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Reconstruction of cultural memory through digital storytelling: a case study of Shanghai Memory project

Fu, Yaming
ymfu@libnet.sh.cn
Shanghai Library/Institute of Scientific & Technical Information of Shanghai School of Information Management, Nanjing University, China

Mahony, Simon
SimonMahony@bnu.edu.cn
Research Centre for Digital Publishing and Digital Humanities, Beijing Normal University at Zhuhai, China; Department of Information Studies, University College London. Department of Information Studies, University College London, UK.

Liu, Wei
wliu@libnet.sh.cn
Shanghai Library/Institute of Scientific & Technical Information of Shanghai, China

The theory and practice of digital storytelling has been developing since the 1990s; firstly in media research, with a focus on audio-visual story creation using digital media (Lambert, 2018), and then extending into multiple fields such as public history (Burgess & Klaebe, 2009) and education (Robin, 2008), where there is a close relationship with human narrative. These fields discussed the possibilities for digital storytelling as they encountered the so-called "digital turn" which prompted the move from traditional storytelling research into the digital sphere and brought about epistemological as well as methodological shifts (Noiret, 2018).

Digital storytelling, understood here as a movement or method for creating, expressing, interpreting, and sharing stories and personal experiences using digital tools, has been viewed as a "democratization of culture" (Clarke & Adam, 2011). It draws attention from the mainstream to the marginalized, the minority, the overlooked and forgotten. Despite the discourse and practice of digital storytelling in education, history, and media research, its theory construction in DH and the practice in GLAMs is still at an exploratory stage.

Digital storytelling provides new opportunities for DH as both fields seek to encourage dialogue, make the world comprehensible, and discover new ways of interaction with the support of digital tools (Barber, 2016). Digital storytelling also serves as a bridge between cultural heritage and DH with "space and time as shared concepts" (Münster et al., 2019), essential dimensions in storytelling and other forms of narratives. A great potential exists for DH practitioners to employ GLAM collections to reconstruct knowledge and cultural heritage, discover hidden knowledge, and support knowledge creation through the lens of digital storytelling.

This presentation, drawing on extensive published literature and in-depth reflection, examines how digital storytelling is applied to encourage and facilitate cultural memory reconstruction as part of the Shanghai Memory project.[1] Relevant aspects focus on democratizing DH practice and the theory of cultural memory construction. *A Journey from Wukang Road*[2], a centrepiece of this project, associates the three dimensions of memory (the past), culture, and community as proposed by Assmann and Czaplicka (1995) to organise and construct the diverse collections pertaining to Wukang Road. Borrowing thinking from postcolonial studies around critical "re-reading" and "re-writing" of the colonial past along with the continuing effect of memory (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 221), it recognises and tells the holistic story of the past. It engages citizens by having them upload photos and personal accounts of their memories and experiences of the road, foregrounding the underrepresented art forms housed in library collections (magazines, music recordings, photos, maps, and old movies), the places and people that constitute the history of Wukang Road.

Wukang Road is famous as the home of many celebrities and historic buildings going back to the colonial era, all having their own stories. Here with digital storytelling, sharing methodologies with oral and public history, we capture the voice of the common people so that the history and culture of Shanghai is democratized in the modern postcolonial era, through the reorganisation and critical "re-reading" and "re-writing" of the past. While the buildings themselves are monuments to the formal history, the "road is the smallest unit of urban geography [and] another focus of urban memory is the space-time structure "(Xia et al., 2021, p. 849), which is why these stories fill the gaps over time and give voice to those usually unheard.

The project uses personal accounts from the lives of everyday people to create digital stories, shifting them from the private to the public sphere, from "private forms of communication and translating them into contexts where they can potentially contribute to public culture" (Burgess & Klaebe, 2009, p. 155). Using digital storytelling in this way makes it an additional tool for researchers in public history and importantly "the recording of oral histories"(Earley-Spadoni, 2017, p. 97). The wider project identifies the material culture embedded in heritage objects and linked with sources makes "literature the historical witness for the material cultural heritage objects themselves"(Xia et al., 2021, p. 844). The focus of formal literary accounts, however, is very different from the more personalized experience of the citizens, or in other words, the history of the people.

The Shanghai Memory project brings together many aspects of memory construction as part of a comprehensive programme of heritage management to reshape the history of the city (Xia et al., 2021). This latest initiative to incorporate digital storytelling into Shanghai Memory is the next phase to further democratize the practice and represent the unrepresented by presenting, creating, and sharing stories in relation to the past, current, and even the future of Shanghai city. This extension to an already established DH project adds significant value to the reconstruction of cultural memory and acts as a model for other memory projects in East Asia and beyond.

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[1] Shanghai Memory: http://memory.library.sh.cn

[2] A Journey from Wukang Road: http://wkl.library.sh.cn