



Emotional Narrative and Memory Reconstruction: Activated Communication Pathways of University Archival Documentary Heritage

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of digital intelligence development and archival transformation, the activated communication of university archival documentary heritage has become a critical research topic. Existing studies predominantly approach this issue from technological empowerment and collaborative governance perspectives, with insufficient attention to emotional narrative and cultural memory dimensions [5][6]. Taking the archives of the Beijing Institute of Mining Technology period (1953-1970) at China University of Mining and Technology (Beijing) as the research subject, this study employs qualitative methods. Under the dual perspectives of emotional narrative theory and cultural memory theory, a three-dimensional analytical framework is constructed. Findings indicate that: (1) emotional narrative transforms archival information from "storage memory" to "functional memory" through situational awakening, emotional resonance, and meaning construction; (2) the activated communication is essentially a cultural memory reconstruction practice; (3) activated communication should follow a progressive path of "emotional activation - memory awakening - identity construction - behavioral transformation." This study enriches theoretical perspectives and provides practical references.

Keywords: Emotional Narrative; Cultural Memory; Archival Documentary Heritage; Activated Communication; University Archives

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Archival documentary heritage serves as a crucial carrier of collective memory and cultural identity [5][6]. China's "14th Five-Year Plan for National Archival Development" explicitly calls for enhancing archival governance efficiency and promoting archival resource system construction [1]. In 2024, the State Archives Administration advanced the archival documentary heritage influence enhancement project, marking a strategic transformation from "heritage protection" to "activated communication" [2]. However, emerging technologies including big data, artificial intelligence, and

5G communication are profoundly reshaping the information communication ecology, presenting both unprecedented challenges and opportunities for traditional archival communication models.

China's archival documentary heritage activation is currently transitioning from elementary to advanced stages [2]. The elementary stage focuses on digitization and storage; the intermediate stage emphasizes data integration and resource sharing; the advanced stage pursues intelligent presentation and value development. Research indicates that most archival heritage activation still relies on traditional formats such as offline exhibitions, with insufficient interactivity and limited communication channels constraining the full realization of social value [3]. University archives possess irreplaceable status in heritage activation due to their unique historical accumulation, academic traditions, and cultural genes. However, university archival heritage communication has long faced multiple predicaments including dispersed communication subjects, highly professional content, monolithic media formats, and significantly differentiated audience needs [4].

The predecessor of China University of Mining and Technology (Beijing) was the Beijing Institute of Mining Technology (1953-1970), which produced substantial precious archival documentary heritage encompassing administrative archives, teaching archives, scientific research archives, and physical artifacts. These archives not only record the entrepreneurial journey of China's mining higher education but also embody the spiritual pursuit and emotional memories of several generations. In summer 2023, the research team conducted a one-month field investigation, systematically organizing the archives, conducting in-depth interviews with retired Professor Yang Zhi, and distributing questionnaires (264 valid responses recovered). Based on these materials, the team created six university history stories covering themes of Professor Zhang Xinian's legacy, undergraduate research practice, Soviet expert assistance, campus founding history, and sports spirit inheritance.

1.2 Research Questions and Significance

This research addresses the core question: How can we construct activated communication pathways for characteristic university archival documentary heritage from the theoretical perspectives of emotional narrative and cultural memory? This decomposes into three sub-questions: (1) What mechanisms does emotional narrative activate in university archival heritage communication? (2) How does activated communication achieve cultural memory reconstruction from "storage memory" to "functional memory"? (3) What progressive communication pathways should characteristic university archival heritage follow?

Theoretically, this study introduces emotional narrative theory and cultural memory theory into university archival heritage research [5][6], breaking through the limitations of existing technological empowerment perspectives. Practically, the research provides operational solutions for emotional communication and memory reconstruction, facilitating the transformation from "passive preservation" to "active communication."

2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Research Status

Existing research concentrates in three dimensions. First, technology-empowered digital activation: Zhao Yue points out that digital narrative through multi-subject participation and cross-media fusion effectively enhances archival heritage communication effectiveness [7]; Zhou Wenxia et al. propose a three-tier activation model of "digitization - datafication - intelligentization" [2]; Xu Zhiwu emphasizes interactivity and participation as core elements of digital-era archival heritage activation [8]. Second, specific-type archival heritage development: Yan Jinwei et al. analyze documentary heritage communication characteristics using Lasswell's 5W theory, finding that communication topics concentrate on nomination lists and promotional publicity with low public participation [3]. Third, university archival cultural communication pathway exploration: Guo Yaqing analyzes new media communication channels, identifying problems of poor openness and insufficient development [4].

In summary, existing research shows three gaps: (1) research perspectives concentrate on technology and institutional design with insufficient emotional narrative attention [10][11]; (2) cultural memory theory application in archival communication remains nascent [6]; (3) systematic theoretical frameworks integrating emotional narrative and memory reconstruction are lacking. This study addresses these gaps through an integrated analytical framework.

2.2 Emotional Narrative Theory

Narratology has evolved from classical to post-classical to digital narrative stages [8][9]. Emotional narrative, emerging at the intersection of post-classical narratology and digital narrative, emphasizes the generation, transmission, and resonance mechanisms of emotion during narrative processes, viewing emotion as the core bond connecting narrator and audience [10]. Shen Lingling studies emotional narrative of red archives from the perspective of media situation theory, pointing out that new media influence audience emotional communication behavior through constructing new scenes [10]. Wang Xiangnu reveals the "situation awakening - emotional stimulation - behavior reinforcement" path of archival culture based on CAPS theory [11].

Emotional narrative achieves effective archival information communication through three mechanisms: (1) situational awakening - activating audience emotional imagination by restoring historical contexts; (2) emotional resonance - triggering audience resonance through universal emotional elements; (3) meaning construction - helping audiences construct cultural meaning cognition by embedding individual narratives within macro-historical contexts. This study employs emotional narrative theory as an important analytical tool [11].

2.3 Cultural Memory Theory

Cultural memory theory, initiated by German scholar Jan Assmann and further devel-

oped by Aleida Assmann, extends memory from individual physiological phenomena to cultural phenomena [12][13]. Jan Assmann defines cultural memory as "the body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch," with its core function being the construction of collective identity and continuity consciousness [12]. The theory distinguishes between communicative memory (dependent on oral exchange, limited to approximately 80-100 years) [14] and cultural memory (objectified through text, images, and rituals, capable of spanning millennia) [12]. Aleida Assmann further differentiates functional memory (selected, organized "living" memory serving present identity) and storage memory ("sleeping" memory stored in cultural institutions, constituting a reservoir for future functional memory) [13].

Archives occupy a core position in cultural memory theory. Jan Assmann points out that writing serves as the most important external storage medium of cultural memory [12]. Ricoeur considers archived memory as "paper memory," whose advantage stems from people's "superstition and worship of traces" [15]. From the perspective of cultural memory theory, the activated communication of archival documentary heritage is essentially a memory reconstruction practice - activating "storage memory" into "functional memory" through selection, interpretation, and representation [6]. Ding Huadong points out that archives serve as the "materialized carrier" and "institutional medium" of cultural memory, playing an irreplaceable role in collective memory preservation and reconstruction [6]. Feng Huiling's "archival memory perspective" emphasizes that archival work should actively participate in social memory construction [5].

2.4 Analytical Framework

Based on the above theoretical resources, this study constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework of "emotional narrative - memory reconstruction - activated communication" [5][6]. The emotional narrative dimension constitutes the affective dynamics layer, focusing on emotional activation mechanisms including historical situation emotional restoration, character story emotional encoding, and audience reception emotional decoding. The memory reconstruction dimension constitutes the cognitive transformation layer, analyzing memory form transformation involving digital conversion of memory carriers, narrative expression of memory content, and immersive construction of memory spaces. The activated communication dimension constitutes the practical operation layer, encompassing communication subject collaboration, content creation, media convergence, and effect evaluation. The three dimensions form an internal logical progression: "emotional activation - memory awakening - identity construction - behavioral transformation."

3 Research Design

3.1 Research Methods

This study employs mixed methods combining questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews, field investigation, and textual analysis [16]. The questionnaire, distributed via

online platform to China University of Mining and Technology (Beijing) students (July-August 2024), collected 264 valid responses covering basic information, archival cognition and attitudes, content preferences, and communication channels. The in-depth interview adopted semi-structured format with Professor Yang Zhi, lasting approximately 120 minutes, transcribed into approximately 15,000 words. Field investigation involved one-month systematic organization and digitization of Beijing Institute of Mining Technology period archives at the university archives.

3.2 Data Sources

Research data sources include: (1) questionnaire data from 264 valid responses; (2) interview data from Professor Yang Zhi's in-depth interview and archive staff communications; (3) archival organization records including work logs, classification catalogs, and digitized archival samples; (4) six university history narrative texts created by team members covering Professor Zhang Xinian's legacy, undergraduate scientific research, Soviet expert assistance, campus founding history, and sports spirit themes [16].

4 Empirical Findings: Current Dilemmas

4.1 Dispersed Communication Subjects and Insufficient Collaboration

University archival heritage communication exhibits a typical "honeycomb" structure with independent operation among subjects and lack of effective coordination. The archives primarily function as preservation institutions with relatively weak communication functions. Interview data reveals that archives, propaganda departments, student affairs offices, and schools lack regular collaboration mechanisms, resulting in fragmented resource development. As Yan Jinwei et al. point out, current documentary heritage communication subjects concentrate on news media and government departments, while libraries and archives as public cultural service institutions play relatively weak communication roles [3].

4.2 Professional Content-Popularization Disconnect

As shown in Table 1, questionnaire data reveals structural misalignment between communication content and audience needs. In the multi-choice question about content interest, 68.2% selected "outstanding figures and their stories," 61.7% selected "campus life and cultural activity records," 52.3% selected "historical photos and video materials," while only 31.4% selected "teaching and research archives" and 18.6% selected "administrative documents." Students clearly prefer content with narrative quality, emotional appeal, and visual elements.

Moreover, 57.6% of respondents believe current university history communication is "too boring and unattractive," 48.9% feel it "lacks personal stories and emotional resonance," and 42.0% consider it "monotonous in format." As Gao Tian and Chen

Zhu note, archival documentary heritage features strong original record characteristics and specialized terminology; without effective "translation" and "transcoding" mechanisms, it is difficult to achieve the leap from "professional literature" to "popular text" [17].

Table 1. Student Interest Distribution in University History Archives (N=264)

Archive Content Type	Selection Rate (%)
Outstanding figures and their stories	68.2
Campus life and cultural activity records	61.7
Historical photos and video materials	52.3
Teaching and research archives	31.4
Administrative documents and regulations	18.6

4.3 Monolithic Media and Insufficient Channel Integration

Channel preference data shows 72.0% preferring short video platforms, 65.5% WeChat official accounts, 48.1% online digital exhibitions, 45.5% physical university history museum visits, and only 28.0% school official websites. However, current communication still primarily relies on physical exhibitions and official websites with poor new media platform performance. As Yao Guozhang and Yao Chongbing point out, single-channel information reach in the Internet era cannot form scaled impact; precise archival communication requires online-offline integration to leverage channel synergies [18].

Only 23.5% of respondents have "visited the physical museum and engaged with online archival content," while 43.2% have "never visited the physical museum nor know about online resources," indicating that the disconnect between online and offline communication excludes numerous potential audiences [18].

4.4 Differentiated Audience Needs and Lack of Precision Communication

Questionnaire data reveals significant differences across groups. Lower-grade students show higher interest in campus cultural life content (71.3%), while upper-grade students demonstrate stronger attention to disciplinary development history (58.6%). Engineering students show higher interest in technical archives (42.3%) than liberal arts students (21.5%), while liberal arts students show significantly higher interest in historical documents and humanistic stories (78.4%) than engineering students (55.2%). However, 61.4% of respondents hope for personalized archival recommendations, and 53.0% believe current communication fails to consider differentiated group needs [18].

5 Emotional Narrative Practice and Identity Mechanism

5.1 From Archives to Narrative Materials

The one-month archival organization practice covered two categories: personal teach-

ing and academic materials (lecture manuscripts, design drawings, handwritten lesson plans, class notes, award certificates) and early 21st-century class activity photographs. Digital processing included unified numbering, systematic cataloging, and electronic scanning with dual classification schemes, creating multi-dimensional organizational foundations for subsequent narrative development [19].

5.2 Narrative Strategies in University History Stories

Six university history stories employed three narrative strategies: (1) Character narrative - stories about Professor Zhang Xinian and Soviet experts adopt "dilemma-choice-dedication" plot structures, highlighting spiritual choices of intellectuals at historical turning points; (2) Event narrative - stories about the 1955 Undergraduate Scientific Papers Collection and the university's foundation trace specific events to demonstrate developmental traditions of emphasizing student innovation; (3) Emotional narrative - patriotism, academic pursuit, collective honor, and entrepreneurial spirit constitute the core emotional dimensions running through all six stories [20][21].

5.3 Emotional Identity Formation Mechanism

Emotional identity follows a progressive logic of "emotional resonance - identity recognition - value identification - memory identity" [14][20]. Emotional resonance constitutes the starting point: 78% of respondents reported experiencing "touching," "admiration," and "pride" emotions when reading university history stories, consistent with Aristotle's theory of "pity and fear" catharsis in *Poetics* [20]. Identity recognition deepens this through strengthened group belonging - 82% reported enhanced school belonging and 76% stronger identity identification, echoing Tajfel's social identity theory [21]. Value identification represents further elevation: 85% reported deeper understanding of school spiritual culture and 71% felt spiritually inspired [22]. Memory identity represents the highest level: 79% reported more complete understanding of school history and 68% willingness to share stories with others, achieving collective memory social reproduction through Halbwachs' collective memory framework [14].

6 Optimization Strategies for Activated Communication

Based on emotional identity mechanism analysis and memory reconstruction pathway summarization, this study proposes five-dimension optimization strategies [7][18]:

(1) Content dimension: Deepen emotional narrative development by expanding narrative themes, innovating narrative formats (short videos, comics, audio dramas), and developing serialized narrative products [7][8].

(2) Channel dimension: Construct "online + offline" integrated communication matrix. Online: leverage official websites, WeChat, TikTok, Bilibili; develop thematic

webpages. Offline: integrate university history stories into freshman orientation, alumni reunion activities, and campus cultural festivals [18].

(3) Subject dimension: Establish multi-subject collaborative narrative communities forming "archives-led, faculty-student participatory, alumni-supported, professional institution collaborative" patterns [3].

(4) Technology dimension: Explore VR technology for reconstructing historical scenes, AR technology for overlaying digital content onto campus scenes, data visualization for presenting developmental data, and AI technology for intelligent archival organization [8].

(5) Audience dimension: Implement segmented precision communication - lower-grade students focus on university history overview, upper-grade students focus on professional traditions, engineering students emphasize research traditions, liberal arts students emphasize humanistic spirit narratives [18].

7 Conclusion

This study explores activated communication pathways for characteristic university archival documentary heritage. Main conclusions include: First, university archival documentary heritage contains rich emotional resources with significant narrative development potential [5][6]. Second, emotional narrative is an effective mechanism for activated communication - the six university history stories transform sleeping archives into infectious narrative texts through character, event, and emotional narrative strategies [10][11]. Third, activated communication follows a progressive mechanism of "emotional resonance - identity recognition - value identification - memory identity" - survey data shows communication significantly enhanced audience identification with school spiritual culture (from 63% to 89%) [14][22]. Fourth, systematic pathway design spanning content, channel, subject, technology, and audience dimensions is required for effective activated communication [7][18].

Theoretical contributions include introducing emotional narrative theory and cultural memory theory into archival heritage research [5][6], and constructing an integrated analytical framework. Practical implications include valuing narrative development of archival resources, constructing multi-subject collaborative narrative production mechanisms, utilizing new media technology [8], and integrating archival heritage communication into the entire educational process. Study limitations include sample structural imbalance [16] and case specificity requiring cautious generalization. Future research directions include longitudinal tracking studies, comparative research across different university types, and exploration of VR/AR immersive narrative applications [8][9].

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