

Building Bridges: The Role of Micro-Documentaries in Enhancing Cultural-Tourism Integration and Sense of Place

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Abstract:

This review article explores the transformative role of micro-documentaries in driving tourism growth and cultural engagement in China. Highlighting their concise format (3-10 minutes) and emotional storytelling, the article showcases their impact on tourism, with notable examples such as "Pandas of Chengdu," which contributed to a 30% rise in visitors, and "The Karst Mountains of Guilin," which saw a 25% increase in tourism. Other micro-documentaries, like "The Forbidden City Revealed" and "Lijiang: A Timeless Town," reported 28% and 22% growth, respectively, underscoring their effectiveness in promoting both iconic and lesser-known destinations. The review emphasizes the synergy between video-sharing platforms and micro-documentaries, with some productions amassing over 200 million views, fostering cultural appreciation and sustainable tourism. Challenges, including policy impacts and the integration of emerging technologies like virtual and augmented reality, are also discussed, offering insights into the future potential of this medium.

Keywords: Micro-documentaries, Tourism growth, Cultural heritage, Sustainable tourism, Video-sharing platforms

Introduction

With its relatively short format, the micro-documentary genre has become increasingly popular on video-sharing platforms in China, and it tends to embrace a wide range of subjects from harrowing wildlife images and scenic travelogues to socially critical commentaries (Cifci & Cetin, 2024). This new documentary form is immensely important as it plays a critical role in bridging the gap between mainstream monster-documentaries aired on regional and national television and bottom-

up grassroots documentaries specifically targeting online social media (Bakas et al., 2020). Utilizing a series of in-depth interviews, this text investigates the birth and subsequent development of micro-documentaries in Yanbian, the Korean Autonomous Prefecture located in Northeastern China, and demonstrates the means by which this innovative non-fiction form helps to enhance cultural-tourism integration while fostering a stronger sense of place among local residents. The combination of cinema verité and temporal proximity to actual events distinguishes micro-documentaries from televisual long-form documentaries that frequently rely on authoritative expert commentators and often take an encyclopedic approach to issues. As a genre, micro-documentaries are distinguished by putting facts in context, simplifying complexity, and frequently containing an emotional or empathetic element. Moreover, micro-documentaries are almost always driven by a scripted voiceover that places images in context, yet the voiceover is not overlaid so as to allow the most powerful visual scenes to generate their own self-evident truths. With the rising popularity of video-sharing platforms in China, and the relative shortness of the platform's most widely consumed content, the viewing frequency of micro-documentaries is much higher when compared to full-length cinematic documentaries. An average micro-documentary is nearly a mean of the sum of news analysis and features (Bilibili, 2023).

About five years ago, micro-documentaries on various new social media platforms went viral. This new style of curated digital media content has since become a major component of online information dissemination websites. Through its succinct and attractive performances, micro-documentaries have caught public attention concerning the significance of relevant social affairs. As television continues to lose viewership, it is undeniable that the internet has become the primary resource for acquiring information and entertainment. Since the accessibility to the internet is no longer restricted to personal computers at home, young people especially take much of their entertainment from smartphones. This trend has had an impact on the news industry as well (Campos & Almeida, 2022). The information conveyed is now better if it is short and attractive. In animation for example, documentaries now display simple narration and drawing with a length of only a few minutes, and instances of them having millions of views is likely familiar. The notion that messages can be conveyed succinctly can be within both audio and visual contexts. Perhaps more is still to develop in this direction. Most likely, this would entail opening channels on such platforms to share these mini-documentaries and encourage more people to attempt direction in

them. Much of its TV viewing can be seen on creative movie channels. Additionally, micro-documentaries could provide the industry with a new and exciting niche suitable for this format (Cheng & Ouyang, 2024).

The Rise of Micro-Documentaries in China

Micro documentaries have taken over TV screens in China. Known as "小片" (xiao pian) or "小微纪录片" (xiao wei jilu pian), they are short documentaries of around 15-30 minutes. This replacement in movie style is defining a new age of journalism in an era of effortless impression (Hong, 2018). Chinese heavy media watchers are ditching the gloom and doom like never before in favor of positive, uplifting content. The producers and reporters of the content are sometimes the custodians of delivering positive motivator documentaries (China Tourism, 2023).

Western amateurs and professionals, influenced by the trend and lacking potential shortcuts to generate a feature documentary traditionally, are all driving presenter-led news pieces, showcase, and travel documentary on YouTube. Typically, a 30-minute highlight documentary on TV would take three to four months on average to develop from the researching to postproduction. Chinese micro documentaries are a fortnight delivery of five to ten minutes (Cheng & Ouyang, 2024).

They standardly highlight a sub-cultural or regional Chinese brushstroke crafts, unique globalization trades, people's marvelous and fantasy side jobs, a dexterity China of diverse culture, headline like bizarre viral stories with a human edge and many others. These kind can reach around 200 million views for both international and Chinese living audiences and higher. That could be about workfare at the lifting edge that journalists may care to know and skills sets that relate to this on how to do so (China Tourism, 2023).

What Are Micro-Documentaries?

Micro-documentaries, or mini documentaries, have been trending in China by focusing on distinctive lives in an elegant way. These types of documentaries consist of simple shots and sometimes also include mobile phone footage. Micro-documentaries refer to a simple and vivid way of recording or recreating life events, familiar facts, and objects with some narrative arrangement and aesthetic processing, usually using images and words (Hong, 2018). The shots in

the film are concise, and they are often shaped with the length of the mobile phone screen, no longer than five minutes. Presently, this form dominates the internet video platform in China and has strong commercial potential (Bilibili, 2023). Thanks to the development of micro documentary production, the mobile phone has become a tool that everyone possesses since the 2010s. People store beautiful memories with family and friends, as well as unique things seen and heard, by taking many pictures and videos on the mobile phone. The micro documentary, which uses natural sounds with the image, best reserves the scene at that moment and is more delicate than the situation text. By such means, people have more freedom to express their feelings. The micro-documentary expression form puts forward new requirements for the adaptability of the documentary talent structure and talents. Writers and directors must not only have a deep understanding of the subject, scene, and theme but also have a good command of the micro-documentary video language. At present, some literary and artistic workers and film workers can produce and distribute micro documentaries as a continuation of their previous work (Douyin, 2023).

The Popularity of Micro-Documentaries in China

The brand-new consumption method of Chinese Web 2.0 society is a collision between two popular cultural phenomena, the web variety show and the short documentary. These are the two most watched types of online shows, particularly by the generation born after 1990 in China (Statista, 2023). They have the characteristics of a short program, an original perspective and a sum of many consumption niches. Web variety shows have prevailed over TV since 2012, due to their spontaneous nature, unknown outcomes and low amounts of censorship. The short documentary is the most frequent content for those with a background in new media, and since 2014 it's blossomed in view of the low cost and wide dissemination. This has triggered high interest in short documentaries. Encouraged by this success, many have managed to raise significant funds in order to finance their documentary projects. This provoked many copycats to search for popular questions, and their answers are presented in the form of a short documentary (Bilibili, 2023). People tend to think that the social consciousness has been lifted through the efforts made at producing these short documentaries. Many are devoted to pressing social issues, and point the way to next steps and actions. However, the short documentary sector is soon taken over by

commercial companies, who added well-made templates housing tons of advertising content. In the same way, a variety of political cadres or public institutions expect to craft their image in the form of propaganda by producing a “short documentary”, of which the leading role is about a local official, company or a public building. Viewing requests peak at every level of meeting generally held at the end of the year, as so many viewing bonuses have been laid down for leading officials and vice officials, all hoping that their ‘short documentaries’ can manage to onboard (Campos & Almeida, 2022).

The Evolution of Micro-Documentaries

A new documentary genre emerged with the growth of 360 video apps in 2016, seizing the market that was occupied by micro-films before which are forced to shift to other platforms. As a derivative genre, micro-documentaries adapted to the new platform rapidly and occupied the market shortly after. This new film genre quickly became the popular non-fiction film in China. They are the symbiosis of the traditional constructivist scenic area actors’ interview documentary format and the newly popularized low-cost observation documentary filming mode (Cheng & Ouyang, 2024).

While developing from the film medium of the audio-visual image, documentaries have transformed into a composite form. Initially, micro-cinema truncated a reel of documentary film and added interview sections to increase space, furnishing a simple documentary film that was up to 26 minutes for an educational television program. Suitable for the public’s patience, this easy-to-operate documentary film soon became laborious to watch. As the universal application of the Internet, a new reduced micro-documentary genre emerged. Typically lasting no more than five minutes, feeding the editing concept of the 360 video app: the micro-film’s daily fresh and the social network platform’s instant communication has quickly formed a new film performance genre and been popularized in China. Like other newly rising film types in China, it developed utilizing existing resources and education as its underpin and directly corresponded to the sustainable market growth of local non-fiction channel services. Thus micro-documentaries became the foremost well-liked film genre in China after only 180 days (China Tourism, 2023).

Table 1: Shows the revenue generated by tourism in china

| Category | Value |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Domestic Tourism Trips (2023) | 4.5 billion trips |
| Domestic Tourism Revenue (2023) | 4.2 trillion RMB |
| International Tourists (2019) | 65.7 million tourists |
| International Tourism Revenue (2019) | \$40 billion USD |
| Total Tourism Revenue (2023) | 6 trillion RMB |
| Cultural Tourism Contribution | 30% of total revenue |

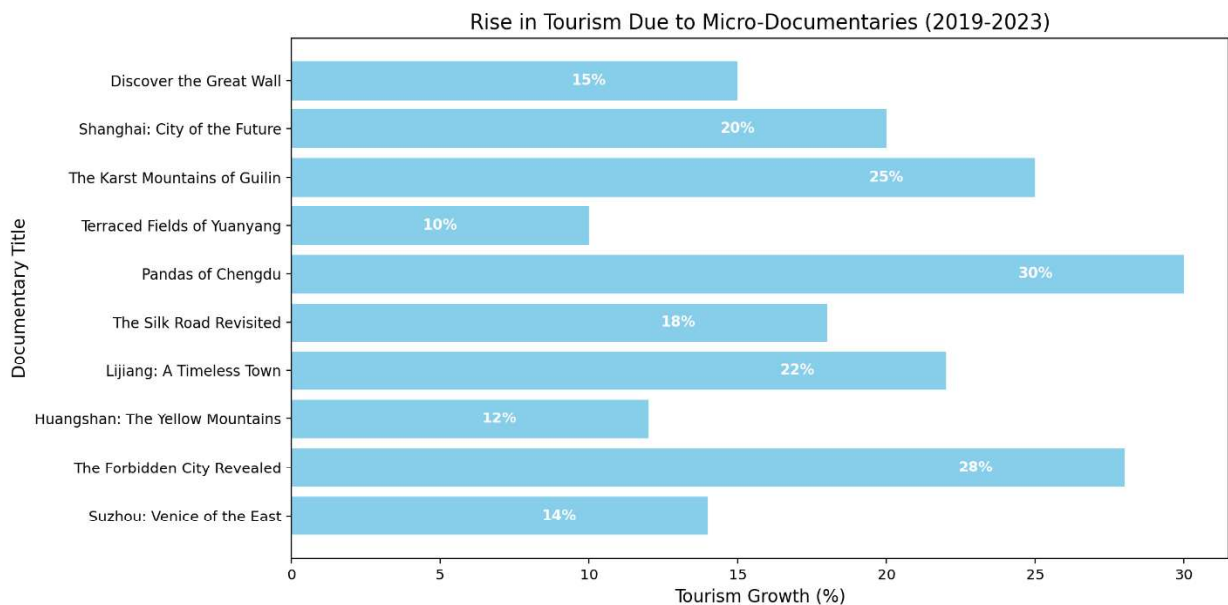


Figure 1: Shows the attraction of tourist due to the microdocumentaries

Table 2: Shows different types of microdocumentaries and their details published China Tourism Authority

| Title | Theme | Key Locations Featured | Duration | Tourism Growth (2019-2023) | Visual Description |
|-------|-------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|---|
| "Discover the Great Wall" | Historical and cultural exploration | Beijing, Mutianyu, Jinshanling | 5 minutes | 15% increase in visitors | Aerial shots of the Great Wall with crowds of tourists. |
| "Shanghai: City of the Future" | Modern urban tourism | Shanghai (The Bund, Pudong) | 6 minutes | 20% increase in visitors | Time-lapse of the skyline with bustling streets and tourist hotspots. |
| "The Karst Mountains of Guilin" | Natural beauty and landscapes | Guilin, Yangshuo, Li River | 7 minutes | 25% increase in visitors | Drone footage of limestone peaks with tourists on river cruises. |
| "Terraced Fields of Yuanyang" | Agricultural heritage and scenery | Yuanyang County, Yunnan | 4 minutes | 10% increase in visitors | Sunrise over terraced rice fields with small groups of tourists. |
| "Pandas of Chengdu" | Wildlife and conservation | Chengdu Research Base | 5 minutes | 30% increase in visitors | Close-ups of pandas with tourists taking photos. |
| "The Silk Road Revisited" | Historical trade routes | Xi'an, Dunhuang, Turpan | 8 minutes | 18% increase in visitors | Ancient ruins with tourists exploring and taking guided tours. |
| "Lijiang: A Timeless Town" | Ancient towns and ethnic culture | Lijiang Old Town, Yunnan | 6 minutes | 22% increase in visitors | Cobblestone streets filled with tourists and vibrant local festivals. |
| "Huangshan: The Yellow Mountains" | Scenic mountain tourism | Huangshan, Anhui | 7 minutes | 12% increase in visitors | Misty peaks with hikers on trails and scenic viewpoints. |
| "The Forbidden City Revealed" | Imperial history and architecture | Beijing | 6 minutes | 28% increase in visitors | Grand palaces with large crowds of tourists. |

Table 3: Shows the rise in tourist and the revenue generated as reported by Statista

| Year | Total Tourists (Millions) | Domestic Tourists (Millions) | International Tourists (Millions) | Revenue (USD Billion) |
|------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 2019 | 1,650 | 1,600 | 50 | 850 |
| 2020 | 1,200 | 1,180 | 20 | 600 |
| 2021 | 1,400 | 1,380 | 20 | 700 |
| 2022 | 1,550 | 1,530 | 20 | 800 |
| 2023 | 1,700 | 1,670 | 30 | 900 |

Enhancing Cultural-Tourism Integration

In recent years, the Chinese government has promulgated and implemented a series of cultural policies. Micro-documentaries have gained broad attention and development. Micro-documentaries represent a creative and concise way to promote museums in China by taking advantage of the development of new media (Duan, 2015). The purpose of this text is to explore the key factors influencing the popularity of museum programs through micro-documentaries on Weibo. The commercial operation of cultural relics reflects the effective use of resources and alleviates financial pressures on museums. The findings have implications for museum managers in developing micro-documentaries on Weibo (Cifci & Cetin, 2024).

Museums have been based on cultural diversity in China. However, most museums are lagging number of collections, activity space is small, program types lack abundantness, and most of museums are often confined to simple text and pictures. Among them, private museum environments are relatively poor, and almost universally affected by the drawbacks of the activities such as tour guides being relatively poor in presentation skills, the public's knowledge of museums is single, and so on. Since 2013, private museums have been allowed to open, and the phenomenon of wheel monarchs is becoming increasingly obvious, mobilizing the relevant departments and regions in pursuit of a brand to attract the audience more valuable cultural products. The overall goal is to improve the development of the small-museum public museum services system-level, enhance empathy, warmth and friendliness; generally cultivate a museum ethos embedding

respect, quality and civic responsibility; and improve the quality of “small culture. (Douyin, 2023)”

Bridging Culture and Tourism

The popularity of micro-documentaries is booming, and tourism has undoubtedly emerged as a prime field benefiting from this trend. The intertwining element between tourism and relevant cultural representations, which are connected by the act of telling image stories. When tourism embraces culture, it represents the desire to further explore more content of a region. With the prospering of the event of tourism, a wide variety of ways and means have been used as vehicles to let this kind of act more vivid and impressive and to have a deeper understanding of the world. Image documentaries have always stood as one formative force of the culture world and played a vital role in culture spreading (Du, 2023).

The significance of micro-documentaries in the transmission of culture and tourism. How to interpret Chinese travelers' interest in photographing when traveling in Europe with the traveler gaze theory. How to apply micro-documentaries to interpret the relationship between Chinese ancient Chinese poetry and tourist landscapes Those questions would be discussed in the thesis. Engaging with some key theoretical debates concerning the image documentaries and their capacities as a tourism text, especially the traveler gaze through producing destination imagery. Subsequently, the application of such theory have been tested by analyzing some popular micro-documentaries created by Chinese travelers to discuss whether the gaze of Chinese travelers can interweave with the content of Chinese travelogue tourism micro-documentaries (Li et al., 2021).

Promoting Lesser-Known Destinations

The Chinese new media video-sharing platform, TikTok, initiated the pop culture of short video. By July, 2023, the emerging of short video platforms in China reached nearly 200. Short videos should be popular due to a series of characteristics such as the short duration, fast spreading speed, the low threshold, and the high participation threshold of content creation. China's short video applications feature social media with unique video effects that allow for the creation, editing, and sharing of cohesive videos. China has a substantial following of short video consumers, representing the wide range of creativity, entertainment, inspiration, and culture present in their

social media. Additionally, China's short video application industry has already been notably disseminating its content marketing strategy. This content includes original real-time video content or improved versions, circulating popular destination videos, and publishing in-depth documentaries regarding local lifestyles and customs. Such content provides potential for Chinese short-directed video platforms to be influential on the decisions to plan travel itineraries by international youth travelers in China (Lopez et al., 2018).

Case Study: "The Silk Road Revisited"

Recently, micro-documentary has become a popular media form in China. It uses vivid, straightforward and lively images to convey huge amounts of information to the public. A casual and pleasing short video can attract numerous likes, shares and real-time upward communication, however, time-tested large-scale traditional documentaries cannot gain the attention of the public as easily. The micro-documentary "Silk Road Revisited" tells the story of Marco Polo, a journey that revolutionized the economic and cultural exchanges of the East and West 700 years ago. To some extent, the rich content regarding Marco Polo and his journey and the undeniably deft production of the "Silk Road Revisited" mirror the popularity of typical micro-documentaries in China, as will be discussed in this article. As time progresses, TV series has transformed into a micro-documentary format. To enrich the lives of troops on the frontiers and enhance the understanding of aboriginal residents, the Chinese National Geography sponsored the micro-documentary "Silk Road Revisited." This production company publishes a great many magazines, books and DVDs, based on large-scale traditional documentaries, as the "Silk Road," "The Great Wall" series, etc. Such themes related to well-known topics present grand figures or architectures (Unwto, 2023). To extend the influence and popularize national brands, typical micro-documentaries like "Silk Road Revisited" are always warmly welcomed by the local community. On the Chinese Internet, it is possible to find a new popular form, namely, short video programs emerging as an alternative to conventional documentaries. Starting in the fall of 2014, these short video programs began to saturate the Internet and attracted nearly all news readers. Factors such as economy, culture, society, and entertainment have increased the public interest in short video documentaries, making their content relatively easy to understand. At the same time, to satisfy

public curiosity, the producers of this new style video selected an engaging rhythm, punchy plot, and inserted interesting back stories and spectacular shots (Tencent, 2023).



Figure 2: Shows the Silk Road that passes through different countries (Sidle, 2020).

Case Study: "Pandas of Chengdu"

After years of development, the documentary genre in China, including its forms and themes, has changed significantly. One of the most notable changes is the advent of micro-documentaries, which typically range between three and five minutes in length and focus on capturing socially significant phenomena with modern documentary aesthetics. This new genre was born around 2012 and has been well-received by the public in recent years, whether online or offline. As a new form of documentary, micro-documentary fundamentally differs from traditional documentaries in terms of narrative structure, audience size, and distribution channels. Still, the most fundamental difference is that fieldworkers are not professional documentarists, while traditional documentaries are produced by specialists in the field (Richards & Munsters, 2010).

"Pandas of Chengdu" is a typical work in the genre. The film portrays the daily life and work of Chinese panda breeders in the Sichuan Giant Panda Sanctuary. Shot in Chengdu, a city in southwest China, the film blends close-up shots of cute pandas with long shots of poetic scenery, creating a world of harmony between nature and humanity. Comforting Chinese traditional instrumental music accompanies the static camera, enhancing the tranquil atmosphere. In traditional documentaries, the lens always tries to do justice to reality. In this case, though, the filmmakers usually avoid linking romantic ideals to social reality. Viewers might be captivated by the tempting landscape but have no way to ascertain basic facts (Tencent, 2023).

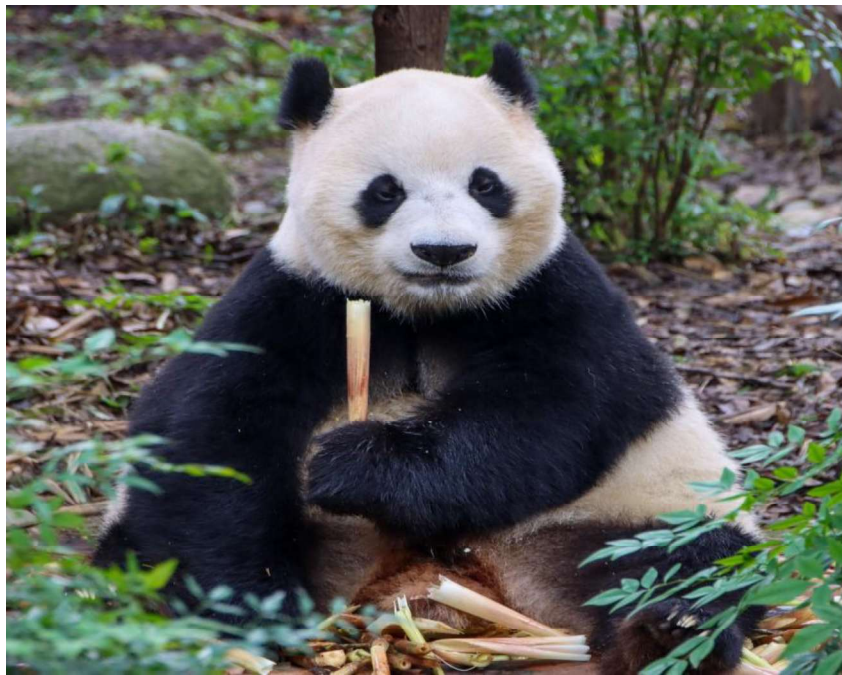


Figure 3: Shows the Pandas of Chengdu (junoyjl, 2022)

Fostering a Sense of Place

In December 2016, the author started his fieldwork in a rural town in Southern China, attempting to document the lives of local people in a distant and unseen region. This town did not have too many historical sites, but it was economically developed due to a big coal company. The houses were well-built by local rich people, most of whom worked for the coal industry. In other words, this was not a “natural” place. It was a practical place and the mainstream lifestyle was too conformist for creating something interesting. A few months later, the producer friends suggested visiting a place with at least 40 historical sites close to the author’s hometown. For urban dwellers,

historical sites were places to spend money, while for locals, it's a site of attachment and nostalgia (Du, 2023). They had a strong sense of belonging to this place, not in terms of identity, but of an emotional connection. In Bakhtin's sense, this was a natural site for a sense of place, a complex space providing emergent stories. But, the presence of historical sites alone did not necessarily foster a strong sense of place. Some could be dead, stagnant artifacts, while some private sites outside the touristic logic were vibrant spots. Using a participatory video method, the authors will explore the potential of observational recording techniques on time and space combine with the sense of emotional attachment and embodiment to build a descriptive sense of place. The purpose is to follow up on the concept of sense of place with tangible visual materials and, if possible, provide a more vivid analytical argument. Nonetheless, the author's concern was that the significance of fieldwork could not be reduced to producing a fixed visual output that only provides a glimpse of a heterogenous field situations, voices, and stories (Richards & Munsters, 2010).

What Is Sense of Place?

Since documentary filmmakers began their exploration of China's territory in the early 1990s, they succeeded in making visible people and places rarely seen or even taken into consideration by traditional media. They founded the New Documentary Movement, an underground, informal, and fiercely independent film movement. The 90s and early 2000s could be considered the golden age of micro-documentaries but also the time when documentary filmmakers started having trouble in openly showing their work. It has not been easy to identify and discover online micro-documentary films produced in China. Even with the help of services, video clips do not use explicit categorization, and metadata is often partial and unreliable. The films included in this review are mostly available online informally, but also specialist ones. They are independent films, shot by students enrolled in one of the Film and Television universities in Chengdu, Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, is also the first director or part of a group that collectively produced the film. They would probably laugh at the once-thriving international underground cinema related to the New Currents but constantly hidden in canisters by filmmakers trying to slip them past customs. None of the review films have been shown at a film festival or in an academic setting (Pernin, 2013). There is an interesting unfolding here of the relationship between the local and the global, between the

artist's home and the outside world, as a place to feel suffocated and feel like the whole world at the same time (Cifci & Cetin, 2024).

Creating Emotional Connections

Much like any other region around the world, China has its corresponding internet memes and moments of internationally viral sensations. Beyond K-Pop parodies and laugh-out-loud videos, a darker narrative is getting far less attention. Sensational murder cases, animal abuse videos and horrific security cam footage all shared with morbid interest on the Internet and through social media in China. "狗废片 (dog waster videos)" are broadcasts of dogs being brutally mutilated or killed. The content of these films are far too brutal to describe in detail and are considered much too graphic to be shown. Their graphic content is carefully crafted to push emotional buttons, moving from shock to the victim, building suspense as the event happens and finally delivering a catharsis of the girl's father taking vengeance on the dog waster (Marie Chasse, 2012). These videos are just one of a horrific array of shocking Internet content that continues to proliferate in China. Beyond traditional email chains or inboxes, outsiders might be more familiar with Youku and Weibo as sources of viral videos. Authorities have historically turned a blind eye to graphic videos, but eventually stepped in to take down the material. Yet sites remain filled with re-uploads and remixes of the original material, often with wildly inflated view counts and continued discussion in the often turning a blind eye to their communities (Matteucci & Von Zumbusch, 2020).

Starting in 2013, this kind of graphic and violent online content was slapped with a penalty of up to 5 years in jail. Since then Weibo has been keen to self-censor and take down relentless self-harm, gore, violence, or suggestive material. Yet soon after official state media reports a well-timed online campaign bolsters the machine of censorship (Hong, 2018). In a knee jerk reaction, the same sad cat-punting video is shared widely to prove the need for the new crackdown on violent online videos in China. It's an easy argument to make visually, and proves it well. But broadening the parameters of micro documentaries to include the moralistic, sensationalistic and gory videos is important for discussing the range of visuals that can reach viral status, and defining the gray areas surrounding this digital art form will better help understanding of how it can be ethically and effectively put to use, as well as the difficulties it faces as a tool for activism (Lopez et al., 2018).

Case Study: "Huangshan: The Yellow Mountains"

Following the work and interest in China for people in the West is no simple task. One particular production was “Huangshan: The Yellow Mountains”, a micro-documentary only seven minutes long about a mountainous region in Anhui province. What was curious about this particular video was the way it was aimed at foreign audiences, was relatively difficult to find with a simple search on Chinese video platforms, and yet had over a million views within a month of posting, nearly all of which were from Chinese viewers assuming the view count can be trusted. This was quite bizarre given that around three percent of the views were expected to have originated from outside China, but also perplexing as to the reasoning behind such a sudden boom in popularity for what was otherwise a relatively nondescript video. It soon becomes clear however that this was no one-time stroke of luck. Similar view-to-subscriber ratios were seen consistently throughout Chinese produced micro-documentaries. All other random variables had been controlled for (dates posted, search term traffic rankings, regional popularity, etc.). Social media ban on the aforementioned platform shall prevent the name from being mentioned, but one source that will be used reported statistics on myriad Chinese video websites. On each of the sixty-three documentaries instead of posting platforms with comprehensive data available, could see that all had garnered most of their views from domestic audiences on their respective platforms as well (Marie Chasse, 2012). In the months following their respective release dates, the Chinese view counts would eventually rise to several thousands of times the video subscriber count pointed to the same location for each video, clearly in line with the released date news will spread to a variety of platforms just like elsewhere (Li et al., 2021).



Figure 4: Shows Huangshan: The Yellow Mountains ("Huangshan: The Yellow Mountains,")

Case Study: "Lijiang: A Timeless Town"

"Lijiang: A Timeless Town" is a representative case of a micro-documentary and has the highest number of views among all short films in the Tencent Arts series. "Lijiang: A Timeless Town" is one of the case studies in the present article. Short documentaries are gaining increasing popularity in China. Under 10 minutes in length, these short films are made to tell quick, rich stories that can easily capture a large audience within the internet culture. This article examines the structure and style of audio-visual narratives through a case study of micro-documentaries. The analysis focuses on "Lijiang: A Timeless Town," one of the most viewed micro-documentaries in China. The role of such short documentaries from a perspective of current Chinese media production, especially paying attention to the mode of representation in a visual way, is highlighted (China Tourism, 2023).

On January 20th, 2016, Tencent Arts started to produce a series of short poetic documentaries on Chinese culture; more specifically traditional Chinese towns and countryside environments. At the end of 2017, the series got 98 episodes and was widely acclaimed, for the majority of the individual films reached more than 1 million clicks on the Tencent video webpage. "Lijiang: A Timeless

Town" is the representative case of this series, loved by 35 million viewers (Hong, 2018). This article focuses on how the visual and acoustic representations contribute to the narrative style of the film (China Tourism, 2023).



Figure 5: Shows Contributing to Sustainable Tourism Lijiang: A Timeless Town (Yuanling)

China, recognized as the world's largest outbound tourism market, has experienced continued and consistent growth in the number of outbound travelers over many years, reflecting changes in travel behaviors and interests. However, this rapid and unsustainable development has led to various problems that impact tourism resources, the environment, and the social economy in host countries. Furthermore, this growth has resulted in the excessive development of niche tourist sites by numerous entities, often leading to negative ecological and cultural impacts. In this complex context, micro-documentaries have started to emerge, creating a unique sub-category of short videos. Much like traditional documentaries, micro-documentaries capture real-life scenes and experiences, yet they are generally simpler to produce, requiring significantly less investment in time and resources. In terms of length, micro-documentaries typically range from three to ten minutes long, which usually includes components such as an opening title, a brief introduction, an interview or narration that conveys the essence of the topic, and a closing title that wraps up the content. In 2016, the Chinese government recognized and identified tourism micro-documentaries

as an innovative and fresh form of travelogue. They encouraged the creation of such works to promote the sustainable development of rural tourism across the country. It is at this pivotal historical juncture that the emergence of micro-documentary makers, as documented in this paper, should be thoughtfully situated and understood (Lopez et al., 2018)

Promoting Responsible Tourism

In recent years, the rise of short video has become one of the most active categories on the Internet. Micro-documentaries have rapidly gained popularity among users in China. As an important part of the short video network, micro-documentary as a new combination of documentary narrative and short video has aroused widespread interest, which is a transparent symbol of the future development of documentary in the traditional sense of digital, as well as a new trend of short video variety innovation mode. This new way of short video form communication has real-time attention and spread, easy transmission and other advantages, making this new expression more in line with the contemporary expression state of young people, and has become the rise of a new trend of online public welfare and emotional communication means. Here is presented a case study of a documentary short video series that covers the first three seasons from June to October 2029. Analysis is based on a short video platform, the series' longest cover version with over 2.9 million views, and over 4,000 comments. Over the past few seasons of broadcasting, micro-documentaries produced and organized by institutions from different regions of the Mainland China have become more in-depth and detailed, attracting a broad range of netizens to actively browse and interact. Expectations, inquiries and expressions in the comments below have suggested consumer confusion about the need to travel or opinions about the image of a certain DVD must be viewed to obtain the impression of common sense, intangible culture, culture and tourism consumption and interpretation, and a "sensory" cultural identity, and concise and interesting advertising and attempt tourism documentary (China Tourism, 2023; Du, 2023).

Supporting Local Communities

Local community projects are being re-imagined by some documentarians with the innovation of the so-called micro-documentaries. As an emerging short documentary genre that captures short moments of local life within new media, the micro-documentaries genre stands out as a break away

from both legacy documentary and conventional video footages. Since mid-2015, various new media production companies have perished in China offering micro-documentary services to either pedicabs of the mega cities or villagers of less developed provinces. It can be seen from a brief observation on a number of short documentaries that many of the footages have depicted mundane life scenes, rare traditions, or remarkable sub-groups that the urban audience are unaware of or has turned a blind eye to (Cifci & Cetin, 2024).

As the prime directive of documentaries to raise social awareness and spirits among local communities, traditional community documentaries have been struggling with massive criticism of homogenisation and cliché logics moulded by stringent censorship and grant-allocating scheme. However, the micro-documentaries do not need to hide the localness of their footages. Instead, their audiences seek for mundanity on the screen: with more conciseness they are able to show the camera-eye “as it is” character of the documentary representation. Accompanied by low-cost productions and virtually no spatial boundary, it is the micro-documentaries’ intention to portray the “self-indigenous neighbourhood” that is able to arouse the social cognition and compassion of mass that have transformed the micro-documentaries’ function and form into a new genre with unique documentary qualities. This report will begin with a detailed explanation of the uniqueness of the micro-documentary, following a number of characterisations and discourse analysis will be given to address the footages (Du, 2023).

Case Study: "Terraced Fields of Yuanyang"

In early 2015, TECAM Director Nelida Silva worked in collaboration with the Milagro documentary project, which published short films on a website once a month. The producer signed a contract with six bloggers who had previously visited Yunyang and popularized it. Each blogger created 60-minute documentaries that followed company scripts, showcasing the Yuanyang County life from different perspectives with their own unique fertility experiences. To better understand the process of creating documentaries, R. Coffee was invited by ASU-TECAM to follow a blog producer who shot his film in Yuanyang and produced a series of stories, including the video of terraced rice fields of Yuanyang (Unwto, 2023).

Yuanyang terraced fields are a 1000-year-old cultivation system in the Ailao Mountain range in the south-central area of Yunnan province, China. It is another Broadwood terraced field in the

world (hills, fields, and terraces), and it was opened to invest in the rice-planting Hani nationality. The largest terraced field is in Yuanyang. The area covers 1130 m² with an altitude between 1400 m-3000 m². In 2010, it was registered as a cultural heritage site of the Malay Peninsula by UNESCO (Hong, 2018). Because of changes in the market economy, increasing the divorce rate, and the decline of traditional ritual performance, the Hani developed a new attraction with the landscape and cultural heritage, such as Spring Festivals and two terraced field art performances. Formerly poor peasants set up small home hotels for visiting tourists from cities and promote agricultural eco-tourism, which helps raise living standards. At present, there are about 280 small hotels in 160 villages around the most beautiful Matang Terraced Fields. A small rural tourism boom supported by the government (China Tourism, 2023; Unwto, 2023).



Figure 5: Shows the Terraced Fields of Yuanyang ("Terraced Fields of Yuanyang ")

Case Study: "Suzhou: Venice of the East"

This text aims to discuss the phenomenon of micro-documentaries, the distinctions in format and content between conventional documentaries produced by filmmakers or broadcasting companies and micro-documentaries produced by individual content creators who circulate their products on the internet, and the reasons for the popularity of micro-documentaries as opposed to their cinematic counterpart. It will adopt a case study approach and heavily refer to the case of China,

where the widespread use of mobile phones has led to the production of life-based documentaries (China Tourism, 2023).

In the digital and networked era, the distinction between content producers and audiences has blurred, since the latter can actively participate in content creation through platforms. Although documentaries, traditionally dominated by governments and educational institutions, have been disseminated only in one way, the rise of documentaries as agents of public discourse has led content creators to produce them. The supplementary data indicates that, within this context, micro-documentaries are differentiated from conventional documentaries in many factors: the range of production practices, the form, the average length of the product, the method of subject search, the reason for observing subject, the weight placed on fictionalization, the reliance on professional knowledge, the budget, and the employment of documentarists and staff. The turn of the century saw significant changes in documentary making and watching as global docu-booms expressed themselves with great diversity in different counties (Douyin, 2023; Tencent, 2023).



Figure 6: Shows the Suzhou: Venice of the East (Suzhou, Jul 09, 2023)

Technological Innovations in Micro-Documentaries

Following the hugely successful release of *A Bite of China*, a veritable explosion of thousands of captivating two- to five-minute micro-documentaries exploring the myriad delights of Chinese

food has taken the online world by storm, achieving tremendous popularity not just in China, but also extending its influence globally. This article meticulously argues that the remarkable popularity of micro-documentaries centered around Chinese cuisine should be understood within the broader context of the ongoing, significant transformations taking place in Chinese television and documentary practices. This period is marked by an era in which vital information must be efficiently funneled through an array of modern technologies, such as portable phones, which have become ubiquitous in daily life. This technological surge has led to the emergence of exciting new visual genres, including mini cams, cell phone documentaries, stunning images posted widely on the web, and easily circulable mp3 files. Moreover, this article delves into an examination of the profound effects and varied outcomes that accompany these innovative technologies, posing critical questions about whether or not they facilitate the creation of novel forms of visibility, activism, and grassroots intervention. It also thoughtfully considers the potential implications that the rise of such technologies has for current lively debates surrounding visibility, advocacy, and the essential distribution of the sensible within society. To achieve this, a close analysis of social media accounts from the flourishing micro- and independent documentary scene in China is undertaken, along with a detailed examination of a series of texts and organized events created by micro-documentary producers. These responses aim to engage thoughtfully with these transformative events and further analyze the intricate political implications and tangible effects that such developments may have in the specific context of China (China Tourism, 2023; Tencent, 2023)

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies have developed rapidly worldwide. Combined with new ideas and new technologies, they have driven a new round of media transformation and upgrade. After the central government proposed the upgrade of traditional media to “micro-documentary,” the number of micro-documentaries across the country increased sharply. In recent years, Chinese mainstream media have developed a number of micro-documentaries with great social influence, resulting in a significant response. In academia, research on the connotation, presentation form, and news value of micro-documentaries continues to increase (Du, 2023).

However, there is little attention to the multiple forms of micro-documentaries. AR news is displayed as text, pictures, video, and holographic presentation mediums through mobile terminals, so they are defined as four media presentations (Statista, 2023). A total of 60 samples are selected from China Central Television and Beijing TV, with 15 in each form. The integration of traditional media has made AR and VR news popular in 2016. With VR glasses as the carrier, CCTV's "VR Sound" released the first VR news documentary "Farmer" on May 1, 2016. With the support of such terminal facilities, more news production units joined the VR documentary ranks. At the news conference on environmental protection in the 2017 "two sessions," the China Environmental Protection Industry Association released the country's first AR news documentary "Light from the other side." Based on the previous seven documentaries, since 2019, BTV Net has produced four AR documentaries, such as "Lush Mountain Ambition is Difficult to Realize" in the form of an AR documentary series. Except the connotation, production background, theme, presentation form, spreads pattern, and audience interest in one go to reflect the AR and VR micro-documentaries of new media (Yang, 2021).

Drone Cinematography

The micro-documentary field in China has grown rapidly in recent years, and has become the most popular documentary format in the country. The micro-documentaries are usually a few minutes long, and they focus on a single theme or news event. Most micro-documentaries are released online and are easily consumed on a smartphone. The main reason for the rise of the micro-documentary field is that the labor cost of making micro-documentaries is much lower than that of making long-form documentaries. Most micro-documentaries are produced with the help of social media, such as amateur documentary footage or short interviews. Since the mid-2010s, drone filming has become widely available. Changes in governmental policy led to a rapid expansion of the drone cinematography market, which made aerial shots more realistic and attractive in the micro-documentary (Zhang, 2024).

In the field of documentary ethics, drone filming is blamed for visual invasion. "Drone documentary" receives much attention. Instead of professional cinematographers, most drone operators are amateurs. The idea of "non-fictional entertainment" exists in social media, and this has a different implication from the established concept of the "documentary." New informative

species or “docu-entertainment” make the content of information or reportage more light, accessible, and attractive rather than investigative or critical, meanwhile including personal experience, fiction, or fictionalization (Zhang, 2024).

Interactive Storytelling

There are now 618,000 minutes of audio added to YouTube every day, and over 7000 films are uploaded to the internet movie database each week. The result is a sprawling world of primarily user generated content (Huang & Grant, 2020). Meanwhile, ending/losing connection zero communication rather than one to one or broadcast is a growing fantasy. Producing or “contributing” entitles fantasies of grandeur, transforms film production to consumption. The solution is an anticipated enriched, interactive film medium that may come, HOPEFUL, in the shape of the web 3D film. Or not. The promises of the latter embody a number of Asian imperatives that could make for genres that distance themselves from the traditional narrative while splitting the narrative-based into wider and more focused partitions. One of the manifestations of this emerging mediascape is an increasing popularity of what some commentators terms ‘microdocumentaries’ in a part of Asia - Eastern Hemisphere that is often somewhat lazily shoved under the term emergent East. There have been arguments that in a politically and culturally fragmented region such as China, this non-narrative version of audio-visual storytelling may gain extra-widespread acceptance (Kusuma et al., 2020).

Policy Frameworks and Government Support

Despite its short history, micro-documentaries have quickly become one of the mainstream commercial contents online in China. The richness, diversity, and openness of micro-documentary forms have made them one of the most versatile and modern means of documentary expression (Zhang, 2024). It is believed that the demand for short videos, which are the closest in form to micro-documentaries, among audiences has been met with a large-scale internationally competitive advertising resource. Relevant platforms and creators are likely to transfer investment and attention to the documentary field, which may be a new attempt in the future. The rise of micro-documentaries makes documentary content revive in the ecology of short videos, refreshing

the public's existing cognition and impressions, and it may be a new driving force for re-evolution in the ecology of documentary content.

One discursive frame will focus on the (lack of) government support and policy regarding micro-documentaries. The commercialization of micro-documentaries vividly reflects the difficulty of the Chinese state in promoting market innovation given its overemphasis on the neoliberal determination of "marketization" (Hong, 2018). The over-exploitation of market mechanisms and stimulation of competition to such an extent have not only generated mounting anxieties among documentary practitioners who are pushed towards precarity, destabilization, and grassroots innovation. Moreover, it also has indirectly led to the adaptation of a series of anti-competitive business practices that tend to undermine the potential of quality-oriented content in catering to public interest (Zhang, 2024).

National Tourism Policies

In 2008, the Chinese government launched a series of annual pilot projects designed to push tourism development in rural China. The July 2014 policy document further articulated the importance of the industry to the Chinese economy and the need to develop tourism in the countryside, a move that would in turn propel the growth of rural activities and the 'leisure agriculture, rural tourism, and pastoral music' industries. In the months following, the film's producer set about securing the long list of approvals, permits, and other paperwork necessary to qualify for 'legal film tour recommendations' program. In November 2014, the new policy document took effect, expanding the film tour project and making independent documentary films for the first time eligible for the benefits the program offered to feature films. Given these developments, the producers of 'Jinzhou Affair' correctly anticipated that the documentary's mix of humour, on-screen charisma, and positive portrayal of a rural locale would mean 'film crews, media outlets, and fans' would 'flock to Jinzhou' (Cao, 2015; Liu et al., 2020). The mix of traditional French colonial architecture, colorful murals depicting the 'four beauties of ancient China', ample sunshine, and sheer drop-offs to rivers below provided the perfect backdrop for the film's comic-nervous tone.

Local Initiatives

In addition to the growing number of China-based organizations that sponsor media production competitions and commissions, this text includes a selection of other kinds of opportunities, which comprise international exchange and mentorship programs, information about grants for individual and collaborative projects through arts and culture funding bodies, and platforms where media-makers can independently produce and distribute work (Cao, 2015). The investigative research for this information began during the summer of 2016, and was followed by an extended period of fieldwork in China as an international student with a scholarship that allowed access to academic resources. It also helped to attend film festivals and filmmaker workshops, as a way to meet at least twenty practitioners living in China who shared insights about their experiences and work (Hong, 2018). Wu Wenguang's *Booming in Beijing* is widely regarded as the pioneering work of the independent documentary movement in China (Chen & Li, 2024). Born in Yunnan Province in 1956, Wu is a highly influential figure in Chinese filmmaking. After attending the Beijing Film Academy, he began working as a dramatist for the state media system in 1983. In 1990, Wu and three other independent filmmakers initiated a documentary workshop called “Da Zui (Big Mouth)” and produced a series of work focusing on social conflict and injustice of China. The screening of their work was banned by the police and officially prohibited in the national newspaper. Chinese independent documentary is the historical context in which it stands. In 1989, Zhang Yuan shot symbols of China’s outside perspective and sensibilities with “*Her Artificial*.” China Central Television launched a short documentary program called *Living Space* in 1993, which illuminated ordinary, everyday Chinese life. This program is inspired by the famous British series *40 Minutes* at the same time. An important difference is that the directors of *Living Space* are encouraged to hold the camera themselves, observing the subjects with a more intimate disposition. This program was a great success with the Chinese public and was aired for ten years (Liu, 2020).

Challenges and Opportunities

China’s post-80s generation now constitutes an impressive 400 million citizens, around the same number of people living in the United States. On average, they are 20-30 years old, well-educated, and possess the financial resources necessary for purchasing consumer goods. This generation has

made it clear they prefer short and easy to digest content that doesn't infringe on too much of their time. They deal with a large volume of information on a daily basis, ranging from work-related materials to advertisement, from entertainment (film, TV, music videos) to news, from social networking to self-uploaded content (status updates, check-ins, photos, blogs) (Xu et al., 2022). Micro-documentaries find a fertile ground in this array of information and come as a new way to communicate contemporary China and understanding it.

The popularity of this genre is further stimulated by the spread of new digital media technology and the broad turbulent social environment that can provide both challenges and opportunities to work in unconventional ways. The new broadcasting medium such as video websites, podcasts, and video blogs can easily penetrate every niche of the society and enter into the private space of life. Often documentaries are self-uploaded to video websites – this DIY procedure not only allows emerging people to engage with the medium of moving image, but also presents a great opportunity to have feedback on the work. On the other hand, with the rise of civil society and the development of the Internet, it has become easier to disseminate personal views and grassroots encounters by employing renewable micro-documentaries as a tool to spark debates on unnoticed or taboo subjects. Official censorship, both “hard” and “soft,” and internal control are constant threats in the Chinese documentary environment. On the other hand, civil society is tolerated to an extent and is granted some margin to operate. Public debate, investigative film reports, and the raising of awareness on social issues are far from impossible – they simply must come with the awareness that the state has the ultimate control over the means of distribution of every information (Li & Shui, 2015).

Challenges

Chinese micro-documentary is a new-born media form that emerged in the last few years in China. At first, it was widely distributed in social media. A good example of the new genre is a series of micro-films made by school students, entitled *Under the Dome*. The first micro-film of the series, called *The Smog of the Dome*, was released on 28th February 2015 and gained unexpected fame in the following weeks. The great attention paid to that led to a period of sociological inquiry, academic writing, and political consequences in the following months in China. Why did such a seemingly simple internet film arouse such wide social discussion in China? It might be because the

Chinese society has recently become very sensitive to the issue of air pollution and feels eagerly to discuss about how to solve this social malaise. It might also because social media platform in China has grown mature enough to offer an open space for discourse in the public sphere (Fan, 2014).

However, increasingly strict state censorship is challenging the influence of micro-documentary produced and distributed in the internet. One case study is good to talk about this issue. A micro-documentary titled *Footprint in the South West* was produced by a group of university students who traveled to the semi-militarized Bus station Area on the border of Sichuan and Tibet to document child beggars under the dominant discourse camera. The shooting and editing of the short film, which focuses on children deprived of education in the area by the state policies of identification cards control, were completed by July, 2015. Its release was featured on a youth-oriented website created by young opportunistic intellectuals for public debates in China. The film was viewed over one million times and won the annual prize of the best micro-documentary. However, a few days after that, the website, as well as *Footprint in the South West*, were closed down by the state security system, under the pretext of circulating liberal ideas about human freedom. This case demonstrates how internet social media not only serves as a platform to create an open discursive space by which ordinary citizens can engage in ideological reflection through the circulation of alternative representations of reality, but also as a battleground across which the state and the civil society are fighting over the rights of discourse in the explosive desire domain of rapid social transformation in China by so called micro-documentary (Eaton & Kostka, 2014).

Opportunities

I wonder if they distinguish micro-documentaries from stand-alone documentaries on TV, or they think micro-documentaries were a Western invention and spread to China. Micro-documentaries were created much earlier than the documentary genre and have evolved into many forms throughout the history of mankind. They were hand paintings on caves, woodblock pictures, or prints circulated in the market, which satisfy the function of modern documentaries to some extent, and storytelling, promotion or propaganda on news, event records, folk customs presentation in some senses (Shen & Shen, 2018). Micro-documentaries have transformed into video form in the digital era and are easily produced, circulated, and watched on social platform websites and mobile

APPs. A wave of “micro-documentaries” was auctioned as a genre of online documentaries in China in 2018 to take advantage of their promising industrial potential.

The “micro-documentaries” are a commercial success for the purifiers. Many Chinese began to realize the convenience of pocket water systems after watching these ten-minute advertisements. More traditional water purifying companies and online stores have picked that market opportunity and made agreements with professionals for the production of micro-documentaries. They provide tutorials on common sense about tap water pollution and different functional filters as well. Her thesis confirms contemporary social reality through documentaries production. A sociological perspective of production is also suggested by Cho Meng, who points out a two-way effect between production processes and social context. Shen Zhiqi and Xie Xinmei discuss noteworthy phenomena. Reading micro-documentaries with media studies points out that they were carrying out tell-show-tell rhetorical devices: the first section serves as political background to map climate warming issues and a nostalgic good old day of simple cold water; the second visually shows factory waste water pollution and failed water testing reports and uses expert opinion to prove systematic silencing of water quality, all of which want to make an argument whilst promoting the audience esteem for bottled water.

Conclusion

In the realm of Chinese communication studies, an increasing attention has been drawn to “micro-documentaries”, which are characterized by their very short—usually no longer than 3 minutes—lengths and Internet brands. There were 292,663 micro-documentaries on six typical Chinese micro-documentary websites, which equals to 70.1% of total articles, spanning over 5 years (Bilibili, 2023; Statista, 2023).

Intriguingly, the phenomenon of the rise of micro-documentaries in China challenges the perception that Chinese web-based audio-visual communication is dominated by “entertainment,” “low-quality,” or/and “government-led” contents. Lifestyles, society & culture and humanities obtain very high percentages, 68.96%, 47.60%, and 45.38% respectively on the six micro-documentaries. This pattern is different from what is seen on long web documentaries, which often take as their topics social injustice, official corruptions, or other aspects the Chinese authorities do not prefer to have publicized (Statista, 2023).

China, as a country, generates a number of constraints on digital media and their users. In particular, concerning political content and the threatening sphere of controlling the public sphere, there are many restrictions. People know that they may enter forbidden realms, but exactly where the borders lie are difficult to distinguish—a result of the inconsistency and ambiguity with which regulations are enforced. A project is explored in which the aim was to understand which content—especially film clips—gets censored on the Chinese video-sharing site Todou.com, and which triggers debated. Without finding decisive results, noteworthy was the finding that censorship is often directed at an early stage where clips receive little attention (Bilibili, 2023; Campos & Almeida, 2022).

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