

Narrative Construction and Cultural Communication of Chaoshan Dialect Films from the Perspective of Cultural Memory — A Case Study of *Dear You*

Daxi Qiu, Wanzhen Zhang*

Zhongkai University of Agriculture and Engineering, Guangzhou 510225, China

Abstract: As an essential part of Chinese culture, Lingnan Culture has its own regional characteristics and rich history. Chaoshan culture is a fundamental element of the Lingnan cultural system and has rich intangible cultural heritage. Local dialects, traditional folk customs, overseas Qiaopi remittance letters, folk crafts, dietary traditions and tea ceremony rituals are all important carriers of the precious cultural memory of the indigenous Chaoshan people and overseas Chaoshan communities. With the development of modern technology and artificial intelligence, the way traditional regional culture is spread has also begun to change. Dialect films are a special type of audiovisual works that have given new practical vitality to the inheritance and development of Chaoshan culture. Taking the popular Chaoshan dialect film *Dear You* as the research object, this paper will investigate how the narrative strategies in the film can promote Chaoshan cultural communication in line with the theory of cultural memory. To promote the living inheritance of Chaoshan intangible cultural heritage and boost the domestic popularization and overseas export of Chaoshan culture.

Keywords: Chaoshan culture; dialect films; narrative construction; cultural memory

1. Introduction

Building the national cultural confidence of the Chinese people has gradually become a crucial direction for the development of Chinese culture in recent years. The primary goal of China's cultural construction is to achieve transformation and innovation in the creative development of fine traditional Chinese culture. In line with the requirements of The 14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Development, modern media have begun to be used as an important way to spread the culture of the minority group and actively promote the inheritance of traditional culture at a grassroots level and enhance the region's soft power [1]. Given the above policy background, regional dialect films have been one of the powerful carriers for the inheritance and development of culture.

Dear You is a low-budget Chaoshan dialect film with a production cost of only 14 million yuan and limited publicity investment, yet it has been very popular among the public through word-of-mouth. It exceeded 100 million yuan in box office revenue within the first ten days of release and created a considerable phenomenon for the domestic regional film market. Based on the actual background of Chaoshan people's migration to Southeast Asia, this film uses real cultural symbols of the Chaoshan people and a simple narrative style. Due to its excellent fame, it has attracted the attention of all sectors of society, sparked public interest in Chaoshan culture, increased people's understanding of local folk customs and historical traditions significantly, and now serves as a strong carrier for contemporary Chaoshan cultural dissemination.

As it is a newly released movie, there has been no sufficient systematic academic research on it so far. Few studies have used the theory of cultural memory as their basis to investigate how to narrate and spread culture. Based on the research gap, this paper will use cultural memory as the theoretical basis, focus on localised dialect expression, cultural symbols and spiritual connotations in the film, and aim to find new and effective ways for the modern spread of Chaoshan traditional culture.

2. Theoretical Overview

The cultural memory can be regarded as the spiritual bond to maintain and sustain the continuous inheritance and development of the ethnic culture in the region. The cultural memory is the historical and emotional record of the development and transmission process and values of the certain group, and also offers the basic theory guidance for the research on the interactional relationship between the regional culture and the modern media communication. In the research of the film and cultural communication studies, the theory of cultural memory will be helpful for us to understand the extraction and reconstruction of local cultural heritages in audiovisual productions, as well as the inheritance of the fragmented folk traditions through narrative art into the inheritable collective cultural tradition. Hence, the introduction of the cultural memory theory

can be beneficial for the study of Chaoshan dialect films in their narration and cultural transmission significance.

2.1 Definition and Characteristics of Cultural Memory Theory

According to German scholar Jan Assmann, the two kinds of group cultural memory under the theory of cultural memory are communicative memory and cultural memory [2]. Communicative memory is the kind of information passed down by talking daily, such as family talk and personal anecdotes. Without a fixed physical support for the memory, it will become distant from the present time and may be forgotten over time.

Cultural memory is, in fact, a series of memorable events and emotions that can evoke a sense of belonging among people. It can be recorded and transmitted in many forms to form the collective memory of the public. This kind of memory can be inherited by future generations and help a group of people establish a sense of shared culture and spirit [3].

2.2 Connection between Theory of Cultural Memory and Dialect Narrative Construction

Oral memory, private individual memory and regional folk memory can all be transformed and preserved permanently by modern media. Oral tradition can be recorded and organised in the form of texts, videos, audio, etc.; scattered private memories can be turned into collective memory through public dissemination; and regional characteristic memories can be refined into exclusive cultural symbols with the help of local material carriers.

Cultural memory is the unique identity label of a particular group, and dialect is the most intuitive symbol of regional cultural identity. Most dialect films are set in the local areas and feature regional histories. Taking advantage of the unique charm of the local area and native dialect, such film and television works are able to deeply move people and strengthen their sense of cultural identity.

3. Embodiment of Chaoshan Cultural Memory in *Dear You*

Against the background of the migration of the Chaoshan people to Nanyang, *Dear You* is a touching story of faith and friendship. The male lead moves to Thailand for a new life and continues writing to the woman back home. He has maintained good communication and support with the overseas fellow villagers in Chaoshan. After his accidental death, his Chaoshan compatriots in Thailand have taken turns writing letters for him and providing financial support for his wife and children back home, keeping to this warm promise for eighteen years. A large number of Chaoshan cultural memory resources have been incorporated into the film to spread this culture widely.

3.1 Dialect Memory

The whole film is in the local Chaoshan dialect, and all the different places in Shantou, Jieyang and Chaozhou have different accents. A large number of daily Chaoshan colloquial expressions are used in the dialogue. For instance, the representative local word “A Ma” has a special fourth tone in daily Chaoshan life and differs from the standard dictionary tone. Widespread screening of the film can allow the public to learn the original Chaoshan dialect. Moreover, there are many modal particles and interjections in the dialogue that exhibit the ancient Chinese linguistic traits preserved in the Chaoshan dialect, and these are used to promote the spread of Chaoshan linguistic culture.

3.2 Symbolic Memory

The movie has many typical material culture symbols from Chaoshan. Among them, Qiaopi, the overseas remittance and letter heritage, is a national and world-class memory treasure. It records the difficult migration experiences and heartfelt family affection of the older generation of Chaoshan people who went abroad to work; it is a carry-over of the cross-generational emotional and historical memory of the Chaoshan community. All the shooting scenes are real places in the central cities of Chaoshan to show the unique regional spatial culture of Chaoshan intuitively. At the same time, typical local elements such as olives, wild olives and Kung Fu tea are also presented to display the unique diet and daily life culture of the Chaoshan people and evoke a strong sense of memory in the public.

3.3 Spiritual Memory

At its heart, the spirit of the film is an excellent notion of right and wrong and love in Chaoshan culture [5]. Through the harmonious interactive relationship of neighbours and overseas fellow villagers, the work demonstrates the humanistic nature of Chaoshan society, which puts loyalty, friendship and sincerity above all else. The love for one another in the movie goes beyond family and friends; it is the most fundamental good of humanity. Deep hometown nostalgia and the longing for family reunions have developed into the collective emotional memory of the Chaoshan people and are now the profound spiritual foundation of Chaoshan culture.

4. Dialect Film Narrative and the Dissemination of Chaoshan Culture.

Dear You has been able to preserve the cultural memory of Chaoshan in a new way and thus serves as a good model for the development of modern works about regional culture.

4.1 Transformation of Carriers of Cultural Memory

With a documentary style, the director of the film has conducted many interviews with more than 300 families in the Chaoshan area and gathered oral histories of the Nanyang migration to create the film. Through lens language, scattered family memories are recorded in a film and become visible, storable and spreadable public cultural memory. It has gathered many scattered personal stories and turned them into a complete public cultural resource to help modern people better understand the migration history of the Chaoshan people.

4.2 Transformation of Cultural Memory Fields

Traditional Chaoshan cultural memory has been dispersed and spread for a long time, lacking organisation. The film can introduce the various cultural resources of Chaoshan and connect different parts of the culture, such as dialect, Qiaopi culture, folk customs, daily life, etc. Cross-regional on-location shooting can be employed to collect dispersed private memories and turn them into united collective cultural memory and create local cultural content that is loved by the public across the country.

4.3 Renewal of Cultural Communication Effect

Many of the old Chaoshan culture memories are gradually disappearing in modern society. However, the hit of *Dear You* has changed that. Audiences of all ages and all walks of life across the country have once again come to appreciate Chaoshan culture after watching the film. The work can enhance the cultural confidence and sense of group identity of the Chaoshan people, advance the construction of regional cultural identity, and ensure the continuous inheritance of Chaoshan cultural memory by domestic and overseas Chaoshan descendants.

5. Conclusion

Dear You is a good example that can help promote the spread of Chaoshan culture. Through the transformation of collective regional cultural memory, this Chaoshan dialect film has incorporated local intangible cultural heritage, dialects, folk customs, food culture, spirituality, etc., to form a complete narrative system. It can go beyond the limitations of traditional oral transmission and spread the linguistic, symbolic and spiritual culture of Chaoshan through modern film. This work can promote the dissemination of Chaoshan culture and build a collective cultural memory system that carries forward the spirit of individual remembrance. It helps strengthen the cultural awareness of the Chinese diaspora in China and abroad towards Chaoshan culture, and also opens up a window to the world for people to get to know, experience and spread excellent traditional culture.

Acknowledgments

This study was supported by the 2025 Guangdong Philosophy and Social Science Foundation — Special Project for Chaozhou Culture Research (GD25CW04); 2025 Special Project of “Foreign Language Teaching Reform Research and Practice” for Undergraduate Universities, Guangdong Province (25GWYB08); The “Hundred Counties, Thousand Towns, and Ten Thousand Villages” High-Quality Development Project-Rural Science and Technology Correspondent Project (KTP20240854).

References

- [1] CPC Central Committee & State Council. (2022). The 14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Development. Xinhua News Agency.
- [2] Jin, S. F. (2017). On Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory. *Foreign Language and Literature*, 33(2), 36–40.
- [3] Wu, S. B. (2021). The evolution of cultural memory theory and its practical significance. *Foreign Language Research*, 6, 123–126.
- [4] Liu, Y. H., Yang, Q. R., & Chen, X. L. (2025). Narrative reconstruction of intangible cultural heritage micro-dramas from the perspective of cultural memory: A case study of Nuo Opera. *Audio-Visual Research*, 8, 68–73.
- [5] Huang, Q. M. (2025, December 3). Decoding the spiritual core of Chaozhou culture. *Chaozhou Daily*. Retrieved from CNKI.