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Fiction and Memory: Reflection and Discussion on the Phenomenon of "Fictional Place Names" in Chinese Film and Television Works

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Abstract: As a text phenomenon that is increasingly frequent and dense in the creation of film and television art, "fictional place names" have a long literary and artistic tradition and typical film production characteristics, and have become a conventional creative practice. Taking China as the research object, this paper combs through the mechanisms behind the phenomenon of "fictional place names" in film and television works, and finds that the causes involve the combined effects of three levels: the "non-indexical" creative exemption based on imagination and fiction, the public opinion prediction to prevent social public opinion risks, and the policy response to obtain approval and production rights. The paper examines the underlying cultural logic of the phenomenon of "fictional place names," arguing that it at least includes the struggle between media geography and topophilia based on the spatial representation of film and television works, as well as the gaming between cultural orthodoxy and film and television reconstruction that loosens the framework of memory. Finally, focusing on the issue of how to balance individual imagination and collective memory, the paper analyzes the dynamic relationship between "real" and "fake" place names and the significance of fictional spaces in film and television works.

Keywords: Fictional Place Names; Fiction; Cultural Memory; Media Landscape

Introduction

The continuous iteration of information technology and the accelerated development of artificial intelligence (AI) have provided multiple perspectives and forms for the representation and constitution of "reality", also making the storage, encoding, and processing of memory more efficient. In the context of Baudrillard's "hyperreality"(1981), memories of reality are particularly cherished. However, in China, "fictional place names" have increasingly appeared in domestic film and television works in recent years, and have even become a default creative convention in certain genre texts. Since "fictional place names" have a certain spatial relationship with real geography and film images (simulated spaces), the topic discussed here should fall within the scope of film geography. However, this is clearly not a discussion that can be completed within the realm of macro human geography. According to the principle of materialism that matter is primary, there is a temporal sequence relationship between the "false" of fiction originating from consciousness and the "true" of physical reality, as emphasized by Jan Assmann (2011), "memory helps us to locate ourselves in the long river of time beyond the boundaries of life and death." Therefore, the logical connection of the above problem also involves the theoretical domain of cultural history and memory studies from the underlying structure. When examining the frequent phenomenon of "fictional place names" in film and television works through memory theory, many aspects are worth in-depth reflection and theoretical analysis.

Memory and memory (or recollection) theory have long been deeply explored by scholars from various fields. For instance, Freud (1953) analyzed the relationship between personal memory, dreams, and the unconscious from a psychological perspective. Bergson (1911), with "duration" as his core concept, transformed the classic mind-body difference into a discussion of the differences between perception and memory. Through the discussion of embodied practices (or bodily habits) and commemorative rituals, Connerton (1989) proposed the concept of "social memory". Halbwachs (1992) developed a cohesive and unified concept, "collective memory",

shared by specific groups from multiple perspectives such as family, society, and class. In his view, there are as many types of memories as there are groups. Notably, the "cultural memory" theory established by Jan Assmann (2011) critically developed Halbwachs's memory theory with a dialectical cognitive approach. He divided Halbwachs's "collective memory" into communicative memory (which can be understood as individual memory) and cultural memory, ultimately establishing three basic forms of memory modes: individual memory (within the realm of brain research and psychology), collective memory (within the realm of social psychology), and cultural memory (the object of cultural scientific research).

Based on the extended thinking of memory theories, it can be observed that real natural geography (places) serves as monuments witnessing the history of human society. Their widely recognized names not only become historical and cultural labels passed down through generations but also constitute important elements and standard symbols of ethnic and cultural memory. Since film narratives unfold within certain spaces and regions, and "movies and television are inseparable from place names" (Assmann, 2006), what is the relationship between "fictional place names" in film and television texts and real locations? How should the phenomenon of "fictional place names" be evaluated? After a certain period of acquired cognition, can "fictional place names" also be incorporated into the framework of cultural memory? Before addressing these questions, it is helpful to conduct a diachronic review of the phenomenon of "fictional place names" from classic literary texts to creation texts in film and television works.

1 The Literary Archaeology and Cinematic Representation of "Fictional Place Names"

The Origin of "Fictional Place Names"

"Place names" refer to the naming of specific natural or human geographical spaces, including generic and proper names. Their primary function is generally "to be used on maps to mark the location of geographical entities, allowing people to quickly find the named geographical entities based on the map" (Zhang, 2024). In a broad sense,

"fictional place names" typically encompass two meanings. First, they refer to false or erroneous place names that are in contrast to commonly used correct place names, which are considered erroneous expressions. Second, they involve the issue of "fiction and reality" in artistic creation, referring to fictional place names that are in contrast to real place names. In the narrow sense, they belong to the realm of imaginative creation.

Regardless of the perspective, the existence of "fictional place names" implies a rupture in the original relationship between the signifier and the signified in semiotics, as well as the reconstruction of a new relationship, or the contradiction and detachment between the naming symbol and its intended place (physical location). In China, the origin of "fictional place names" in film and television works can be traced back to the traditional creative origins of "fictional place names" in the field of literature and art. As early as the Pre-Qin period, the "Classic of Mountains and Seas" contained rich geographical imagination and mythological spaces. For example, "Woye," the land of Woye Country, refers to a fertile and abundant land, yet it has no clear real geographical identity. The fantasy land of "Qingqiu," which has been particularly favored by fantasy film and television themes in later generations, is also a popular place name derived from fiction. In the Han Dynasty, Sima Xiangru's "Shanglin Fu" describes the "Shanglin Garden," which was a palace garden of the Qin and Han dynasties. However, due to its exaggerated geographical depiction, it became a literary landscape that does not actually exist, leading to criticism from literary figures such as Zuo Si. Additionally, the southern boundary "Dan River" and the northern boundary "Ziyuan" mentioned in "Shanglin Fu" which are derived from the "Classic of Mountains and Seas" also do not withstand strict indexical verification. By the Ming and Qing dynasties, the phenomenon of "fictional place names" in many chapter novels had become even more prevalent.

Main Types of "Fictional Place Names"

Examining the traditional practices of literature and art across China, it can be found that the emergence of "fictional place names" primarily stems from the following

three situations.

First, they are "false" due to individual cognitive and memory errors, which are unintentional mistakes made by the creators. This type of "fictional place name" is ubiquitous in the "Four Great Classical Novels" of ancient China. For example, Gong (1983) and Shen (1990) have respectively pointed out geographical errors in "Romance of the Three Kingdoms." Taking Shi Nai'an's "Water Margin" (All Men Are Brothers) as the most representative example, some geographical descriptions and names in "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" do not correspond accurately with historical facts, leading to many scholars conducting specialized discussions on this issue. For example, Liu (2000) believes that in "Water Margin", the descriptions of Shandong and Henan are "often chaotic", and Yang (2005) summarized and organized the geographical and place name issues found by comparing the "Yuanfeng Jiuyuzhi" and related maps. The phenomenon of "false" due to "error" is often related to the limited and weak geographical knowledge and place memory of the creators, as well as the historical geography or regional governance evolution. Zhou (2010) pointed out that "there are indeed many prefecture and state names and related geographical knowledge in 'Water Margin' that did not exist in the Song Dynasty but appeared in the Ming Dynasty". However, with the development of information retrieval technology, this type of "false due to error" fictional place name has become relatively rare.

Second, intentional fabrication: place names that creators intentionally imagine. The combination of reality and fiction is a significant source of "fictional place names" in classic literary and artistic creations. Among the most famous are Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County (Aiken, 1979) and García Márquez (1967) 's Macondo. In ancient Chinese literary history, "fictional place names" are also numerous. Not to mention the allegorical place names like the Land of the Gentlemen and the Land of the Dwarfs in "Journey to the Mirror Flower". Scholars such as Wang (1986) and Zhou (2005) have long discussed the fictitious nature of the Grand View Garden in "Dream of the Red Chamber (The Story of the Stone)" arguing that it only exists within the novel. Extending to later generations, in addition to the continuation

of fictional locations in film and television adaptations of classic novels, the appearance of fictional place names, such as the commonly seen Four Seas, Demon Realm, Demon World, and Fairy Realm, in many fantasy, fairy, and science fiction films and television works is an even more common phenomenon.

Third, substituting the real with the fake: place names that creators are forced to modify. For example, in the short story "Drive My Car" by Japanese author Haruki Murakami (2017), the book faced protests from local council members because it depicted the female driver Misaki casually throwing away a cigarette butt, and her hometown was identified as Nakadōbetsu Town in Shikaoi District, Hokkaido. As a result, Murakami had to change the place name to the fictional "Kami Jūnikō" in subsequent editions of the book. Similar changes are common in the process of adapting contemporary Chinese literature especially novels to film and television works.

Specific Applications of "Fictional Place Names" in Film and Television Production

Focusing on the practice of film and television cultural communication in China, it can be concluded that the creation of "fictional place names" which originated in the literary field, has gradually evolved from a relatively scattered textual phenomenon to a convention and even a "system" in current film and television production. This is closely related to the media identity and function of mass communication carriers represented by film, television, and digital networks. Although it is difficult to archaeologically confirm which film or television work first adopted the narrative technique of "fictional place names" even when tracing back to the early development history of images, it can be affirmed that the phenomenon of "fictional place names" in film and television art creation also exists in the aforementioned three basic situations. Moreover, its specific application in the practice of film and television works can be summarized into three aspects of representation.

First, it varies by genre: The use of "fictional place names" in different types of film and television texts is subject to different restrictions. Generally, documentary

films, educational films, news footage, children's films and television dramas, and major revolutionary and historical themes in domestic film and television works should not use fictional place names. This is because their purpose is to enhance the "realistic" nature of the images, establishing an indexical relationship between the images and reality to achieve the educational, knowledge-based, and propagandistic functions of film and television cultural communication. In ordinary urban drama and workplace films or TV series, fictional place names are also generally not used, with place names like "Beijing," "Shanghai," "Guangzhou," and "Shenzhen" being quite common, highlighting the everyday and simple connection between film and reality.

Of course, there are also exceptions. For example, "Hengzhou City" in "Conquest" (2003) and "Jiangzhou City" in "Snail House" (2009) are both fictional. In the "Ode to Joy" series, set in Shanghai, "Dai Mountain" and "Xindu" are also fictional. In contrast, in many police, crime, and mystery-themed film and television works, symbolic fictional place names have become a conventional creative practice. For example, in the anti-corruption TV series "In the Name of the People" (2017), a fictional place, "Handong Province", was created, and the main filming locations were in Jiangsu province. The urban setting of "Jingzhou City Handong Province" is roughly similar to Nanjing which was chosen as the filming location.

Second, the interplay of reality and fiction: "Fictional place names" often have linguistic or literary connections with real place names. The basic logic of film and television place name design is often a combination of the real and the fake, using techniques such as homophony, disassembly, and recombination of place names. For example, in the crime film "Drug War" (2012), the place names "Yuejiang" and "Jinhai" are fictional. "Yuejiang" is actually an old name for the Pearl River, while "Jinhai" was primarily filmed in Tianjin. In the mystery drama "The Longest Season" (2023), the fictional northeastern industrial town of Huacheng is clearly invented, but there was indeed a "Hualin Rubber Factory" established in 1938 in the Northeast in the last century. The construction of "Huagang" mirrors that of Ansteel, encapsulating the collective memories of the older generation of people from the Northeast. The naming here carries rhetorical implications of metonymy and metaphor.

Third, symbolic narration: The cinematic landscapes created by the collage of real locations and fictional place names often serve a structural narrative function. This approach is particularly common in fictional film and television texts. For example, in the 1982 version of "Journey to the West," the filming location for "Captures the Jade Rabbit at the Kingdom of Tianzhu" was chosen at Kunming's Cuihu Park, while the locations for "Imprisoned in the Five Elements Mountain" and "The Lotus Cave" were selected at the Stone Forest in Yunnan province. These specific locations, when combined with the names used in the drama, are no longer purely geographical concepts, their symbolic meanings do not point to specific spaces either. However, after stripping away the actual geographical implications, they acquire vivid metaphorical and symbolic hues. For example, the renamed Stone Forest and Cuihu are not merely present as scenery or background in the film, but also take on the identity function of "cinematic landscapes", laying the groundwork and propelling the progression of the plot and the unfolding of conflicts.

2 Mechanisms Behind the Conventionalization of "Fictional Place Names" in Film and Television

Another related question worth considering is why "fictional place names" have become a common phenomenon and even a conventionalized practice in contemporary Chinese domestic film and television production. This is a complex issue that involves multiple aspects of the social system. However, when examining it from the macro perspective of the production and dissemination field, the mechanisms behind the "fictional place names" phenomenon in domestic film and television are at least significantly influenced by the combined effects of three important dimensions centered on the film and television text (Fig. 1).

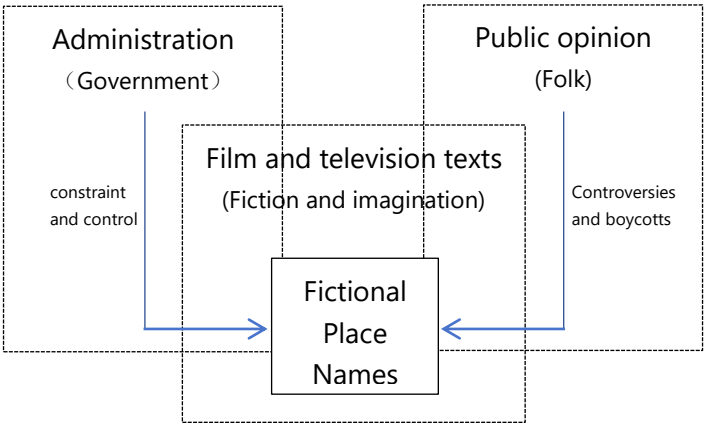


Fig.1. The mechanisms behind the phenomenon of fictional place names in film and television works

Fiction and Imagination: The Creative License of Non-Documentary Film and Television

Unlike the seriousness of spatial writing in local chronicles and historical books, the scale of geographical imagination in artistic creation is much larger. Additionally, compared to documentary film genres, the spatial construction in non-documentary images is relatively more free and diverse. So, why are these film and television dramas so keen on "fictional place name" narratives? The answer to this creative issue at least includes three levels:

First, casual fabrication and de-emphasis of location. Some scholars have pointed out that "compared to plot, story, characters, dynasties, and especially themes, specific geographical locations are the least important and least noteworthy, hence they are often blurred. Therefore, ancient writers often casually invented a place name or deliberately blurred a real existing place name, in order to reflect the universality and commonality of the story, allowing the audience to focus more on the story and characters"(Yang & Yang, 2019). From this perspective, "fictional place names" can be considered the result of a masterful stroke in traditional Chinese novel creation, which weakens the connection to real space to highlight the overall narrative or character development needs.

Second, easy to understand and conducive to dissemination. In non-documentary

film and television art texts, geography "does not aim for historical verification, does not need to pursue consistency with official history, and does not need to concern itself with the evolution of ancient and modern place names, but only needs to adhere to the principle of being easy for the audience to understand and willing to accept"(Yang & Yang, 2019). This is extremely common in both domestic and foreign film and television works, such as Platform 9 3/4 in Harry Potter, the extraterrestrial planet Pandora in Avatar, and Springfield in The Simpsons, all of which are quite easy to remember and pronounce.

Third, the freedom under "non-indexicality" to display talent and pursue interest. Zhang (2024, pp.82) pointed out that "when the title and narrative of an artistic work mark a location, the artistic work is subject to the constraints and regulations of the geographical environment characteristics of that location. In contrast, the use of "fictional place names" offers a transcendent freedom. The creative motivation of displaying talent and pursuing interest more fully exercises the exemption rights of plot-based film and television texts, thereby constructing a parallel universe or another dimension of time and space that the brain bestows upon the screen. For example, in Journey to the West authored by Wu Cheng'en, the "Baoxiang Kingdom" and "Chechi Kingdom" with Buddhist teachings, as well as the vividly named "Luan Shi Mountain" "Ying Chou Gorge" "Black Wind Cave" and "Shi Tuo Ridge", all belong to the classic literary geography. In Chinese domestic films, the "Xi Hong City" in the Mahua FunAge series has clearly become a well-known "film city landscape" that exists in the virtual world with the popularity of the series.

Public Opinion Anticipation: Mitigating Social Risks

Moving beyond the text production phase and examining the social context of "fictional place names" from the perspective of risk control in the dissemination field yields different insights. Anticipating and avoiding potential complex emotional, cultural or religious reactions from the audience becomes an important consideration.

As is well known, under the feudal hierarchy of ancient Chinese society, there was a practice of "taboo avoidance", what the "Gongyang Zhuan" of the "Spring and

Autumn Annals" states: "The Spring and Autumn period avoided taboos for the respected, the relatives, and the virtuous". While the purpose of ancient taboo avoidance was to honor the authority and exalted status of rulers (emperors, princes), elders (officials, teachers), and relatives (parents, ancestors), today's film and television producers avoid using real names of people, places or countries primarily to consider the audience's common immersive viewing and empathetic aesthetic habits. They preemptively avoid unnecessary social troubles that may arise from real place names, such as regional discrimination or "regional bashing" and damage to the image of local government authorities.

In addition to the example of Murakami mentioned earlier, the Chinese domestic urban workplace drama "The Chase" (2017) once featured real place names like Beihai, Guangxi province. This inevitably created a relationship of overlap or reflection between the image and reality in the public's emotional experience, potentially leading to questioning of the political governance of Guangxi Province and Beihai City and damaging the local administrative and even central image, while triggering uncontrollable negative public opinion. Similarly, although the mystery drama "The Bad Kids" used fictional place names, the "Liufeng Mountain" in the drama does exist in reality and the series even thanked the "Liufeng Mountain Scenic Area" in the credits, leading to psychological shadows on the actual Liufeng Mountain in Lingshan County, where the murder cases in the drama took place, resulting in the stigmatization of Liufeng Mountain as a natural landscape (Travel in April, 2020). For similar reasons, the position and controversies of the audience have long been written into "Regulations on the Administration of Television Drama Review", a regulations issued by the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (2004, Article 16).

Responding to Administrative Management: Aiming for Production Approval

The conventional production of "fictional place names" can be seen as a pragmatic and balancing strategy adopted by the creative community to comply with and

respond to administrative management and review standards. This involves accepting comprehensive scrutiny and expert evaluation from National Radio and Television Administration, China Film Administration, and their subordinate management units (NRTA, 2004), in order to smoothly obtain permits for production, operation, and distribution, reduce the administrative approval cycle, and improve production efficiency.

For example, according to the notice issued by China Film Administration, "Historical themes, especially major historical themes, in film and television works contain historical views, values, and historical knowledge that have a strong educational, exemplary, and guiding role for audiences of all age groups and social strata" (CFA, 2006). Therefore, to achieve the social educational role and promotion function of "education, demonstration, and guidance", historical-themed film and television creations are typically required to use correct and real place names.

Similarly, considering the differences in the scope and capability of media dissemination between literature, which is more of a "cool medium," and film and television, which are more of "hot media," directors and screenwriters of non-historical, fiction-based costume dramas often preemptively change familiar "real" place names to fictional ones to minimize review disputes and improve production efficiency. For instance, in the adaptation of Tong Hua's "Once Upon a Time" into the TV series "Ballad of the Ancient" (2016), and the adaptation of Tong Hua's eponymous novel into the TV series "The Longing" (2023-2024), many place names with ancient mythological backgrounds derived from texts like the "Classic of Mountains and Seas" were modified and processed using homophonic techniques.

Other generative factors may also include religion or law, such as avoiding blasphemy and preventing infringement. These often draw invisible boundaries that prohibit the free crossing of artistic creation. However, if our discussion on the reasons for the phenomenon of "fictional place names" only stops at these intuitive levels with "strong effects" in the production and dissemination context, then the following two questions with inherent causal logic will not be fully answered: "What is the emotional logic behind the possible negative public opinion reactions from local

audience groups?" and "Does the review basis of the review institutions contain a deeper cultural logic?"

3 The Underlying Cultural Logic Behind the Phenomenon of "Fictional Place Names"

Fiske (1994) noted, "The image initially referred to a certain visual representation of reality... It now generally refers to an artificial creation or public impression made to attract the public rather than to replicate reality, which implies a certain degree of falsehood, making it difficult for reality to match its image." This also corresponds to Guy Debord's (1992) view that today's society is a society of the spectacle, where everything we see is the result of artificial generation. When "everything that was directly lived has been transformed into a mere image", the spectacle is essentially "social relations mediated by images".

These somewhat pessimistic judgments point us towards a theoretical path for further exploration, namely, that the discussion of "fictional place names" in film and television has transcended visible textual relationships and delved into the realms of film geography and media memory theory, while also being closely related to the media characteristics of film and television as mass communication media.

Media Geography and Topophilia: The Struggle Based on Film and Television Representation of Space

Building on previous research, Adams (2009) thoroughly demonstrated and explained the "turn towards communication in geography," and divided media (communication) geography into four constituent quadrants: "media in space, space in media, media in place, and place in media" (p. 4). The topic of "fictional place names" attached to real filming locations intersects between what he refers to as "space in media" and "media in place." According to Adams (2009), space and place are not only "carriers that determine the scope, environment, framework, and form of communication," but also "content produced by communication (p. 5)". That is to say, communication is writing, narrating, drawing, and depicting space and place, and they become social phenomena

and experiences carried and transmitted by communication.

In the context of the AI era and a highly digitized society, media seem to have an even stronger discourse power over space and place. Ratzel had long emphasized in "Anthropogeography" that "circulation (Verkehr, or communication)" has an important controlling effect on space. Boorstin (1992) and Baudrillard (1994) further emphasized the function of media, which can be summarized by Hu & Zhang (2021) as "Media may be the carrier that determines the scope, environment, framework, and form of space and place, rather than the other way around. Even any space and place may be constructed or reconstructed by media". Therefore, if we analyze using Lefebvre's spatial theory framework, compared to "spatial practice" and "representations of space", the existence of "fictional place names" with media geographical attributes is more akin to the category of representational space, demonstrating people's imagination and reconstruction of the former two.

Given the significant influence of mass media in shaping space and place, it can be inferred that when film and television art vividly describe a story set in a space with a real place name, it objectively corroborates Bazin's ontological realism perspective that "film is the asymptote of reality" (Bazin, 2008). The audience may easily blur the line between reality and fiction, becoming lost in the intersection of imagined and real life. This can lead to some viewers developing stereotypical or misconceived negative emotions, and certain locations or geographical spaces in real life may be constructed into "stigmatized" media images, such as the discrimination against "Henan" in the films "Love is Not Blind" and "Twelve Citizens", the criticism of "Northeastern" girls in the TV series "House of Cards", and the ridicule of "Shanghai" men in "Double-edged Sword").

The Loosening Memory Framework: The Struggle Between Cultural Canons and Film and Television Reconstruction

These negative media memories persist, causing cultural harm that pierces the "topophilia" of local audiences from the grassroots level, threatening and even tearing apart the "emotional bond humans have with the material environment," disregarding

that the place "is his home and the repository of memories" (Tuan, 1990). This also provides a reverse explanation for the emotional logic behind local negative public opinion reactions.

Related to the previous point, the collective memory of the audience can also experience varying degrees of cognitive confusion or memory rewriting due to the intrusion and permeation of visual text narratives. Taking the popular TV series "The Longing" as an example, if the place names from the mythological source texts were used as is, it would inevitably lead to the fictional narrative of tragic love and narrative space in the drama forming a new memory text during the process of mass media visual dissemination. This could then blend into the existing encoding system of mythological traditions. This analysis is not an exaggeration or sensationalism. The cumulative dissemination of the "Classic of Mountains and Seas," which serves as an encyclopedia of ancient Chinese society, and related mythological stories is not monolithic.

Halbwachs's (1992) memory theory has already provided an explanation for this, stating that "the customs of speech constitute the most basic and stable framework of collective memory." He also pointed out that "this framework is quite loose because it does not include those slightly more complex memories, but only retains some isolated details and discontinuous elements in our representations (p.93)". The "looseness" mentioned here is related to the discourse subject and the field of communication, referring to a dynamic instability that changes with time and space.

Gu (2018) strongly agrees with Assmann's view, stating that "any country needs a canon, a common belief, and a strong sense of identity to survive". Although Halbwachs (1992) believes that there are many types of collective memory which can be understood as related to "looseness", collective and cultural memories with sacred and canonical cultural historical identities often have a common cognitive framework and shared narrative tone. Cultural memory comes from a cultural community, and according to Baehr (2005), the typical characteristics of a cultural community include at least two aspects: it not only has a "spiritual axis formed by language and identity" but also a series of "ritualized representational forms, including gatherings, symbols,

or signs (pp.179-211)". These are usually not allowed to be excessively modified or reorganized into fiction, which can be compared to Frisch's "shared (historical) authority" (Frisch, 2011). Compared to the relatively unstable political authority, the authoritative status of "collective memory" with historical sharing is almost unshakable and cannot be stripped away.

The Essence of Cultural Logic: The Connection Between Collective Memory and Intergenerational Narration

Based on Baehr and Richter's perspective, mythological historical legends from the early stages of cultural development have formed a spiritual and cultural axis with standard significance, a position that has been ritualistically consolidated and established through generations of sacrificial and celebratory activities (Baehr & Richter, 2004). For the Chinese nation, the bloodline of the descendants of Yan and Huang originates from the Yan Emperor and the Yellow Emperor. For thousands of years, almost every dynasty has held grand ceremonies to worship the Yellow Emperor, which have continued to this day and have been elevated to the ideological and collective memory level of "national sacrifice and the inheritance of Yellow Emperor culture"(Liu, 2024). Similarly, the sacrificial activities for the Yan Emperor (Shennong) and his Mausoleum also serve as memorials and symbols of the source of cultural traditions, which have been passed down through the folk. Annual or periodic sacrificial activities have coalesced the people into a cultural community that shares a spiritual bloodline from the level of collective memory.

As Zhou (2022) pointed out, "The transmission of collective memory relies on intergenerational narratives, but whether this narrative is realized depends, on a macro level, on whether the collective narrative has been disconnected from current values or belief systems due to changes over time, and on a micro level, it is related to a series of narrative contexts. For example, whether there are entry points that can connect with the listener's real life and imagined world; whether the narrative form leaves space for the listener to supplement; and whether there are narrative occasions that inherently possess the quality of experience". Based on contemporary fiction,

"new ancient mythological stories" that are re-encoded and establish a strong connection with the audience's daily life and emotional memory through the halo of celebrities and emotional mobilization are inevitably subject to questioning, and the sacredness of early mythological historical memory in the sense of a cultural community may be desecrated and damaged to varying degrees.

Therefore, the comprehensive replacement of place names and personal names in TV series such as "Ballad of the Ancient" and "The Longing," which are broadcast through mass communication media like television and the internet, is not solely attributed to official authoritative regulations. According to French (1995), the cultural logic behind these regulations essentially stems from the construction of group boundaries by collective social memory, as well as the defense and adherence to "orthodox" cultural identity and collective memory.

4 Rebirth in Fiction and Memory: Reflections Based on the Phenomenon of "Fictional Place Names"

How should individual imagination and collective memory be balanced? This has always been one of the fundamental topics that mass media, including film and television, need to consider during the dissemination process. Taking the phenomenon of "fictional place names" in film and television dramas as the medium text, a new question emerges: Is it possible to transition from personal narratives based on fiction to collective and cultural memories with a serious identity, and if so, how?

Film and Television Media Construct a Virtual Spatial Geography

According to Adams, "Places are not only composed of natural elements such as mountains and rivers, but are also generated by human subjective cognition and historical and cultural experiences. Their formation naturally cannot be separated from symbolic expression and communication" (Adams,2009,p.5). Visual communication media such as film and television, in their symbolic expressions, create a complex and diverse audience response through the fusion of reality and fiction. For example, although the story of the film "Drug War" is set in the fictional

"Jinhai city" which does not exist on maps, the film features many famous landmark sites from Tianjin, China, such as the Tianjin Eye, the Century Clock at Tianjin Station Square, the Jinhai Expressway, and various landscapes along the Haihe River (Li, 2013). Audiences familiar with the cultural background of Tianjin can still recognize familiar regional architecture and place characteristics in the film, feeling a certain cultural "locality" of the movie. As Natale（2020, p.6）said, "They actively fall into the subtle and complex (ordinary) deception, … gaining entertainment by falling into the illusion provided by the film" .

This expands on the previously mentioned view that "film and television media actually carry the construction of a virtual spatial geography" (Lukinbeal & Zimmermann, 2006). In the imagined heterotopia, space and place become fluid, even becoming a spatial flow. They are re-edited, processed, and integrated into a spatial narrative landscape, serving the image creation, narrative logic, plot development, and emotional needs in the world of images. This also reveals a positive affective function carried by "fictional place names," namely, generating a sense of mystery and attraction with literary qualities, much like the "Bright Peak" and "Peach Blossom Island" in Jin Yong's works, which can arouse the reader's or audience's desire for endless imagination.

"Fictional Place Names" Gradually Form a Collective Memory Identity

The creation of "fictional place names" from literary carriers to visual media also corroborates the theory of imagination consumption advocated by Chen (2020). As an active form of imagination consumption, it is based on a certain visual logic. In the process of watching serial dramas, it evokes a continuous visual mechanism for consumption, leading to a learned, repetitive acceptance and routine cognitive movement. As the aesthetic subject of the audience, their "embodied practice" of appealing to auditory and visual imagination is an automatic bodily response. After a relatively long period of immersive media exposure, cognitive memory eventually transforms into habitual memory.

Connerton (1989) suggests, “When skills are sufficiently practiced, the programs

in the nervous system require little monitoring from the perceptual system and can run continuously on their own. Therefore, skilled operations demonstrate foresight, with responses that are always precise and actions that are smooth, as if completely automated. The underlying mechanism may be that the human brain stores such guiding programs."

Some scholars have further elaborated on this, stating, "Actions that appear in continuous form, after repeated practice, accumulate into bodily inertia and are internalized as automated bodily programs, thus enabling memory to be preserved long-term and stably" (Ma, 2010). In the daily and cumulative consumption discipline or domestication process of film and television series visual mechanisms, including "fictional place names", numerous fictional cognitions originating from individual narratives and communicative memories gradually form a conventional collective memory identity (with fan culture as its connotation), and even develop the potential to construct cultural memory.

Just as "people's retelling or recollection of history is also a process of continuous extraction, superimposition, editing, and construction" (Zhou, 2022, p.157), Assmann (2016) particularly emphasizes that cultural memory is not equivalent to the "tradition" generally recognized by people; it also includes "forgetting and concealment that lead to the disappearance and rupture of tradition". As an important carrier of media memory in the spectacle society, the conventional dissemination of "fictional place names" in blockbuster films and television series objectively disrupts and obscures the mapping relationship between image space and real physical space（Jin, 2017). However, it may activate the "possible world" in Stanley Cavell's sense within a certain range. Even if this "possible world" is not accepted and incorporated by "tradition" in the short term, as long as it persists over time, it will eventually be included in the realm of cultural memory. Assmann (2006, p.10) had already defined this, stating that cultural memory "is a special case of communicative memory, with a different time structure".

Interaction and Integration Between Fictional Place Names and Real

Spaces

In the process of developing from communicative memory to cultural memory, a "community of shared destiny" emerges. The ability of this community to transcend individual perspectives primarily stems from the common "destiny" that enables each member to experience shared historical events in the same time and space, forming a complex social structure that interconnects and influences their entire lives. Personal narratives are embedded in collective life from the beginning, thus possessing the potential to transcend into collective memory or representations of group spirit (Zhou, 2022). This is similar to how the "Xihong City" created by Mahua Funage has become a well-known comedic "city" in the eyes of Chinese audiences. It is also akin to how Zhongdian County in Yunnan Province, China, was renamed "Shangri-La" in 2001 due to the fictional naming in James Hilton (1933)'s Lost Horizon. Since then, the name has spread widely and, combined with its breathtaking scenery, has become a kind of distant and detached spiritual landscape and a paradise on earth. Many fictional media spaces have not only achieved a transcendent development of memory identity but also migrated from image space to real space. This points to the phenomenon of "places named after art" as described by Zhang (2024) and reveals the dynamic interplay between the "fake" and the "real."

Finally, Halbwachs (1950, p.127) noted, "The reality of time depends on whether it has content and whether it provides events as material for thought." For spaces or places, we might also apply and expand this structuralist logic. The reality of a fictional space or place labeled with a "fictional place name" may not lie in its physical existence, but more importantly, in whether it participates in the generative construction of narratives and meanings both within and outside the text. As the landscape society of the AI era deepens and arrives comprehensively, the "fictional place names" with meta-narrative characteristics in future film and television texts may, like "real place names", become indistinguishable within the virtual metaverse space.

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Ethics declaration

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