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Development and Communication Breakthrough of the Chinese Urban Scene from a Historical Perspective

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Abstract
This paper explores the development and dissemination pathways of the urban scene in China from a historical perspective, analyzing the characteristics and transformations across different periods. By integrating factors such as urban planning and cultural communication, the study reveals the unique role of the urban scene in social modernization and cultural identity. The paper concludes by providing strategic recommendations for communication in the contemporary era.

Keywords: Urban Scene, Communication Strategy, Historical Perspective, Chinese Cities

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance of the Study
Cities, as products of human civilization, have served as focal points for humanity's creative achievements throughout history. From ancient Athens and Chang'an to Paris and Beijing, cities have become living repositories of human accomplishments, with urban spaces showcasing architecture, economic activities, and cultural facilities (Hu, Y., 2022). Their evolution is thus deeply intertwined with contemporary political, economic, social, and cultural developments.

China's urban origins date back to ancient times, with a long and rich history of development. According to historical records and archaeological findings, China's earliest cities emerged during the late Neolithic period, marking the transition from primitive to slave societies (Zhuang, L., & Zhang, J., 2011). This period, known archaeologically as the Longshan Culture era, approximately 4000 to 5000 years ago, witnessed advances in productivity, the disintegration of clan-based societies, and intensifying conflicts among tribes. During this time, the rudiments of urban development-fortified settlement began to appear. Wang Dehua (1997) noted that over 4000 years of urban development in China established a comprehensive ancient urban system by the pre-Qin era. This system included national capitals and regional administrative cities, where urban planning became a tool for governance warfare and societal management. Urban construction primarily centered on city walls, palaces, government offices, temples, residential neighborhoods, streets, and markets. Ritualistic ideologies, yin-yang geomancy, and urban planning principles formed ancient urban design's core knowledge and terminology. Due to political systems and geographic constraints, ancient Chinese cities developed within relatively closed cultural and geographic

contexts, making them representative of the overall trajectory of China's socioeconomic development and distinctive cultural essence (Zhuang, L., & Zhang, J., 2011).

According to scholar Kui Yingtao, cities act as mirrors of a nation's development, reflecting its modernization journey (Kui, Y., 1991). In the modern era, adopting Western capitalist urban models brought significant changes to Chinese cities, shifting their traditional administrative roles toward modernization and commercialization. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, urban development experienced transformative stages, reflecting a profound evolution from functional restoration to marketization and globalization (see Table 1). Wu Weijia (2022) highlights that China is currently undergoing a phase of developmental transition, necessitating further research into the principles of urban development and the role of urban planning.

Table 1. *Stages of Urban Development in the People's Republic of China*

Phase	Period	Main Characteristics	Limitations
First Phase	1945–1952	Focused on the restoration and development of cities' productive functions.	Limited functional zoning and weak infrastructure development.
Second Phase	1953–1978	Rapid industrial development with cities as the core.	Urban planning and management lacked scientific approaches, and environmental pollution began to emerge.
Third Phase	1979–Early 1990s	Reforms accelerated the urbanization process, addressing the housing shortage caused by economic constraints.	Lagging infrastructure development, widening urban-rural disparities, and unequal resource allocation.
Fourth Phase	Late 1990s–Present	Enhanced urban competitiveness; optimization of governance systems and urban policies.	Prominent urban-rural inequalities, cultural-historical continuity challenges, and issues related to social and ecological sustainability.

(Source: Data adapted from Lan Zhijun, 2019; Table created by the author.)

Cities, as spatial carriers of social, economic, and cultural activity, offer the most direct representation of the spatial scene (Zhuang, L., & Zhang, J., 2011). Thus, examining the historical development of the urban scene provides an avenue to systematically explore the evolution of China's society, culture, politics, and economy. This approach helps uncover the inherent laws, universal patterns, and unique phenomena underlying urban development, ultimately informing contemporary urban planning, construction, and dissemination strategies.

First, studying urban development reveals the transformation of the spatial scene and the evolution of cultural characteristics across different periods. It documents and reflects the societal transitions from traditional to modern and from industrial to post-industrial, thereby offering historical foundations for breakthroughs in contemporary urban dissemination.

Second, urban dissemination has undergone a transformation from physical spaces to virtual environments, evolving from traditional spatial and cultural symbol transmission to the use of social media, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) in the digital media era. Investigating how to leverage emerging technologies to overcome traditional limitations can enhance Chinese cities' ability to narrate their stories, strengthen cultural identity, and increase international influence.

Third, a historical perspective aids in summarizing past experiences and uncovering the cultural potential of urban spaces, fostering innovation in urban dissemination models. Within the context of globalization, creatively applying cultural symbols, spatial design, and diversified communication methods can enhance and sustain the artistic value of cities.

In summary, grounding research in history while integrating innovative dissemination strategies allows for a comprehensive exploration of the evolution and advancements in the urban scene. This approach provides profound insights into enhancing the cultural dissemination, social functionality, and international competitiveness of Chinese cities in the contemporary era. Such research holds significant academic value and far-reaching practical implications.

1.2 Research Objectives and Problem Formulation
The primary objective of this study is to comprehensively trace the historical evolution of urban scenes in China, focusing on changes in spatial organization, cultural symbols, and social functions over time. The study uses historical documents and case studies to explore the evolution of urban spatial structures, cultural symbols, and social roles, examining their transformation in line with socio-political changes throughout Chinese history. The second objective of this study is to explore how urban scenes are distributed and developed into cultural symbols of national or local significance, investigating the role of media, policies, and tourism in this process. The study uses case studies to explore the various dissemination channels for urban scenes, including the influence of media, policies, tourism, and creative industries in shaping urban culture.

This research is guided by two main inquiries: first, how do urban scenes function as indicators of societal, economic, political, and cultural transformations across specific historical epochs? The second inquiry explores how the dissemination mechanisms of urban scenes can be examined to understand the role of modern communication methods in shaping urban culture and identity in the globalized and localized contexts.

1.3 Research Methodology
This research utilizes a historical analysis approach to map the evolution of the urban scene in China, examining the trajectories of urban development through different historical phases. This research combines various historical sources, including documents, archives, images, and maps, to provide an in-depth investigation of how the urban scene has been shaped and developed over time. Data collection involves a mix of primary sources, such as historical documents, maps, and archival materials, along with secondary sources, including academic articles, media reports, and contemporary studies on urban development. It reveals the underlying social,

economic, cultural, and political forces behind the transformation of urban scenes. Within an urban planning framework, the research examines how urban scenes have evolved by analyzing spatial structure, zoning, and the role of public infrastructure in different historical periods. This study pays particular attention to how urban planning policies across historical periods have impacted the development and transformation of urban spaces. Cultural communication theory is also employed to analyze the ways in which urban scenes have been disseminated and communicated throughout various historical stages. The research also investigates how both traditional and contemporary media have played roles in expanding and spreading urban scenes, and how different channels have facilitated cultural integration within urban environments. The research applies qualitative analysis techniques, including content analysis, to interpret historical data. This method helps identify key patterns, transformations, and shifts in the urban scene throughout Chinese history. The interpretive framework for this study combines urban planning theories and cultural communication theory to examine the evolution and dissemination of urban scenes. The analysis focuses on the interplay of cultural, political, and economic factors that have shaped urban environments.

2.0 The Development of China's Urban Scene

2.1 Formation and Evolution of Traditional Urban Scene (19th Century - Early 20th Century)
Douglas once stated, "The importance of history lies in the fact that due to the continuity of social institutions, present and future choices are determined by the past" (North, D. C., 2008). Accordingly, significant historical events in modern Chinese history have had a profound impact on the country's urbanization process. For instance, the late Qing Dynasty and early Republican period marked a time of intense societal upheaval, characterized by the gradual collapse of the feudal system, external interventions, and internal reforms. During this transitional period, the urban scene began shifting from traditional feudal cities to modern urban forms (see Table 2). Based on the analysis of existing historical records, the characteristics of the urban scene during this transition can be categorized into several types.

Table 2. *Characteristics of Urban Development in the Late Qing Dynasty and Early Republican Period*

Category	Key Features
Urban Scene Integration of Chinese and Western Elements	With the intensified invasion of Western powers and the opening of coastal ports, major cities along coastal and inland regions became hubs of Chinese-Western cultural exchange. Traditional streets coexisted with Western-style architecture, forming a hybrid "Chinese-Western synthesis" in the urban scene (Wang, Y., & Wang, C., 2024).
Commercialization and Functional Transformation of Cities	Traditional economic structures underwent modernization, leading to thriving urban commerce. Public consumption spaces such as shopping streets, tea houses, and theaters became popular. Economic activities transitioned from self-sufficiency to market-driven systems, shaping new commercial and cultural functions within urban spaces.
Early Modernization of Transportation and Infrastructure	The advent of railways, ports, and modern transportation tools redefined urban spatial structures and flow models. Coastal cities such as Tianjin accelerated urban expansion and layout adjustments through modern transportation systems, significantly improving urban residents' living conditions.
Social Stratification and Class Hierarchies	Social mobility increased, and new social classes emerged as forces of change. Traditional hierarchical structures were gradually dismantled, leading to the rise of new urban social strata and shifts in urban lifestyles and consumption patterns.
Dissemination of Urban Culture and Modern Ideologies	Newspapers, books, and other modern communication media rapidly spread reformist and revolutionary ideas. Cultural spaces such as teahouses and bookstores became key platforms for exchanging knowledge and promoting new cultural ideologies.
Emergence of Public Spaces in Urban Reform	Public spaces such as parks and squares began to appear, providing venues for leisure and recreation while serving as essential sites for civic engagement and interaction. These spaces marked the transformation of urban life toward more modern forms of activity and public expression.

(Source: Wang, Z., & Wang, J., 2024; Table created by the author)

Why are urban scenes in the early stages of modernization considered key drivers of social mobilization and transformation? This is because the development of modern infrastructure and public spaces within cities provided the material foundation for societal change. Moreover, the dissemination of ideas and culture, alongside the emergence of new social classes, utilized urban scenes as hubs for production, daily life, and social interaction. Consequently, these scenes became essential forces for social mobilization. Through this dual function, urban scenes not only facilitated the development of cities themselves but also had a profound influence on the broader process of societal modernization.

2.2 Evolution of the Urban Scene after the Founding of New China (1949–1977)
During the early years of the People's Republic of China (1949–1977), the development of the urban scene underwent two transformative phases, characterized by urban planning and spatial layouts oriented toward industrialization. During this period, the primary objective of urban planning was to serve the nation's industrialization strategy, resulting in a distinctive focus on factories, mining areas, and labor-intensive production units. The dominant spatial structure included large-scale worker residential areas, industrial zones, and supporting infrastructure such as transportation networks and energy supply systems. Overall, urban planning was relatively homogeneous, with unclear functional zoning and a notable deficiency in diverse public recreational spaces and comprehensive cultural facilities.

At this stage, urban life was closely integrated with workspaces, forming a typical "work unit system" (Li, L., 2019) in the urban scene. The work unit not only served as a workplace but also functioned as the core of social activities, reflecting the unit-based organizational structure of society at the time. The daily lives of urban residents revolved around the work unit, exemplifying a collectivist lifestyle.

Simultaneously, the urban scene during the early years of the People's Republic carried significant political symbolism. Public spaces, including squares, monuments, and government buildings, became critical carriers of socialist ideology. For instance, Tiananmen Square

and large assembly squares in provincial capitals were used for major political events and ceremonial functions, embodying state authority and the spirit of collectivism. These symbolic spaces not only reinforced political identity within society but also became distinctive components of the urban scene in the early years of the People's Republic.

2.3 Transformation and Rejuvenation of the Urban Scene after Reform and Opening-up (1978–2020s)
In the early stages of China's reform and opening-up (1978–1990s), urban development shifted toward market-oriented and diversified growth. Following the implementation of reform policies in 1978, urban planning transitioned from a singular focus on industrial development to a market-driven approach, resulting in the gradual diversification of urban functions. Commercial, residential, and cultural facilities are increasingly separated from traditional industrial layouts, prompting a reorganization of urban functional structures. Coastal cities such as Shenzhen and Shanghai spearheaded urban transformation by establishing special economic zones and development zones, becoming pioneers in the marketization process (see figure 1).

Aerial view of Shekou Industrial Zone, 1987
(Photo by Chen Zonghao)

Shanghai Hotel under construction, 1984
(Photo by Wei Dongsheng)

Guangzhou Tianhe City and
Shanghai Nanjing Road Map (Source: Little Red Book)

Shanghai Nanjing Road Map
(Source: Little Red Book)

Beijing CBD
(Source: Little Red Book)

Drone delivery of goods and Physicians using smart dispensing carts
for precise medication picking (Photo by Huang Xinying)

Before and After Renovation of No. 23 Guozijian Street, Beijing (Source: F.O.G. Architecture)
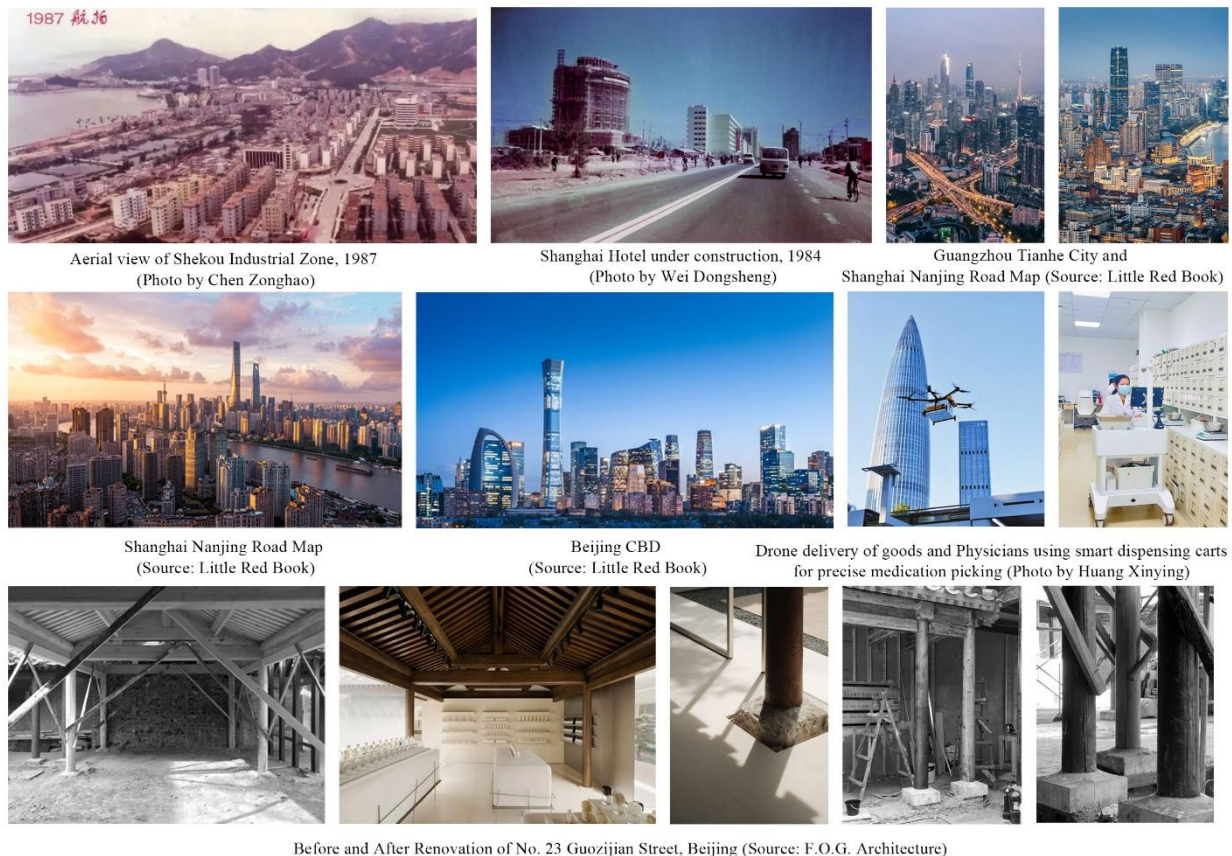
Figure 1. The Evolution of Urban Scenes in China: From Early Transformation to Smart Cities

With rapid economic growth, urban infrastructure witnessed significant advancements. Large-scale construction of roads, bridges, and metro systems dramatically improved urban transportation. Concurrently, the expansion of public spaces provided more venues for communal activities. Emerging urban scene, including parks, shopping malls, and office buildings, became integral to residents' daily lives, offering diverse opportunities for public engagement and consumption. Iconic commercial areas such as Beijing's Central Business District (CBD) and Shanghai's Lujiazui Financial District exemplified the functional clustering that characterized urban development during this period.

The early reform era also saw an accelerated urbanization process, particularly in coastal regions, where urban areas expanded rapidly as large numbers of rural migrants moved to cities. This migration fostered the formation of urban-suburban spatial structures, with stark contrasts emerging between traditional urban centers and newly developed suburban areas. Urban commercial spaces were notable, with shopping centers, commercial streets, and entertainment facilities becoming critical components of urban life. For instance, landmark commercial districts like Nanjing Road in Shanghai and Tianhe City in Guangzhou became iconic representations of modern urban commercial culture.

Entering the 21st century, China's urban development entered a phase of globalization, with the concept of internationalized metropolises dominating urban planning strategies. Major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai enhanced their global influence through international mega-events, such as the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai World Expo. The rise of modern facilities, including skyscrapers, shopping malls, five-star hotels, and high-tech industrial parks, highlighted the rapid modernization of cities, marked by high-density development and functional diversification.

At the same time, the preservation of cultural and historical heritage gained increasing attention. Urban planning has transitioned from a predominantly economic focus to one that incorporates cultural value and spatial revitalization. Historic districts with distinctive local characteristics, such as Beijing's courtyard houses and Shanghai's stone-gated houses, were gradually integrated into preservation and redevelopment plans. These areas became vital components of urban memory, embodying the continuity and diversity of urban culture.

In the 21st century, advancements in technology and the rise of sustainable development concepts have made "smart cities" (Hu, C., Liu, C., & Long, Y., 2024) and "eco-cities" (Qin, H., Chen, T., & Wang, G., 2024) critical trends in urban planning. By introducing intelligent infrastructure, green buildings, and ecological conservation projects, cities have created a more efficient and sustainable urban scene. Initiatives such as shared bicycles, smart transportation systems, and intelligent communities have improved urban operational efficiency while enhancing the quality of life for residents. Additionally, ecological parks and green spaces have become essential components of the urban scene, significantly improving the ecological environment and the living experience for city dwellers.

To conclude, as urbanization continues to advance, China's urban scene has undergone multiple waves of revival and transformation. This process has not only renewed spatial forms but also profoundly influenced how urban culture is expressed. The core of urban scene revitalization lies in preserving historical and cultural heritage, upgrading modern functionalities, and restructuring diverse spatial forms, ultimately strengthening residents' cultural identity and emotional attachment to their cities.

3.0 Communication Mechanisms and Social Impacts of Urban Scene

3.1 The Evolution of Media Technology and the Transformation of Urban Scene Communication
The research finds that media technology has transformed the dissemination of urban scenes significantly, evolving from traditional forms such as paintings and photography to modern digital platforms like social media and AR or VR technologies. From traditional modes of communication before the advent of modern media to intelligent dissemination in the digital age, each stage reflects the profound impact of technological and cultural interactions on the communication of the urban scene (see Table 3). This shift has not only changed how urban scenes are presented but also how they influence the cultural identity of residents. For instance, social media platforms now enable interactive engagement with urban culture, broadening its global dissemination. The study finds that urban scenes are now disseminated more rapidly due to the integration of digital platforms, especially social media, which has redefined how urban spaces and cultures are shared worldwide, accelerating the global transmission of urban culture and values.

The research highlights that before the internet era, traditional media such as painting and photography were key in shaping the public's understanding of urban environments. These media recorded not only the physical forms of cities and their social activities but also profoundly shaped people's understanding of urban environments through unique cultural expressions. For example, the intricate cityscapes depicted in traditional Chinese paintings and woodblock prints, such as Along the River During the Qingming Festival, illustrate the prosperity of Bianjing during the Northern Song Dynasty and serve as valuable cultural resources for studying the Song-era urban scene. Similarly, literary works like Dream of the Red Chamber imbue the urban scene with narrative and emotional dimensions, fostering a distinct cultural atmosphere for traditional Chinese cities.

Findings suggest that photography marked a significant milestone in urban scene dissemination, moving away from artistic depictions to more realistic representations of urban life. Photography captured the architecture, streets, and inhabitants of cities with unprecedented realism, presenting the urban scene more vividly to the public. Print media, including books, newspapers, and journals, which had already been pivotal in knowledge dissemination for over five centuries (Liu, Y., 2019), combined text and imagery to document urban development and social transformation systematically. Early news media offered the public a structured understanding of urban changes. In China, television became widely available in the 1990s, while the internet entered households in the early 21st century (Liu, Y., 2019). With the advent of radio, television, and the internet, urban communication transitioned into the visual era. Television, for example, combines images, sound, and narrative to present urban architecture, streets, and social activities compellingly. Programs like City 24 Hours used a chronological framework to showcase urban character and daily life, enhancing the visual impact and communicative power of urban culture.

Key findings of the research show that the advent of the internet in the 21st century has dramatically increased the speed and reach of urban scene dissemination, facilitating a broader international audience. Social media platforms, with their extensive network coverage and efficient dissemination mechanisms, enabled information to reach large audiences within a short time frame (Liu, J., & Liu, B., 2024). Through interactive media such as social networks, blogs, and video-sharing platforms, the public transitioned from passive recipients to active participants in the dissemination process. Urban scene communication shifted from a unidirectional model to an interactive one. Simultaneously, advancements in VR and AR technologies introduced new paradigms for urban scene dissemination. VR technology, by recreating the past, present, and future of cities in virtual spaces, offers immersive experiences to the public. For instance, the VR short film Nanchang: City of Heroes (Wu, X., 2024) provides a multidimensional representation of urban identity. AR technology, by overlaying digital information onto the real world, enhances perceptions of historical landmarks, such as the AR glasses used at the Sanxingdui Museum. These innovations enrich cultural dissemination and offer novel solutions for urban planning and heritage preservation.

Additionally, findings show that big data has revolutionized how urban scenes are communicated, allowing for more accurate, data-driven dissemination tailored to the preferences of individual users. By analyzing user behavior and preferences, the dissemination of urban scenes has achieved greater personalization and precision. For example, the "One-Click Navigation" project in Xiaoshan District,

Zhejiang Province (Sheng, W., & Liu, L., 2024), demonstrates the application of big data in urban traffic management, achieving breakthroughs in both service functionality and spatial representation.

In summary, the dissemination of urban scenes has undergone multidimensional technological and cultural transformations, evolving from traditional media to digital platforms. This progression has not only chronicled the historical trajectory of urban development but also shaped public cultural identity about cities, providing new possibilities for future urban planning and artistic preservation. While modern media dominate the dissemination of the urban scene, traditional media remain indispensable. The digitization and dissemination of traditional media ensure the continuation of urban historical memory in contemporary society. The integration of traditional and modern media offers new avenues for urban communication. Looking ahead, the ongoing advancement of emerging technologies will further diversify and enhance the intelligence of urban scene dissemination, exerting an even deeper influence on the shaping of urban culture and public perceptions.

Table 3. The Role of Different Media in the Dissemination of Urban Scenes

Media Type	Role	Typical cases
Traditional Painting and Architectural Design	Records and disseminates urban spatial structures through paintings, prints, and urban planning maps. It expresses the social value and daily lifestyles of urban residents as reflected in architectural styles and urban layouts.	Along the River During the Qingming Festival
Traditional Literature and Drama (Novels, Poetry, and Dramatic Works)	Shapes the social and cultural atmosphere of urban life through narratives and dramatic representations, reflecting the psychological and cultural identities of urban residents.	Dream of the Red Chamber
Photography	Realistically documents urban architecture, streets, and communities. Especially during the Industrial Revolution, photography became an effective medium for recording rapid urbanization processes.	China and the Chinese: A Pictorial Collection by John Thomson, 19th century
Modern Media (Newspapers and Magazines)	Provides detailed urban scene information by reporting on urban development and social changes through text and imagery.	CGTN's Cities of a Billion Dreams
Broadcast and Television	This work integrates imagery, sound, and narration to vividly present urban architecture, streets, and social activities. Enhances the visual representation and influence of the urban scene.	City 24 Hours
Internet and New Media	Enhances the speed and breadth of urban scene dissemination, providing greater interactivity through diverse platforms while transforming communication methods.	VR short film Nanchang: City of Heroes
Virtual Reality (VR) Technology	This platform offers an immersive experience, allowing users to tour the city in virtual space and experience its history, present, and future, expanding the scope of communication and expression of the urban scene.	Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, VR short film "The Heroic City of the World".
Augmented Reality (AR) Technology	Integrates digital information with the real world, enhancing public engagement with historical sites and urban culture while providing innovative solutions for urban planning and heritage protection.	AR experience at Sanxingdui Museum
Big Data-Driven Dissemination	By collecting and analyzing user behavior and preferences, personalized dissemination of urban scenes is achieved. This enhances the precision and intelligence of dissemination efforts while providing data support for urban planning and management.	Zhejiang Xiaoshan's "One-Click Navigation" Project

(Source: Liu, Y., 2019; Table created by the author)

3.2 The Role of Urban Scene in Cultural Identity

The findings highlight that urban scenes go beyond mere physical spaces; they are integral to shaping cultural values, social relationships, and local identities. Urban scenes, through their unique cultural symbols, spatial designs, and social functions, profoundly influence residents' cultural identity. From historical landmarks to modern public spaces, and cultural festivals to multicultural settings, the urban scene enhances residents' sense of belonging and identity through symbolic expressions, spatial organization, and the orchestration of cultural activities (see figure 2).

Findings emphasize the role of landmark buildings and historic districts in preserving cultural identity, as seen in iconic examples like Beijing's hutongs and Paris's Eiffel Tower. For instance, Beijing's hutongs and the Eiffel Tower in Paris have fostered a deep sense of cultural belonging among residents. The spatial design and functional layout of urban spaces significantly impact residents' daily lives and social interactions. Open spaces such as La Rambla in Barcelona and Central Park in New York offer platforms for interaction and engagement, where daily social exchanges help establish a sense of community and belonging to the city.

The study finds that urban scenes attract specific cultural groups that contribute to the diversity and cultural richness of cities, strengthening the cultural identity of these groups. For example, Paris's Left Bank has become a hub for artists and intellectuals, cultivating a distinct cultural group identity. Simultaneously, cultural festivals and public ceremonies within cities reinforce urban identity and enhance residents' sense of cultural pride and belonging. Events such as China's Spring Festival temple fairs and the Venice Carnival evoke collective resonance among residents, deepening their understanding and recognition of urban culture.

The study highlights that globalization has turned urban scenes into spaces for cultural exchange, showcasing how cities integrate different cultural elements while maintaining local identity. Scholar Yu Qiumeng (2020) argues that cultural development as a driver of urban transformation has become a key trend in global urban development. By incorporating diverse cultural elements, the urban scene exhibits inclusive and open characteristics of cultural identity. For example, London's Chinatown and New York's immigrant neighborhoods showcase distinct cultural lifestyles and values, creating a unique scene of cultural integration. This multiculturalism is evident not only in shaping physical spaces but also in various aspects of urban cultural life and social life.

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Beijing's hutongs and Paris's Eiffel Tower
(Source: Little Red Book)

La Rambla in Barcelona and Central Park in New York
(Source: Little Red Book)

China's Spring Festival temple fairs and Venice Carnival
(Source: Little Red Book)

London's Chinatown and Little India, Singapore
(Source: Little Red Book)

Figure 2. Urban Scenes as Cultural Identity: Landmarks, Public Spaces, and Multicultural Integration

Findings highlight how urban scenes serve as a bridge between a city's history and its future, with material spaces and cultural practices acting as drivers for identity construction. The interplay between traditional and modern cultures plays a critical role in shaping residents' cultural identity. Urban scenes, as carriers of this process, significantly influence how residents understand and identify with their cultural identity. Thus, urban scenes are not only vital for the preservation and inheritance of cultural heritage but also serve as dynamic drivers of residents' evolving cultural identity. As scholar Liu Tao (2021) observes, urban culture, as a key component of a city's soft power, is increasingly recognized for its critical importance.

Table 4. The role of different urban scenes in cultural identity

Theme	Content	Typical cases
Landmark Buildings and Historic Districts	Landmark buildings, historic districts, and public spaces preserve the collective memory of cities, serving as carriers of civic identity.	Beijing's hutongs, Paris's Eiffel Tower
Public Spaces and Social Interaction	Public squares, parks, and streets foster social interactions, enhancing residents' sense of belonging to the city while influencing their lifestyles and cultural expressions.	La Rambla in Barcelona, Central Park in New York
Cultural Groups and Scene Identity	Urban scenes attract cultural groups to express their distinct identities, strengthening the cultural identity of these groups.	Paris's Left Bank cultural district attracts artists and intellectuals.
Cultural Festivals and Public Ceremonies	Festivals and ceremonies reinforce residents' cultural identity, enhance the cultural atmosphere of the city, and promote understanding of urban culture.	China's Spring Festival temple fairs, Venice Carnival
Multicultural Integration and Display	In a globalized world, urban scenes embody inclusivity and integration of diverse cultures, showcasing cultural plurality through the arrangement of multicultural elements.	London's Chinatown, New York's immigrant neighborhoods

(Source: Yu, Q., 2020; Table created by the author)

4.0 Challenges and Methods of Contemporary Urban Scene Communication

4.1 Cross-cultural communication of urban scenes in the context of globalization
Findings show that globalization has introduced both opportunities and challenges in the dissemination of urban scenes. While offering advanced media platforms for global outreach, it also brings risks like cultural homogenization and loss of local distinctiveness. The research identifies that technological advancements, such as VR and AR, have enhanced the global dissemination of urban scenes, allowing cities to present themselves through immersive experiences and interactive media.

Today, many cities are increasingly recognizing the importance of shaping international cultural brands through the urban scene. Examples include Venice's image as a City of Water and Singapore's identity as a Garden City, both of which have been promoted globally through tourism campaigns, cultural expos, and similar initiatives. The development of digital technology has further enriched the forms and content of urban scene dissemination. Social media, characterized by high interactivity, user-friendliness, extensive reach, and broad engagement, has provided new avenues for shaping and disseminating city images (Xu, Y., & Cai, Y., 2024). For instance, major Chinese cities have established over 450 accounts on international social media platforms, publishing more than 4 million posts to showcase their urban image and enhance global appeal (Wang, R., & Wang, R., 2019). Additionally, the application of VR and AR technologies has allowed cities to offer immersive virtual tours to global audiences, enhancing the innovation and appeal of urban dissemination. For example, Dubai has bolstered its global cultural influence and economic appeal through projects like the construction of the Burj Khalifa and hosting the World Expo.

Findings highlight that cultural homogenization is a significant challenge in the globalization of urban scene dissemination, where global brands and architecture dilute local cultural elements in cities worldwide. In many major cities, the influx of multinational corporations and international brands has led to an increasingly uniform urban scene, a phenomenon described as "a thousand cities, one face" (Lu, X., Wang, Y., Huang, S., Cheng, L., & Zhang, Y., 2024). For example, commercial streets in global metropolises are often dominated by brands like Starbucks, McDonald's, and Zara, gradually displacing local characteristics with a standardized commercial culture. Furthermore, the convergence of architectural styles has diminished the distinctiveness of urban landmarks. Emerging cities, in their pursuit of a modernized image, frequently adopt glass curtain wall designs without integrating local cultural elements, resulting in a lack of uniqueness and cultural identity on the global stage.

The research shows that globalization tends to overshadow local cultures, as cities often prioritize global aesthetic preferences over preserving indigenous cultural symbols and practices. In many Asian cities, younger generations tend to emulate Western popular culture, leading to the marginalization of traditional festivals and local customs in urban cultural contexts. When showcasing themselves on the international stage, cities often prioritize cultural symbols aligned with global aesthetic preferences while neglecting the diversity and deeper connotations of local cultures. This tendency can result in the loss of local cultural voice in global dissemination. For example, some cities emphasize the construction of commercialized scenes while overlooking the preservation and inheritance of historical memories, thereby weakening residents' cultural identity.

The findings underscore the impact of globalization on urban residents, where the collision of foreign cultures can lead to identity crises, especially in immigrant-heavy cities, where local cultural identity may be weakened. While the influx of foreign cultures enriches the diversity of the urban cultural scene, it can simultaneously weaken local cultural identities. In immigrant-heavy cities, for instance, native residents may feel a loss of belonging to their original cultural scene due to the excessive commercialization of urban development can erode historical ambiance, creating fractures in residents' cultural identity.

Findings reveal that language differences pose a significant challenge in global urban scene communication, especially in non-English-speaking cities, where cultural nuances may be lost in translation. Although social media and digital platforms have improved dissemination efficiency, non-English-speaking cities face the difficulty of accurately conveying their cultural characteristics in languages other than their own. The cultural scene in these cities may be inadequately understood by international audiences due to language barriers, limiting the effectiveness of dissemination. Additionally, cultural differences can lead to misinterpretations of urban symbols. For example, cultural icons from non-Western cities may evoke unintended interpretations among Western audiences, potentially distorting the city's image or exacerbating cultural conflicts.

Overall, the globalization of urban scene dissemination offers immense opportunities but also raises pressing demands for the protection and promotion of local cultures. As cities strive to shape globalized images, they must balance cultural diversity with local distinctiveness, emphasizing the precise expression of cultural connotations to address the multifaceted challenges of globalization.
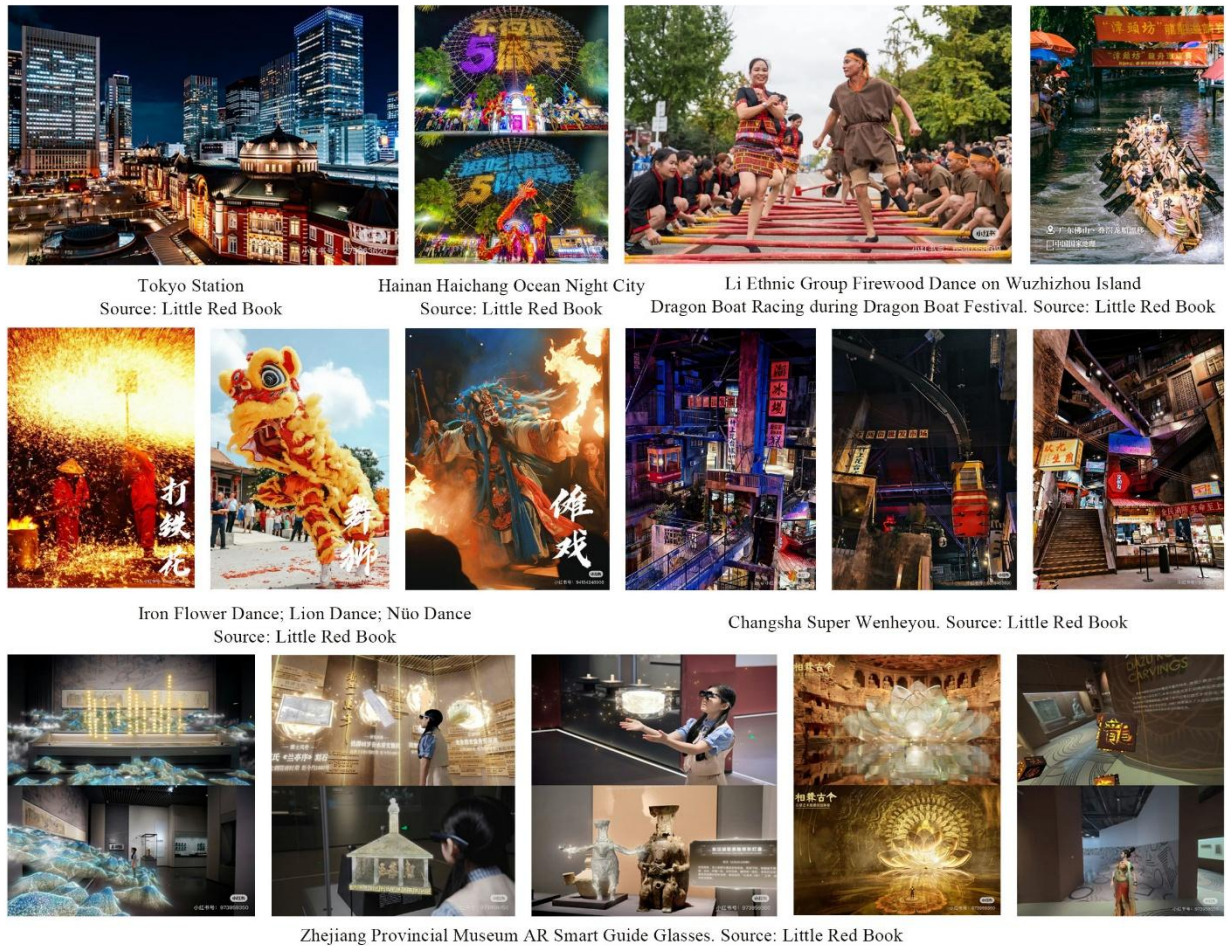
4.2 Approaches to Balancing Localization and Globalization in Cross-Cultural Communication
The research reveals that successful cities balance local cultural heritage with global engagement, creating communication strategies that emphasize both local distinctiveness and global relevance. By adopting innovative communication strategies and diverse cultural expressions, cities can maintain their cultural uniqueness and diversity (see figure 3).

Key findings indicate that employing multilayered cultural symbols enhances the global appeal and communication effectiveness of urban scenes, making them both unique and internationally relatable. This approach not only enhances international appeal but also improves overall communication effectiveness. While showcasing local characteristics, cities can design cultural symbols that align with global audiences' aesthetic preferences, ensuring openness and inclusivity. By integrating traditional cultural elements into modern urban design, cities can create distinctive urban identities. For instance, Tokyo combines traditional architectural features with modern urban functions, crafting old meets new cultural spaces that blend history with modernity and tradition with fashion, showcasing its unique cultural charm and identity.

The research emphasizes that local cultural symbols play a pivotal role in cultivating strong urban identities that resonate with both residents and global audiences. These symbols include both tangible cultural heritage, such as architecture and attire, and intangible cultural heritage, such as festivals, traditional crafts, and culinary practices. For example, China's Hainan Province has effectively showcased Sanya's cuisine, Li ethnic culture, and unique scenic resources on international platforms like TikTok. Iconic attractions such as Sanya Haichang Fantasy Ocean Night City and Wuzhizhou Island have successfully established a diverse and distinctive international urban image. Additionally, promoting region-specific festivals can effectively reinforce a city's local identity in global dissemination. Events like the Chinese New Year and the Dragon Boat Festival invite international audiences, including foreign students, to participate in activities such as visiting temple fairs, writing spring couplets, dragon boat racing, and making rice dumplings. These immersive

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cultural experiences not only enhance dissemination effectiveness but also achieve positive social impacts through platforms like international social media.

Tokyo Station
Source: Little Red Book

Hainan Haichang Ocean Night City
Source: Little Red Book

Li Ethnic Group Firewood Dance on Wuzhizhou Island
Dragon Boat Racing during Dragon Boat Festival. Source: Little Red Book

Iron Flower Dance; Lion Dance; Nüo Dance
Source: Little Red Book

Changsha Super Wenheyou. Source: Little Red Book

Zhejiang Provincial Museum AR Smart Guide Glasses. Source: Little Red Book

Figure 3. Urban Scenes as Cultural Identity: Landmarks, Public Spaces, and Multicultural Integration

Findings show that global dissemination of local art forms, through events like exhibitions and competitions, can significantly enhance a city's cultural identity and foster cross-cultural understanding. For instance, the Village Super League (Rongjiang He-Mei Rural Football Super League) in Rongjiang County, Guizhou Province, integrates ethnic culture, football, and local cuisine. Since its launch in May 2023, it has attracted over 600 million online views and more than 3 million on-site visitors, generating significant economic and cultural benefits. This model of "football + ethnic culture + cheerleading + culinary promotion + media" not only highlights local culture but also fosters cross-cultural exchange and ethnic unity.

The findings highlight that bidirectional interaction through platforms

like social media and VR or AR enhances the effectiveness of cultural dissemination, fostering deeper engagement from international audiences. Successful social media accounts emphasize audience engagement and interactive experiences (Xu, Y., & Cai, Y., 2024). On the one hand, cities should enhance engagement with global audiences through social media, leveraging popular topics and challenges to attract younger demographics while establishing online communities that encourage user participation, creating an organic network for cultural dissemination. On the other hand, cutting-edge technologies can amplify dissemination effectiveness. For example, virtual VR and AR technologies offer immersive cultural experiences to global audiences. Combined with short videos, live streams, and 3D panoramic displays, urban scenes can be disseminated in more dynamic and multidimensional ways. Additionally, artificial intelligence (AI) can analyze audience preferences and deliver tailored content, enhancing personalization and interactivity. Museums, historical sites, and iconic districts can attract international audiences through virtual tours or online experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of local cultures.

To counter the cultural challenges posed by globalization, cities must implement policies that promote the preservation and dissemination of local cultures. For instance, legislation to protect traditional crafts, languages, and folk arts ensures the continuation of these cultural heritages in a globalized world. Moreover, cultural branding strategies can transform local culture into unique city brands. A notable example is Changsha's "Super Wenheyou" (Wu, S., Hu, Y., & Xu, H., 2024), which combines nostalgic aesthetics with local street culture to evoke collective memories of Changsha's urban culture. This cultural experience space has become a popular destination for both domestic and international tourists, expanding its influence through user-generated content (UGC).

In cross-cultural dissemination, cities should balance localization with globalization by exploring cultural connotations and local characteristics while tailoring communication strategies to audience needs. For instance, cities can design specialized activities centered

on international audiences' interests, such as cuisine, history, and music, strengthening connections with diverse cultural backgrounds. Additionally, incorporating both global and local languages ensures that dissemination content reaches a broader international audience.

In summary, by integrating local culture with global elements, employing innovative dissemination strategies, and leveraging cultural policy support, cities can attain a balance between cultural uniqueness and diversity in global dissemination, enhancing cultural identity and international influence.

5.0 Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into how the urban scene has evolved through different historical periods, reflecting societal transformations in China. However, a limitation of the study lies in its reliance on secondary sources and historical records, which may not capture all dimensions of urban scene evolution, especially regarding contemporary and ongoing transformations. While the study successfully traces the development of the urban scene, it is important to acknowledge that the research primarily focuses on key historical events and urban planning policies, potentially overlooking other cultural, economic, and social factors that could further illuminate the dynamics of urban transformation.

The research emphasizes how digital technologies have transformed urban scene dissemination. A key recommendation for future research is to investigate how emerging platforms and digital trends, such as AI-driven personalization, influence urban scene communication.

A limitation of the study is the limited discussion on how different urban groups (e.g., immigrant communities or marginalized groups) experience urban scenes and contribute to the formation of collective identity. Future studies could explore these groups' roles in urban scene development and their interactions with mainstream urban cultures.

While this study highlights the complexities of balancing localization and globalization, there is a need for further research into how cities in non-Western regions address this challenge. Future studies could explore case studies from African or Latin American cities, where local cultures often conflict with global urban trends.

A limitation of the study is that it does not fully address the technological barriers faced by cities in developing countries, where digital infrastructure may not be as advanced. Future research could investigate how technological gaps impact urban scene dissemination across different regions.

Paper Contribution to the Related Field of Study

This study contributes to the field by providing a comprehensive historical analysis of the Chinese urban scene, shedding light on the spatial, cultural, and functional transformations influenced by historical and socio-economic dynamics. Additionally, it advances the understanding of urban scene dissemination by identifying key mechanisms and strategies that integrate traditional and modern elements, offering insights into how cities can balance localization and globalization while enhancing their cultural identity and influence. This research thus bridges historical urban studies and contemporary communication strategies, enriching the theoretical and practical discourse on urban cultural development and dissemination.

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