

Return and Reconstruction of the Pearl River Image and Guangzhou City Image

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Abstract: City image is the culture symbol of a city. As the mother river of Guangzhou, the Pearl River has witnessed the historical changes of Guangzhou over time and promoted the connection between China and foreign countries, serving as an important literary image to spread the urban image and continue the urban culture. In order to promote the deep participation of the pearl River literary image in Guangzhou's construction and improve the cultural soft power of Guangzhou, this paper based on the analysis and research of the pearl River literary image and Guangzhou's urban construction, actively seeking for the convergence point of their integrated development.

Keywords: cultural connotation of the Pearl River in literary works; The Pearl River in city image construction; reconstruction of the Pearl River image in city image construction

The spread of city image is helpful in rebuilding the city with the cultural resources, because it brings back people's nostalgic memories and improves their sense of belonging. The Pearl River as the witness of Guangzhou's development, boasts time-honored history and profound culture. For a long time, the Pearl River has been an important image appearing frequently in Ling-Nan Literature. According to statistics, among the literary works from 1959 to 2019 on Guangzhou, there are fourteen collections of prose, nine of poetry, ten books of novels, three of reportage and two of folk literature concerning the Pearl River. Therefore, exploring and creating the cultural connotation of the Pearl River in literary works on Guangzhou will be conducive to improving the utilization of the Pearl River cultural resources and the reconstruction of Guangzhou's image.

1. Cultural Connotation of the Pearl River in Literary Works

The Pearl River appears frequently in literary works about Guangzhou. Looking into the existing literary works, it's easy to find that the Pearl River has been recognized as an important symbol of Guangzhou since ancient times. The image of the Pearl River has conveyed rich cultural connotations, and can be divided into three aspects.

First, it represents an open Guangzhou. The history of the Maritime Silk Road of 2000 years is the best example to demonstrate the cultural openness of the Pearl River. Since ancient times, the Maritime Silk Road has been a conduit for economic and cultural exchanges, with western

goods and culture introduced into China and eastern goods and culture exported and spread abroad. The special geographical pattern of the Pearl River, which forms a fertile delta plain and merges into the ocean at last, has contributed to the economic and cultural prosperity of Guangzhou, making it a global trade center and an exchange place for Chinese and foreign culture [1]. In literary works, there are many descriptions of the Pearl River as an important trading port of Guangzhou. For example, Han Shanggui of the Ming dynasty wrote in his poem of *"To Viceroy of Liangguang Hu Yingtai: My Trip in Guangzhou"* which reads "Along the bustling river, with drums beating and trumpets blowing merchant ships are busy coming and going. Sparkling coral jewelry are imported into markets, as ivory and rhino horns are used in sumptuous banquets" [2]. The poem describes the bustling scene along the Pearl River, where merchants gathered and ships carried various western goods. In addition, according to Qu Dajun, a poet of the Qing dynasty, he portrayed the prosperous foreign trade in his poem "The official and merchant ships compete to sail towards two oceans. The elegant Canton brocade and the silver coins piled up in the port" [3]. These poems well present the prosperous scene of Guangzhou's maritime trade in the Pearl River, and construct an open image of Guangzhou in the literary world.

Second, it represents a diversified Guangzhou. There is a great river culture in Guangzhou, which includes Dan culture (formed by those living in the boat) and Dragon-Boat culture, demonstrating the special customs of Guangzhou. The Pearl River system provides the material basis for the formation of river culture. The Dan people lived in the boat on the Pearl River, with boat as their home and water for their company. In order to ease the hardships in life, and the discrimination and oppression they suffered, the Dan people often sang songs to express their feelings and amuse themselves. Dan songs (also called Salty Water Songs, which are about the river) are an important element of Dan culture, and many of them are related to the Pearl River. For example, Qu Dajun's *New Cantonese* mentioned the unique marriage customs of Dan people. In a wedding, the bride and groom sing to each other, and only when the groom sings perfectly in tune with the bride can the wedding ritual complete [4]. Moreover, Mengyao also mentioned Dan songs in his poem of *"ZhuZhi Poem on the Pearl River"* (ZhuZhi Poem is a poetic form popular in the ancient Sichuan area and depicts local customs and habits.), as "Who is most favored by the

moonlight? Boats are singing in unison the song of the wave. The flower field is as bright as snow, lighting up for the florist who is crossing the river" [5]. He depicted a beautiful scene that Dan people are rowing the small boat with pleasure in the moonlight, while sometimes yelling and selling her flowers, and sometimes singing songs. The sounds of selling, singing and laughing floating over the Pearl River, together with the shuttle-like boat, constitute a unique landscape. Likewise, Dragon-Boat Festival has a long history in Guangzhou, and there are many literary works describing this festival in the Pearl River. Wang Shizhen (*ZhuZhi Poem on Guangzhou*), Wu Jiamao (*ZhuZhi Poem on The Pearl River*), and Shi Menglan (*Poetry on East Canton*) all describe the competitive dragon-boat race and the lively scene that people scramble along the Pearl River to watch the race. With the Pearl River as the carrier, these works well present the diversified local culture of Guangzhou, and the Pearl River is regarded as a symbol of the diversified Guangzhou.

Third, it represents a striving Guangzhou with full courage and fighting spirit. As one of the origins of Chinese modern revolution, Guangzhou has left an indelible mark on the Pearl River and its both sides. Many spots of red tourism are scattered along the Pearl River, which has borne witness to the extraordinary years and the revolutionary memory of Guangzhou. Guan Zhendong wrote in "the Pearl River At Night" that, "Pearl River, how many heroes' blood she has in her veins, how many battle songs she sings, how many touching stories of fight she tells! She is the cradle of modern Chinese revolution. One hundred and twenty years ago, it was here that the Opium War, which shocked the world, broke out. It was here that China's century struggle against imperialism began. After the founding of the Communist Party of China, under the leadership of the Party, the revolutionary wave along the Pearl River reached a higher level, and the largest and longest strike in the history of the world took place here. It was here that the first Soviet Workers' and Peasants' Government of Canton, in the East was established. And the Pearl River is the witness of all this history." Therefore, the Pearl River is not simply a river in people's heart, moreover, it is the symbol of the bravery, fearlessness and fighting spirit of Guangzhou.

2. The Pearl River in City Image Construction

City image reflects the spirit and style of the whole city. For one thing, it has the function of internal integration. It can stimulate the sense of responsibility and pride of all citizens, and encourage them to devote to the economic development and social progress of the city. For another, it has the function of external communication, which is determined by the external intuitiveness of the urban entity image [6]. The Pearl River is of profound significance to Guangzhou, but there are many shortcomings in its development and application in the construction of the city image

First, the utilization of Pearl River cultural resources is monotonous. The Pearl River Night Cruise and the Pearl River Water Bus are the most regular projects, in which the natural scenery of the Pearl River is mainly developed for

sightseeing activities. However, the exploitation and utilization of the Pearl River fail to keep pace with the times, so its resources development is still limited to the traditional sightseeing tour, which has resulted in the lack of novelty and sustainable attraction. For example, the current Pearl River Night Cruise project lacks an in-depth development of historical architectural heritage and historical stories along the Pearl River. Hence, the value of the Pearl River Night Cruise is quite limited. In addition, the Pearl River Water Bus as one of the vehicles for Guangzhou travelling fails to well introduce the city culture on either inside or outside of the bus. Compared with other transportation tools, such as the subway and bus, there are many ways to promote Guangzhou culture, for example, by designing and presenting various videos and slogans inside the bus.

Second, the participant group of activities related to the Pearl River is rather single. Take the Pearl River Crossing and Dragon Boat Race as examples, both of which are important activities with the Pearl River as the carrier. The former is an annual gathering of government officials and citizens. According to the *Guangzhou Chronicle*, Guangzhou had organized at least 16 times of the Pearl River Crossing from 1930s to 1976. Among series of activities of the Pearl River, this activity has successfully enhanced citizens' enthusiasm, promoted national fitness and improved urban identity. However, the main participants of this project are middle-aged and elderly local people aged 45 or above, and the project is not popular among migrants in Guangzhou. Similar situations also exist in dragon boat races. Most of the races are organized by locals from villages or districts in Guangzhou, and the range of participants is limited. However, according to the data of the sixth population census by Guangzhou Bureau of Statistics, young people and migrants account for a large proportion of the population structure in Guangzhou, but they do not take an interest in these activities. Thereupon, it is difficult for them to enhance the understanding of Guangzhou culture and the sense of belonging to Guangzhou through these activities.

Third, the exploitation and utilization level of the Pearl River cultural resources is superficial. Government is supposed to dig out the spiritual core of the Pearl River cultural resources and then design cultural and creative products. Nowadays, with the trend of knowledge economy and the intensification of urban competition, cultural and creative industry has been paid more and more attention by the government and favored by people. "Culture plus Creativity" not only can inject soul and added values into the product, but also is the best way to concretize and spread the abstract image of the Pearl River. The Pearl River and its two sides have abundant cultural resources, which undoubtedly provide possibility for the development of cultural and creative products. In addition, The Forbidden City in Beijing and the Panda IP in Chengdu are both effective in building the city's image, and they provide experience for the in-depth development of the Pearl River cultural resources.

To sum up, the Pearl River has great potential in the construction of Guangzhou's city image. In fact, there is

still a lot to be developed with the Pearl River as the focus in the city image construction of Guangzhou and it is expected to truly integrate the image of Guangzhou with the Pearl River in depth. Besides, the historical and cultural resources about the Pearl River and both sides lack integration and overall planning, so tourists cannot have a deep understanding of the relationship between the Pearl River and the historical and cultural resources along the river. The Pearl River is a historical clue that connects Guangzhou in ancient to the present and China to world. Telling the story of Guangzhou and showing the image of Guangzhou based on the Pearl River can help tourists better understand Guangzhou. However, without a systematic and comprehensive planning, the golden cultural resources of the Pearl River fail to shine

3. Reconstruction of the Pearl River Image in City Image Construction

It is an inevitable trend for literature to play an active role in the urban construction, in which the city image is of great importance. The characteristics of literature and the construction of the city image naturally coincide. More importantly, the Pearl River is a significant witness of the reform and opening up of Guangzhou and its modernization, as well as a mature image in literary works. Combining the Pearl River image in the existing literary works with the Pearl River development in real life will be helpful to explore the reconstruction of the Pearl River image in literary works, and shape the city image of Guangzhou. Methods are provided as follows.

First, spread image on the basis of local characteristics. The Pearl River runs through many cities, but each place has different history and culture, so in the process of development, attention should be paid to the spread and development of differences. The Xinzhou Fishing Village is the largest residence of Dan people in Guangzhou and the major carrier of the Dan culture, which seems like a museum about Dan culture, but few people know about this place, not to mention that they take a visit. Literary works should reshape the Guangzhou culture based on the special elements of the Pearl River, and introduce the unique Dan culture, adding charm to the Pearl River, and improving the image of Guangzhou city

Second, integrate different aspects and spread together. The city itself is composed of various symbols. So we can adopt a “point-line-surface” model to shape the Pearl River image by integrating different resources and spreading the image of Guangzhou. For example, we can explore the historical stories of bridges, ships and docks on the Pearl River by words, and meanwhile, integrate the cultural resources of the tributaries of the Pearl River and represent the whole ecological and cultural environment of the Pearl River region in Guangzhou. Moreover, the public cultural space on both sides of the Pearl River is broad, including old buildings such as Aiqun Building, Haizhu Bridge, Sun Yat-sen University and Shamian Island, as well as new buildings such as Guangdong Museum, Guangzhou Tower, Haixinsha Island, Zhujiang New Town and Pazhou International Conference Center, which could have spread together with the Pearl River to jointly shape

the new image of the Pearl River and Guangzhou.

Finally, adopt a diversified spreading mechanism. At present, the Pearl River image is mainly seen in poetry and prose, in which the method of image construction is rather monotonous, and it mainly serves as the landmark of Guangzhou or places for different activities. But the cultural connotation of the Pearl River is not deeply explored. To solve this problem, there are basically three ways to improve the diversity of spreading methods. To begin with, different creation methods can be adopted, including other genres of literature like films, novels, etc. Furthermore, multiple connotations of the Pearl River can be further discovered. The present connotation of the Pearl River image is mainly traditional, but as time goes by, the Pearl River is bound to be endowed with new cultural significance and needs to be further explored. At last, the spreading methods can be diversified. For example, in the current information age, new media and modern information technology platforms, such as TikTok, Weibo and We-Chat, are very helpful in telling stories.

In a word, Guangzhou is built near the river and gets prosperous with the river. The Pearl River influences the economic development of Guangzhou and cultivates the spirit of Guangzhou. The Pearl River is the important image of Guangzhou city. So it's important to enhance the image, the cultural soft power and the comprehensive competitiveness of Guangzhou with developing and utilizing the Pearl River cultural resources. What's more, literature has an important impact on people's emotions. An in-depth exploration of how literature participates in urban construction will be helpful for telling the Pearl River story well, making people understand the history of the Pearl River thoroughly and inheriting the Pearl River culture. It can make the image of the Pearl River and the city image of Guangzhou more vivid and diversified.

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