on stage by seeking the life codes of the Zhuang ancestors and has participated in the Shanghai International Arts Festival. The production meticulously extracts cultural symbols of the Zhuang ethnic group from Huashan Rock Art and constructs four chapters through a unique narrative approach: the sun, copper drums, and men; the moon, embroidered balls, and women; as well as the Zhuang totem frog and Zhuang brocade. "Huashan" artistically processes the movement symbols from the Huashan murals and brings them to the stage, reviving the ancient murals. The scenes are majestic, the movements powerful and forceful, and the ethnic artistic atmosphere strong, providing audiences with a breathtaking visual and auditory feast that is truly awe-inspiring.

With the success of the musical dance poem "Huashan," various media outlets have reported on it, giving audiences a certain understanding of Huashan Rock Art. However, most media coverage of Huashan Rock Art remains superficial, lacking in-depth exploration, leading to limited audience knowledge of Huashan.

Overall, using visual works to promote a city's image and enhance its fame has a profound and immeasurable impact. However, visual works themselves also have some issues that more or less affect the construction of a city's image.

Firstly, visual works have poor timeliness. City promotional videos, TV dramas, and other visual works often fail to promptly reflect the new face of a city's image. Due to high remake costs, multiple channels are needed to showcase the city's new look; otherwise, audiences' impressions of Chongzuo may be stuck in a certain phase. In recent years, Chongzuo has made significant achievements in urban construction, resident happiness index, and tourism industry, but these new accomplishments and changes have not been promptly presented to the national audience through visual works, leading to blind spots and misconceptions about Chongzuo among audiences.

Secondly, staged scenes and exaggerations in visual works can easily mislead audiences. For example, in the "Chongzuo's Beauty" tourism promotional video, some scenes are staged. Friends dressed in various ethnic costumes sing and dance at Detian Falls, and friends from different countries holding national flags wave and walk past the camera in an orderly manner, all appearing too contrived and false. When tourists visit in person and find that the actual situation differs significantly from the scenes presented in the visual works, they may feel deceived, experience a significant psychological letdown, and negatively impact the development of Chongzuo's tourism industry.

Furthermore, visual works that expose negative aspects of the city are also detrimental to the construction of the city's image. Longzhou County in Chongzuo used the film "The Beauty of Tianqin" to promote tourism, which was a rare opportunity. However, the film exposed issues in the local tourism industry's development. The accommodation conditions in homestays were too simplistic, with three people having to share a room; the transportation was inconvenient, and the location was remote; and the corresponding tourism facilities were inadequate. These issues not only hindered the development of tourism but also adversely affected the construction of the city's image.

Lastly, microfilms, an emerging promotional method, should be fully utilized to target the promotion of the city's image and enhance promotional effectiveness. Microfilms, with their concise and easily disseminated nature, have become a popular form of entertainment among the public. However, there are relatively few works in Chongzuo that use microfilms to promote the city's image. In contrast, Sichuan Province has produced a series of microfilms titled "Love, in Sichuan" as a Chengdu city promotional video, with a novel perspective and clear theme, achieving good promotional results. Chongzuo can draw lessons from these successful cases, actively explore and innovate in city image promotion methods to better showcase the city's charm and vitality.

3 Strategies for Constructing and Shaping the City Image of Chongzuo through Imaging Works

In addressing the issues that arise in the dissemination of city images through imaging works, it is essential to delve into how to effectively avoid or mitigate the potential impact of negative information on the city's image. In this regard, the approach taken by Guilin provides a valuable reference for Chongzuo.

3.1 Adhering to the Principle of Authenticity

Imaging works, as a form of light entertainment, often undergo post-production processing, which is a common practice in creation. However, when promoting a city's image through imaging works, the principle of authenticity is an unshakable cornerstone.

Take the first microfilm featuring Guilin's landscapes, "The First Step: Guilin," as an example. The film narrates the story of a pair of Taiwanese artists traveling to Guilin. In the film, natural landscapes such as the Lijiang River, Elephant Trunk Hill, and Longsheng Terraced Fields, along with local folk songs, hospitable Guilin residents, convenient transportation, and comfortable accommodation, collectively portray a modern city with a leisurely and entertaining atmosphere. Notably, the scenes in the film are presented in a natural and authentic manner without deliberate staging or excessive post-processing, leaving a profound impression on viewers.

3.2 Avoiding Negative Symbols that Affect the City's Image

In imaging works, any subtle negative symbols can cause immeasurable damage to a city's image. For instance, Longzhou County once planned to promote its eco-tourism through the film "The Heavenly Lute Beauty," but the film exposed the poor and inadequate facilities of local farm stays, raising doubts among viewers about Longzhou's tourism reception capacity.

To avoid such issues, Chongzuo can draw inspiration from Guilin Tourism Bureau's "On the River" microfilm series, which showcases the city's positive aspects through careful planning and production. In "On the River: Spring Melody," a local resident named Yamei not only enthusiastically assists tourists but also invites them to stay in her spacious and comfortable traditional wooden house. Yamei's father even sings local folk songs - Cai Diao - with enthusiasm. This portrayal of simple customs and rich folk culture undoubtedly adds a vibrant touch to Guilin's city image.

3.3 Planning Activities to Shape the City's Image through Multiple Channels

Chongzuo boasts rich cultural connotations, including the unique Zhuang ethnic culture of the Luoyue people, the Huashan Rock Art culture, and the historic sugar culture. To effectively shape the city's image, Chongzuo can fully leverage these cultural resources through festive events, folk activities, thematic cultural parks, and other specialized projects as communication carriers, enhancing the sense of identity and belonging to the city's cultural spirit.

In recent years, Chongzuo has successfully held a series of large-scale folk activities, such as the "March 3rd Song Slope Festival," the Kapok Flower Appreciation Series, the Zuozhou Jinshan Firecracker Festival, and the Ningming Large-scale Luoyue Ancestral Sacrifice Ceremony. These activities not only showcase Chongzuo's cultural characteristics but also enhance the city's fame and influence. However, Chongzuo still needs to intensify efforts to further expand the impact of these activities, create cultural brands with local characteristics, and strive to reach beyond the province and even the international stage.

3.4 Utilizing Mass Media Platforms to Timely Disseminate New Changes in the City

In the information age, mass media platforms are crucial channels for disseminating a city's image. Chongzuo should fully utilize various forms of communication, including music, dance, literature, microfilms, microblogs, forums, and documentaries, to comprehensively showcase the city's achievements in economy, culture, and people's livelihood.

Meanwhile, local governments and media should be keen to capture news leads, seize opportunities, and promptly report positive news about the city. Additionally, it is necessary to actively assist film crews shooting in Chongzuo to secure more opportunities to showcase the city's image. For example, the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games attracted worldwide attention, but Chongzuo failed to recognize this promotional opportunity and missed the chance to promote Huashan Rock Art.

Generally, news dissemination is more effective than advertising in setting the agenda. The public's attention and discussion on social issues often align with the reporting pattern of mass media. Therefore, Chongzuo should fully leverage the power of media, seize opportunities, and achieve twice the result with half the effort in its promotional efforts.

4 Conclusion

Chongzuo, a land imbued with infinite beauty, nurtures aesthetics through historical precipitation and creates beauty amidst the changes of the times. As an ancient yet youthful city, Chongzuo appears even more mysterious due to its profound historical heritage and more vibrant because of its youthful vitality. Although Chongzuo is relatively new in its development journey, it, like many other cities, possesses a rich array of unique resources, akin to untapped treasures awaiting exploration and utilization.

Imaging works play a pivotal role in shaping and disseminating a city's image. For Chongzuo, leveraging imaging works as a modern media tool can not only fully showcase the city's natural landscapes and cultural attractions but also deeply excavate and convey the city's inner spirit and unique charm. Therefore, we must approach the planning and production of each imaging work with a high sense of responsibility and mission, striving for perfect unity in content and form, art and technology. This will fully harness the important role of imaging works in shaping and disseminating the city's image, contributing to the prosperity and development of Chongzuo.

Funding

This paper is a phased achievement of the 2023 project "Research on the Translation Strategies for the External Publicity of Guangxi's Regional Image from the Perspective of Peripheral Communication" (Project No. 2023KY0791), funded by the Program for Enhancing the Basic Research Capabilities of Young and Middle-aged Teachers in Guangxi Colleges and Universities.

References

- [1] Sun Xiangming. Research on the City Brand Image System [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2012:1.
- [2] Zhang Bo. Research on the Communication Strategy of Henan City Image in Media Language [J]. China Technology Panorama, 2014: (16).
- [3] Li Zongcheng. Festival Events and City Image Dissemination [J]. Contemporary Communication, 2007-07-15.
- [4] Zhao Bo. The Historical Trajectory, Classification, and Social Factors Behind the Birth of MVs [J]. Music Dissemination, 2015-06-30.
- [5] Huang Huajiang. Longzhou's Heavenly Lute Reappears on CCTV's Spring Festival Special [N]. Guangxi Daily, 2013-02-01.
- [6] Wang Wei. The City in Images: A Study on How Films Shape City Images [J]. Enterprise Technology Development: Lower Issue, 2014, 33(8).
- [7] Zhou Kai, et al. Film: Deconstructing an Alternative Channel for City Image Marketing and Communication [J]. Modern Communication, 2013(3).
- [8] Chen Fengjun. How to Tell a Touching Story in a Microfilm [N]. Shenyang Daily, 2011-04-11.
- [9] Traversing "Huashan" to Discover the Life Code of Zhuang Ancestors [N]. Morning Post, 2015-09-23.
- [10] Lu Yandan, Luo Ruining, et al. Constructing the Spiritual Culture of Chongzuo Border City from the Perspective of Cultural Identity [J]. Southern Ethnic Studies, 2013.4(2).
- [11] Huang Liuling. Reflections on Missing the Promotional Opportunity of the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games for Guangxi Ningming Huashan Rock Art [J]. Journal of Guangxi University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), 2009.4(31).