

A Study on the External Publicity Strategy of Rural Cultural Tourism under Narratology Theory: A Case Study of Quzhou, Zhejiang Province

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Abstract: Chinese rural regions serve as repositories of intangible cultural heritage, characterized by distinctive natural landscapes and localized cultural practices. The significant transformations occurring in these rural areas reflect the broader narrative of China's swift development, positioning them as critical lenses through which the global community can gain insights into the country. This article seeks to apply narratological theory to analyze the current state of rural cultural tourism and to propose relevant external publicity strategies. These strategies will focus on narrative content, narrative techniques, and narrative methodologies, with the objective of offering pertinent recommendations for enhancing the external promotion of rural cultural tourism.

Keywords: Narratology Theory; Rural Cultural Tourism; External Publicity of Cultural Tourism

1. Introduction

The globalization of Chinese culture plays a pivotal role in augmenting its global influence and is crucial for accurately representing China's image on the international stage. In the previous year, initiatives such as the optimization of visa policies in China successfully attracted a significant influx of international tourists, thereby highlighting the allure of the nation to a global audience. The rural regions in the contemporary era are characterized by favorable ecological conditions, effective governance, and distinctive local customs and historical legacies. This article employs narratology theory to investigate the potential of rural cultural tourism in effectively conveying

compelling narratives about rural life and promoting cultural awareness.

2. Overview of Narratology Theory and External Publicity

2.1 Publicity of Rural Culture and Tourism

External publicity pertains to the communication of information to external audiences. The term "publicity" is utilized here to denote active dissemination rather than the pejorative implications associated with propaganda. In the context of an increasingly globalized world, interactions among nations are becoming more frequent and interconnected. Nevertheless, there persists an "information deficit" in these international exchanges. Certain Western media outlets have been known to distort information and engage in negative portrayals of China, which contributes to a lack of understanding among foreign populations and fosters stereotypical perceptions characterized by "cognitive errors." Furthermore, as one of the four ancient civilizations, China possesses a rich historical and cultural legacy that cannot be fully comprehended in a short period. Effective external publicity can facilitate a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of China among foreign nations, thereby fostering enhanced international exchanges and cooperation.

As China's international influence continues to expand, its rich traditional culture has increasingly gained global recognition. The channels for external promotion and dissemination have diversified, leading to the establishment of a publicity framework that integrates "mainstream media" with "self-media," "traditional media" with "new media," and "online" with "offline" platforms. The scope of external publicity encompasses

various dimensions, including politics, economics, and culture. However, currently, only a few prominent cities, such as Guangzhou and Hangzhou, have effectively engaged in the external promotion of their cultural and tourism offerings, while the majority of cities exhibit notable deficiencies in this regard. For instance, the official website of the Quzhou government provides English descriptions of local attractions and intangible cultural heritage; however, the content is overly simplistic and fails to consider the audience's cognitive and cultural contexts. The external promotional materials are treated similarly to internal communications, lacking a tailored approach that addresses the specific needs of different audiences. Additionally, the website's design is basic and does not facilitate meaningful interaction between text and imagery. Furthermore, updates are infrequent, with the earliest content dating back to September 2023, resulting in a lack of engagement and appeal.

Furthermore, while extensive research has been conducted on the concept of "external publicity," there exists a notable scarcity of studies specifically addressing rural external publicity or the external publicity associated with rural cultural tourism. A search conducted on CNKI using the term "external publicity" yielded a total of 439 relevant articles published from 2022 to the present; however, only 39 articles were identified under the term "rural external publicity." The promotional strategies employed in rural cultural tourism predominantly focus on internal publicity, and the communication platforms utilized are relatively limited in scope. The steady and high-quality development of contemporary China, coupled with significant transformations in rural areas, exemplifies the nation's rapid advancement. Aspects such as rural culture, environmental aesthetics, economic progress, and the spiritual outlook of farmers can all serve as lenses through which the global community can gain insights into China.

2.2 Narratology Theory

Narrative, defined as the act of storytelling, is examined through the lens of narratology, which encompasses the representation of events characterized by temporal connections

or causal relationships across various media, including text, language, behavior, and products. The field of narrative theory is primarily composed of four significant components: Western classical narratology, Western rhetorical narratology, Western post-classical narratology, and traditional Chinese narrative theory, each possessing its distinct discourse system.^[1] Although narratology was formally articulated in the 1960s and introduced to China in the 1980s, discussions and applications of related theories had already been prevalent among scholars prior to this period. Roland Barthes, a prominent French structuralist theorist, noted in "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative Works" that "there are countless narrative works in the world, with a wide variety of types and diverse themes." This observation suggests that virtually any material can serve as a basis for narrative, with narratives being conveyed through both oral and written forms of language. Consequently, building upon Barthes' research, it can be posited that narratology extends beyond literary works to encompass various domains, including painting, film, journalism, literature, communication studies, and the arts.

Narratology theory is pertinent to the external promotion of rural cultural tourism, employing analogous methodologies. A narrative must possess a substantive story as its foundation. In the context of promoting rural cultural tourism, there must be identifiable elements to promote. Furthermore, a narrative requires an audience; thus, the external promotion of rural cultural tourism must also target specific audiences. The effectiveness of storytelling through narrative art is directly related to the strategies employed in external promotion. Rural narratives center on the essence of rural life, utilizing intangible cultural heritage and contemporary achievements as foundational materials, and are conveyed to targeted groups through engaging storylines. This approach enhances cultural comprehension by leveraging emotional engagement, rendering the narratives more compelling and impactful. In contrast, traditional cultural and tourism narratives often suffer from monotony and homogenization. Therefore, it is imperative that the external promotion of rural cultural

tourism involves a thorough exploration of rural narratives and their effective articulation.

3. The External Publicity Strategies of Rural Cultural Tourism under Narratology Theory

3.1 The Strategization of Narrative Subject Matter Content

3.1.1 Rural culture: Breaking through the barriers of external publicity culture

In the realm of cultural outreach, it is imperative for outreach workers to comprehend the shared elements within the outreach material, engage the audience by utilizing content that resonates with popular public interest, and simultaneously express their unique identities throughout the outreach process to fulfill their objectives. Intangible cultural heritage represents a collective spiritual asset of humanity and serves as a testament to cultural diversity. It is universally esteemed and elicits significant interest across various populations. Furthermore, intangible cultural heritage is produced by specific nations within distinct living environments and cultural contexts. The intangible cultural heritage of diverse regions embodies varying value systems, encapsulates unique national identities, and reflects individuality. Notably, the intangible cultural heritage of China garners considerable attention and high engagement on international short-video platforms.

The Chinese civilization boasts a history exceeding five millennia, with its rural areas also possessing a rich historical legacy spanning several thousand years. These rural regions embody a significant historical tradition and a deep cultural heritage. The cultural heritage associated with rural areas in China can be categorized into at least four distinct groups. Data indicates that over 73% of the more than 100,000 intangible cultural heritages recognized at various levels throughout the country, which include those found in rural settings, traditional Chinese villages, significant agricultural cultural heritages, and material cultural heritages characterized by agricultural, ethnic, regional, and temporal features, are situated in rural locales. To date, 8,155 traditional Chinese villages and 188 important agricultural

cultural heritages have been officially recognized.^[2]

For instance, Quzhou City in Zhejiang Province is home to one entry on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, alongside 12 national-level intangible cultural heritages, 86 provincial-level intangible cultural heritages, and 340 municipal-level intangible cultural heritages. These items encompass ten major categories, including folk literature, traditional music, traditional dance, traditional drama, folk art, traditional sports, games and acrobatics, traditional fine arts, traditional craftsmanship, traditional medicine, and folk customs. In 2016, UNESCO officially inscribed the "24 Solar Terms" of China on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Among these, the Jiuhua Start of Spring Festival, a folk intangible cultural heritage that celebrates the onset of spring, has garnered renewed attention. During this period, Miaoyuan Village in Jiuhua Township, Kecheng District, Quzhou City, Zhejiang Province, hosts a significant springtime custom known as the Jiuhua Start of Spring Festival Sacrifice. Folk activities such as the whipping of the spring ox and the welcoming of spring and good fortune serve to align agricultural practices with seasonal changes. Furthermore, these activities illustrate the harmonious ecological relationship among heaven, earth, and humanity, resonating with universal values such as "nature conservation" and "harmonious coexistence between humans and nature."

3.1.2 Rural development: Highlighting the development trends of The Times in external publicity

In 2021, China accomplished a significant milestone in its efforts to eradicate poverty, garnering considerable attention from the global community. The methods by which China sustains its poverty alleviation successes have become a persistent subject of interest for international media. In promoting China's developmental achievements, foreign public relations professionals may concentrate on rural regions, beginning with localized observations and subsequently broadening their perspective to encompass the national context. This approach allows for an understanding of China's overall progress

through the examination of specific rural transformations. According to the 2024 Statistical Bulletin on the National Economic and Social Development of Zhejiang Province, the province constructed or renovated 2,023 kilometers of rural roads during the year. By year-end, the integration rate of urban and rural public transportation reached 90%, the coverage of large-scale water supply systems exceeded 90%, the reliability of rural electricity supply attained 99.99%, and 5G networks along with fiber optic resources achieved comprehensive coverage in key administrative villages. Furthermore, the rate of environmentally safe disposal of rural waste reached 100%.^[3]

In the contemporary context of globalization, the development of ecological civilization has emerged as a significant benchmark for assessing a nation's modernization trajectory. The Chinese government places considerable emphasis on enhancing the rural environment and fostering ecological civilization, viewing the initiative of "beautiful villages" as a pivotal strategy for the comprehensive revitalization of rural areas.

The rural landscape possesses distinct advantages, particularly in terms of its natural beauty. For example, within Quzhou, more than fifty villages have been recognized as traditional Chinese villages. The architectural configurations of these villages are tailored to their local environments, harmoniously situated amidst mountainous terrain and waterways, thereby integrating seamlessly with the surrounding landscape. The vistas are characterized by clarity and aesthetic appeal, with each mountain offering a unique perspective and each village exhibiting its own particular attributes. Notably, many of these villages retain well-preserved Huizhou-style architecture from the Ming and Qing dynasties, which, alongside their cultural elements and landscapes, can captivate foreign audiences and should be emphasized in international outreach efforts. Moreover, guided by the principle that "green mountains and clear waters are as valuable as mountains of gold and silver," public awareness regarding ecological preservation has been progressively heightened. Village collectives have actively engaged in environmental protection oversight and remediation, transitioning from a historical

tendency to prioritize economic development at the expense of ecological integrity to a contemporary focus on leveraging ecological advantages to foster distinctive industries. This shift aims to optimize economic structures and achieve a synergistic relationship between economic growth and ecological sustainability, thereby facilitating high-quality development.

In Houxi Town, located in the Qujiang District of Quzhou City, a model of spatial integration and resource aggregation has been implemented, centering around Quanjingbian Village and encompassing six adjacent villages. This initiative has led to the establishment of a rice-fish integrated farming and breeding industrial park, which generated a collective operating income of 7.7644 million yuan in 2024. Consequently, while promoting China's construction philosophies on the global stage, the accomplishments of these initiatives can be presented to an international audience, thereby sharing narratives and experiences related to rural development in China. This approach not only enhances global understanding of China but also encourages increased international visitation and promotes the external visibility of rural culture and tourism.

Meanwhile, with the advancement of the digital globalization wave, digital construction has become a strategic choice to seize the new opportunities of the new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation. In recent years, the digital governance capacity in rural areas has been continuously enhanced. The "24-hour Rural Digital Reading Room", "Digital Running Track", and "Smart Health Reading Room" have enabled villagers to enjoy higher-level and more convenient education and medical care, and their quality of life has been constantly improving. "Smart agriculture" and "e-commerce live streaming" have broadened employment channels, empowered the cultivation of new agricultural talent teams, enabled villagers to truly participate in the digital construction of rural areas, and maximized the interests of rural areas.

3.2 The Strategicization of Narrative Means

3.2.1 Textual narrative in the traditional mode Traditional textual narratives encompass print

media, including books and newspapers, as well as traditional broadcasting platforms such as television and radio, and offline venues like theaters and exhibitions. While much of the content in "The Travels of Marco Polo," authored in the 13th century, remains subject to verification, it served to introduce the enigmatic East to the relatively less developed West during the late Middle Ages, thereby facilitating the dissemination of Chinese civilization. With the advent of the Internet, traditional media has gradually diminished in prominence. Nevertheless, the traditional narrative format continues to retain a significant audience. A substantial number of individuals worldwide remain accustomed to traditional media, utilizing platforms such as newspapers to access information and news.

Short videos were initially created to facilitate users' rapid comprehension of information during brief intervals. Typically, these videos range from 5 to 10 seconds in duration, with the longest generally capped at approximately 10 minutes. This format, however, often results in a constrained understanding of broader contexts among users. The communication of rural historical development, local culture, and intangible cultural heritage necessitates thorough documentation through textual narratives within the traditional framework. In the contemporary landscape characterized by swift information turnover, traditional texts possess the capacity to transcend temporal and spatial limitations, ensuring their continued relevance and presence in the historical discourse, despite the emergence of newer formats.

3.2.2 Multimodal narrative under the convergence of new media

Multimodality encompasses the integration of various symbolic modalities of representational media, including but not limited to memes that combine text and images, as well as videos that incorporate text, images, audio, and dynamic visuals. Multimodal communication pertains to the activities of conveying messages through the synthesis of multiple forms of representational media. ^[4]In the context of promoting rural cultural tourism, the utilization of photographs that highlight the natural landscapes and historical heritage of

rural areas can significantly enhance the visibility and international engagement of the intellectual property associated with these scenic locations, thereby enriching the global perception of Chinese rural regions. According to the World Research Index's analysis of the overseas social media communication power index for Chinese provincial cultural tourism, published in February, natural scenery has emerged as the predominant theme for Chinese provinces in their efforts to foster international communication. For example, images of Mount Huangshan shared by Anhui Province's cultural and tourism social media on Instagram's photo wall on February 24, 2025, garnered over 222,000 likes.

Short videos represent multimodal compositions that amalgamate diverse components, including text, music, images, and video content. ^[5]As indicated in the "Research Report on the Development of Short Videos in China (2024)," these videos are increasingly distinguished by a substantial user demographic and a high level of user engagement. Since 2023, short videos have played a significant role in promoting local cultural tourism and have contributed to the social and economic advancement of urban areas.

3.3 The Strategicization of Narrative Methods

3.3.1 Flexible narrative caters to the preferences of the audience

At the national level, international communication often employs rigid narratives to articulate positions, attitudes, and propositions. In contrast, it is essential for international communication at the local or regional level to prioritize more adaptable narratives that aim to capture attention, generate interest, and address relevant topics. ^[6]This approach is intended to mitigate the challenges posed by ideological and cultural disparities, thereby facilitating comprehension and acceptance among international audiences. Furthermore, by fostering emotional connections with overseas audiences, the dissemination of information within social spaces can be broadened, enhancing both the depth and scope of communication. ^[7]

In February 2025, the People's Daily published an article entitled "The Drum Beats

of the Start of Spring," which narrated the experiences of a diverse group of individuals who established the "Start of Spring Drum Society" driven by their passion for music. This group integrated music with the Jiuhoa Start of Spring Festival, merging artistic expression with traditional culture, and annually heralding the arrival of spring. Their performances not only featured at the opening ceremony of the Hangzhou Asian Games but also extended internationally, as they participated in the 6th International Drum Festival of the 24 Solar Terms held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In Western contexts, there is a pronounced emphasis on "individuality" and the pursuit of personal development. Flexible narratives can identify "common themes" that resonate with foreign audiences. By sharing individual stories, these narratives can evoke emotional responses, thereby not only highlighting the allure of traditional Chinese culture on a global stage but also illustrating the ongoing inheritance and evolution of fine traditional Chinese culture in the contemporary era. China's rural regions are characterized by a rich cultural heritage, a deep historical background, and contemporary trends in business development. The refinement of information can be enhanced through the processes of summarization and generalization. When disseminated within the domestic context, such information tends to favor macroscopic summaries and abstract generalizations. Conversely, international audiences are generally more inclined to focus on specific, tangible cases, dramatic conflicts, and narratives that evoke strong emotional responses.^[8]

In the context of promoting intangible cultural heritage, external communicators often prioritize "reasoning" over "narration." This tendency is evident in their reliance on specialized terminology to describe the history or characteristics of intangible cultural heritage. However, this approach frequently results in the use of obscure and complex vocabulary, which can hinder comprehension and diminish the effectiveness of external communication. To enhance the promotion of intangible cultural heritage, it is essential for communicators to not only provide an overview and describe production processes but also to engage in storytelling, supplemented by reasoning. By weaving

cultural content and national spirit into these narratives, they can convey the underlying spiritual connotations and values associated with intangible cultural heritage, thereby fostering a more intuitive and enriching interaction with the audience. While intricate craftsmanship may be impressive, compelling narratives often leave a more lasting impact. For instance, consider the Spring Festival in Jiuhoa, Quzhou. Given the diverse cultural backgrounds of foreign audiences, a promotional focus solely on folk customs and requisite etiquette may fail to capture their interest or resonate emotionally, ultimately obscuring the underlying narrative. However, if the promotion begins with the legend associated with the Jiuhoa Spring Festival, it can create a more engaging narrative. The story of the brothers Chisongzi and Chisunzi, who lived on Tiantai Mountain and navigated conflicts with the deity Mang Shen over ecological concerns, serves as an illustrative example. Chisunzi's intervention to reconcile the conflict not only alleviated tensions but also contributed to ecological preservation. Such narratives are likely to resonate emotionally with audiences, making them more memorable and effective in promoting cultural heritage.

3.3.2 Diversified narrative subjects expand the perspective of communication

The narrative subject refers to the individual who conveys the story. To a certain degree, the number of narrative subjects influences the volume of external promotional content. The diversification of narrative subjects allows for the representation of Chinese rural areas from various viewpoints, thereby creating a more nuanced, dynamic, and authentic portrayal of the countryside. In China, the government and mainstream media serve as the primary agents in the external promotion of rural cultural tourism. In the context of an all-media era, various self-media platforms and individual users have emerged on short-video platforms, infusing new energy into the external marketing of rural cultural tourism. A notable example is Li Ziqi, a blogger who highlights the beauty of Chinese rural landscapes through her visual storytelling and promotes traditional Chinese culture. Since her official return in 2024, she has amassed over 20.1 million followers on YouTube. Her videos

depict the poetic and tranquil aspects of the countryside, challenging the preconceived notions held by foreign audiences regarding the perceived backwardness and poverty of rural China.

In order to effectively promote rural culture and tourism externally, it is essential to consider the dissemination of rural culture from the perspective of "others," who possess diverse cultural backgrounds. By positioning the "other" as the narrative focal point, it becomes possible for audiences from various cultural contexts to resonate with the narrative content presented by individuals from the same cultural group, thereby enhancing the authenticity and objectivity of the portrayal.^[9] Recently, the prominent streamer "I Show Speed," whose real name is Darren Watkins Jr. and who boasts 38 million followers on YouTube, conducted global live broadcasts from eight locations, including Shanghai and Beijing. These broadcasts garnered a cumulative viewership exceeding 55 million, sparking significant discourse both domestically and internationally. The unedited nature of these live streams, coupled with immersive experiences of Chinese culture, has effectively showcased the "real China" to a global audience, challenging the reductive and negative stereotypes of a "backward China" often perpetuated by Western media. In light of China's recent comprehensive relaxation and optimization of its visa-free transit policy, Quzhou, located in Zhejiang Province, has initiated the "Global Free Tour Quzhou" campaign. This has led to an increasing number of international tourists visiting China to engage with its culture. The feedback and evaluations provided by these tourists regarding their experiences in China will have a direct impact on foreign audiences' perceptions of the country. Consequently, the external promotion of rural cultural tourism should incorporate a broader array of "other" perspectives, including those of international students and reputable internet influencers, to effectively advocate for rural culture and narrate rural stories.

3.3.3 Interactive and immersive experiences enhance narrative effectiveness

Traditional promotional strategies in rural cultural tourism predominantly depend on manual planning and static media, which lack the elements of personalization and cultural

adaptability.^[10] Consequently, these methods struggle to fulfill the contemporary audience's expectations for interactive and immersive experiences. This inadequacy has resulted in an ineffective communication of local resources and cultural significances. Furthermore, traditional promotion often relies on tourists visiting independently, which, due to varying cultural backgrounds, leads many visitors to engage only superficially with the material, thereby missing the deeper spiritual essence. Additionally, reliance on one-way narratives from tour guides contributes to a lack of engagement, rendering the experience monotonous and limiting tourists' content retention, ultimately diminishing their overall expectations.

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality (AR) into the exploration of ancient cultural artifacts and structures in rural settings has the potential to create an immersive experience for visitors. For example, by utilizing a QR code, tourists could access dynamic restoration visuals of cultural relics and comprehensive models of ancient buildings, accompanied by multilingual audio explanations. Moreover, opportunities for hands-on engagement with rural intangible cultural heritage and other operational cultural practices can enhance visitor participation and enjoyment. In the digital realm, short videos equipped with user comment functionalities can facilitate immediate feedback collection by promotional personnel. It is essential for these professionals to establish a robust feedback mechanism to address deficiencies promptly and enhance the overall visitor experience.

4. Conclusion

Enhancing the international influence of China's discourse necessitates a robust approach to capacity building in international communication, particularly through the effective narration of China's stories. Achieving this requires an exploration of diverse narrative perspectives and emotional connections, as well as the diversification of narrative subjects and methods. It is essential to maintain the cultural essence while engaging audiences with the underlying culture, ideology, and spirit of these narratives, thereby positioning rural areas as a

prominent aspect of China's global identity.

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