

Constructing Visual Memory of Local Traditional Material Culture: A Case Study of the Documentary *The Green Endures*

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of ongoing efforts to promote rural cultural dissemination and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, the question of how local traditional material culture can be used to construct memory through documentary film has become a topic worthy of attention. Local traditional material culture manifests itself not only in specific artefacts, crafts and modes of production, but also embodies the lived experiences, emotional structures and cultural identities of a particular region. This paper takes the documentary *The Green Endures* as its subject of study. Employing textual analysis and adopting a cultural memory perspective, it examines how the film transforms Boxing's traditional coarse cloth into a visual text of local cultural memory through the presentation of artefacts, oral accounts, scenes of daily life and narrative expression. The study argues that *The Green Endures* does not merely offer a superficial documentation of traditional weaving techniques. Instead, through a structural organisation centred on 'objects—people—daily life', it transforms the old coarse cloth from a local artefact into a symbolic memory that embodies rural sentiments, local experiences and cultural perceptions. Simultaneously, by employing first-person narration, documentary-style imagery and everyday expressions, the film enhances the authenticity, relatability and communicative power of its portrayal of local culture. This case study demonstrates that the significance of documentary films on traditional local material culture lies not only in the preservation of traditional crafts, but also in the use of visual media to drive the reconstruction and contemporary expression of cultural memory.

Keywords: Local Traditional Material Culture; Cultural Memory; Documentary; *The Green Endures*; Visual Expression

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1. Introduction

Due to their combination of documentary realism, narrative quality and communicative power, documentaries have become a vital medium for the preservation and dissemination of traditional culture. They not only record reality but also participate in the organisation and construction of cultural meaning through visual storytelling^{[1][2]}. With regard to local traditional material culture, the value of documentaries lies not merely in preserving artefacts, skills and scenes of daily life, but also in revitalising the cultural memories and emotional identities embedded within local communities.

The term 'local traditional material culture' refers not only to specific artefacts and craft forms, but also to the lived experiences, aesthetic tastes and local ethics surrounding their formation. In recent years, research in this field has gradually shifted from a focus on 'documentary function' to discussions of 'cultural memory', 'identity construction', and 'expressions

of localness'. Some studies have pointed out that documentary films on intangible cultural heritage not only serve the purpose of cultural preservation, but also participate in the construction of cultural memory and identity^[3]; other studies, drawing on collective memory and a sense of local attachment, emphasise the role of rural-themed documentaries in reshaping local experiences and sentiments^{[4][5]}. At the same time, research on localness and the construction of regional culture indicates that the presentation of local culture in documentaries is not a natural process, but rather the result of organisation and signification within narrative structures and audiovisual language^{[6][7]}.

The documentary *The Green Endures* focuses on the traditional coarse cloth of Boxing, weaving together local weaving culture, rural life and personal memories to unfold its narrative. Rather than merely explaining the production process, the film reconstructs the local cultural world embodied by this coarse cloth through a comprehensive presentation of artefacts, characters and settings. In the film, the coarse cloth serves not only as a traditional textile, but also as a cultural medium linking rural life, domestic labour and local memory. Consequently, *The Green Endures* is not merely a documentary on traditional handicrafts, but also a text exploring how local traditional material culture is reorganised and expressed through the medium of film.

Based on this, this paper takes *The Green Endures* as its subject of study. Adopting a perspective on the construction of cultural memory and employing textual analysis methods, it focuses on three key questions: firstly, how the film constructs memories of local traditional material culture through artefacts, characters and scenes of daily life; secondly, what narrative strategies and audiovisual mechanisms the film employs to enhance the visual representation of local culture; and thirdly, what insights this case study offers for the creation and research of documentaries on local traditional material culture. This paper argues that the significance of *The Green Endures* lies not merely in documenting traditional crafts, but in promoting the contemporary expression of local cultural memory through the construction of visual narratives.

2. Old Coarse Cotton Cloth as a Visual Representation of Local Traditional Material Culture

The central subject of *The Green Endures* is the old coarse cotton cloth of Boxing. As a traditional handwoven cotton textile, old coarse cloth has long been an integral part of daily production and life in rural society, possessing both practical attributes and a distinct sense of local identity and everyday life. It is not merely a tangible textile product, but also embodies the labour practices, domestic division of labour and aesthetic experiences that have evolved over time within the local community. Consequently, in *The Green Endures*, old coarse cloth is not simply an object, but a culturally significant vehicle for local traditional material culture.

From the perspective of local cultural expression, the reason why coarse cotton cloth has become the narrative centre of the documentary lies in its combination of visibility, historicity and symbolism. On the one hand, it possesses a distinct material form, making it easy to present through imagery; on the other hand, it maintains a stable connection with rural life, family memories and local experiences, serving as a concrete medium for accessing the inner workings of local culture. Recent research on locality and regional cultural expression suggests that local culture in documentaries is not a mere display of regional landscapes, but rather emerges gradually through the narrative organisation of local symbols, local experiences and local ways of life^[7]. Old coarse cloth is precisely such an object capable of connecting local history, contemporary life and cultural identity.

By choosing coarse cotton cloth as its central subject, *The Green Endures* shifts the film's focus beyond a mere introduction to traditional craftsmanship. In the film, coarse cotton cloth represents not only a weaving technique, but also a cultural experience that, whilst gradually fading from everyday life, remains preserved in local memory. The visual treatment of this subject allows the film to move beyond specific artefacts into a deeper exploration of local life, and to further discuss the rediscovery and re-expression of traditional local material culture within a contemporary context. In other words, *The Green Endures* is not merely a film about an old artefact, but rather uses coarse cloth as a vehicle to engage in the process of constructing a visual narrative of local cultural memory.

3. 'Objects—People—Life': The Construction of Cultural Memory in *The Green*

Endures

To present the analytical framework of *The Green Endures* more clearly, the elements of its cultural memory construction can be summarised into the three dimensions shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Elements and modes of expression in the cultural memory construction of The Green Endures

dimension	Details	The main focus of the film	Cultural significance
Object	Coarse homespun cloth, cotton yarn, spinning wheels, looms and related traditional tools	Establishing the visibility of traditional coarse cloth through the presentation of artefacts, weaving tools and the form of the fabric.	Transforming local traditional material culture from an abstract concept into tangible cultural artefacts, thereby creating a visual gateway to local cultural memory.
people	Elderly people, villagers and their stories and memories of coarse cotton cloth	Through oral accounts, personal recollections and emotional narratives, it imbues coarse cotton cloth with dimensions of lived history and emotional history.	By drawing on local traditions and a sense of place, we can transform traditional coarse cotton cloth into a cultural medium that embodies collective memory and a sense of local identity.
Life	Village spaces, domestic environments, courtyards, rural roads and scenes from everyday life	By depicting rural life and the spaces associated with coarse cotton cloth, we reconstruct the social context in which they exist.	to reintegrate local traditional material culture into the fabric of everyday life, thereby achieving the holistic reconstruction of the local cultural context.

Note: Table 1 summarises the main levels of cultural memory construction in *The Green Endures*. Rather than merely providing an informative account centred on coarse cotton cloth, the film employs a progressive structure of ‘object–person–life’, elevating the coarse cotton cloth from a concrete artefact to a visual symbol of local cultural memory.

The portrayal of ‘Lao Cubu’ in *The Green Endures* is not merely a simple documentation of traditional craftsmanship; rather, through the layered unfolding of objects, characters and scenes of daily life, it constructs a complete space of memory concerning the region’s traditional material culture. The film constructs not merely an understanding of the coarse cloth itself, but also the local life experiences, sense of place and cultural identity that have developed around it. In terms of its content structure, this construction of cultural memory is primarily manifested across three dimensions: ‘objects’, ‘people’ and ‘daily life’.

3.1 The Material Dimension: Coarse Cotton Cloth as a Repository of Local Traditional Material Culture

In *The Green Endures*, the old coarse cloth first enters the film in the form of tangible artefacts. Pieces of cloth, cotton thread, spinning wheels, looms and other traditional tools associated with weaving collectively constitute the film’s most immediate cultural objects. The appearance of these artefacts transforms the old coarse cloth from a mere abstract concept of ‘local traditional culture’ into a tangible presence that can be perceived and recognised. Consequently, the film first constructs a ‘material memory’, whereby the audience enters the historical traces of local culture through concrete, visible material forms. Existing research indicates that a key premise of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) filmic expression lies in rendering traditional cultural objects visible and re-establishing their public cognitive foundation through the medium of film^{[8][9]}.

However, the ‘objects’ in the film are not merely static relics of the past, but cultural mediators bearing distinct traces of time and the imprints of lived experience. The coarse cloth depicted in the film embodies not only the weaving craft itself, but also the labour experiences of rural households, the aesthetic habits of past lives, and the simple yet stable social order of the local community. In other words, through this artefact—the coarse cloth—the film constructs a material cultural memory imbued with local identity and historical depth. Research on the construction of regional culture indicates that local culture in documentaries does not emerge naturally through the accumulation of landscapes, but is gradually imbued with meaning through the sustained presentation of specific cultural symbols^[6]. In this sense, the coarse cloth in *The Green Endures* is not merely an ‘object’, but becomes a vessel upon which local cultural memory can attach and manifest.

3.2 The 'Human' Dimension: Local Experiences and the Preservation of Memories of Local Ties

If 'objects' constitute the external form of cultural memory, then 'people' form its internal foundation. The elderly villagers and their narratives featured in *The Green Endures* do not merely provide background context for the coarse cotton cloth; rather, they serve as the film's repositories of local experience and rural sentiment. It is precisely through the characters' recollections, narratives and emotional expressions that the coarse cotton cloth is transformed from a mere artefact into a cultural object intrinsically linked to local life and lived experience. Existing research indicates that, within the framework of collective memory, the rural expression in documentary films lies not in the display of rural landscapes, but in the evocation of rural sentiment and local identity through the experiences of the characters^{[4][5]}.

In this respect, the film constructs a form of local memory centred on the characters' experiences. The coarse cotton cloth is no longer merely an object that is 'seen', but becomes an object of daily life that has been 'experienced', 'used', and 'remembered'. The presence of the characters imbues the coarse cotton cloth with emotional warmth, linking it to domestic labour, intergenerational relationships, rural daily life and personal growth. Relevant research suggests that rural-themed documentaries can be viewed as a practice of cultural memory construction 'using imagery as a method', the significance of which lies in organising individual experiences into a shared local cultural memory^[10]. Consequently, *The Green Endures* constructs not merely a traditional cultural memory in the sense of material culture, but rather an emotional and lived memory grounded in the experiences of local subjects.

Furthermore, the introduction of these characters imbues the local traditional material culture represented by coarse cotton cloth with social significance. Behind the coarse cotton cloth lies not merely a single craft, but an entire social structure and code of conduct tied to local life. What the film constructs through the characters' experiences is, in fact, a process by which a locality continually forms its self-awareness through artefacts, labour and daily life. Consequently, what is achieved at the 'human' level is a re-evocation of local experience and a sense of attachment to the land. Research on documentaries about rural transformation in recent years has also pointed out that the significant value of rural imagery lies in the way it elevates local experience from fragments of reality to narrative texts of cultural significance through the construction of characters and emotions^[11].

3.3 The 'Lifestyle' Dimension: A Holistic Reconstruction of the Local Cultural Context

The construction of cultural memory in *The Green Endures* does not remain confined to artefacts and characters, but delves further into the local living environment. The courtyards, villages, domestic furnishings, rural roads and details of daily life depicted in the film collectively constitute the real-world context within which 'old coarse cloth' exists and is understood. In this sense, the film constructs not merely an intellectual understanding of 'old coarse cloth', but a local lived world centred upon it. Research on rural cultural documentaries and expressions of local identity suggests that the effective representation of local culture in visual media often relies on the holistic reconstruction of living environments, spatial relationships and everyday experiences^{[6][12]}.

The most significant aspect of this approach lies in the fact that it liberates coarse cotton cloth from its status as an isolated cultural artefact, reintegrating it into the local social fabric from which it originally sprang. The importance of coarse cotton cloth does not lie in its 'antiquity', but rather in the fact that it was once genuinely embedded within the daily workings of local society. It is intertwined with living spaces, modes of labour, family relationships and local aesthetics, collectively forming the everyday foundation of local culture. Relevant research suggests that the value of documentary footage in the context of rural revitalisation and cultural heritage lies in its ability to re-establish the connection between local cultural resources and contemporary society through depictions of everyday life^[13]. Consequently, by presenting these scenes of daily life, *The Green Endures* constructs a more comprehensive local cultural context, enabling the audience to understand why coarse cotton cloth transcends the mere status of an artefact to possess cultural significance.

Taken as a whole, *The Green Endures* achieves a comprehensive reconstruction of the memory of local traditional material culture through a progressive exploration of 'objects—people—daily life': the objects provide a tangible form, the characters imbue them with experiential and emotional depth, whilst the scenes of daily life complete the reconstruction of the local cultural context. It is precisely through the combined interplay of these three layers that coarse cotton cloth is transformed

from a local artefact into a visual symbol of local cultural memory^{[3][4]}.

4. The Narrative Strategies and Audiovisual Realisation of The Green Endures

To provide a clearer overview of how the film constructs cultural memory, its narrative and audiovisual expression can be categorised into the three aspects shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Narrative Strategies and Audiovisual Realisation in The Green Endures

In this regard	Specific methods	Role in the film
First-person narrative	The narrative unfolds through the first-person narrator’s reflections, search and recognition	Establish a local cultural perspective centred on the presence of the subject, fostering a more natural connection between local experiences and individual memories, and enhancing the text’s sense of familiarity and relatability.
Documentary film	Retain the real characters, real settings, authentic details of daily life and the condition of objects	Enhance the sense of authenticity in the expression of local culture, ensuring that traditional coarse cloth and the associated way of life are not reduced to mere spectacles or stripped of their substance.
Language and Structural Organisation	The narrative employs a conversational tone, and through the introduction of objects, the appearance of characters and the unfolding of daily life, it creates a structure that builds in layers	To gradually unfold the cultural significance, guiding the audience from merely ‘seeing objects’ to ‘understanding local culture’, thereby enhancing the film’s depth and engaging the viewer.

Note: Table 2 summarises the primary expressive techniques employed by The Green Endures to construct cultural memory. Through the synergistic interplay of first-person narration, documentary-style imagery, and linguistic and structural organisation, the film transforms the content and layers of local traditional material culture into a visual text that is both perceptible and communicative.

If the previous section discussed what The Green Endures constructs’, this section will examine ‘how’ the film achieves this construction. The reason The Green Endures succeeds in transforming coarse cotton cloth into a memory of local culture lies not merely in its choice of subject matter, but rather in the clear approach it adopts in terms of narrative strategy and audiovisual expression. Documentary theory suggests that whether a real-world subject can be transformed into a persuasive text hinges on the coordinated interplay between narrative perspective, mode of expression and structural arrangement^{[1][2]}.

4.1 First-Person Narration: Establishing a Local Cultural Perspective Through the Presence of the Narrator

A particularly striking feature of The Green Endures’s narrative style is its adoption of a first-person perspective with a distinct sense of subjective involvement. The significance of this narrative approach lies not only in rendering the narrative more intimate, but also in establishing a sense of the subject’s presence—that of ‘I am within the place’. Compared to a fully externalised, expository objective narration, first-person narration enables the film’s expression of local culture to be grounded in experience and emotion. Research on first-person documentaries suggests that the introduction of a subjective perspective can enhance the immediacy and immersion of the narrative, making it easier for the audience to enter the experiential space constructed by the work^[12].

In The Green Endures, this first-person perspective is not merely an expression of personal feelings, but rather constitutes the film’s pathway into local culture. Through the ‘I’s’ act of looking back, searching and recognising, a more natural connection is established between the coarse cotton cloth, hometown life and local memory. What the audience encounters is no longer a cultural object detached from reality, but a world of local culture linked to the narrator’s own experience. Precisely for this reason, the expressions of local traditional material culture in the film possess a stronger sense of immersion and a deeper sense of place, which also lends greater credibility to the construction of cultural memory.

4.2 Documentary Film: Enhancing the Sense of Authenticity in Local Memory

The effectiveness of The Green Endures in constructing local cultural memory also relies on its strong documentary style. The authenticity of a documentary does not equate to a haphazard replication of reality, but rather involves visual presentation

grounded in respect for the logic of reality and the conditions of daily life. During filming, the documentary largely preserved the subjects' authentic demeanour, the texture of the rural environment, and the traces of daily life on everyday objects; this documentary approach provides a tangible foundation for local cultural memory. Relevant research generally holds that one of the keys to a documentary on intangible cultural heritage gaining persuasiveness lies in maintaining a sense of real-world texture, thereby preventing the cultural subject from being reduced to a mere spectacle or becoming hollowed out^[14].

The film does not portray the coarse cotton cloth and its associated scenes of daily life as an 'exhibition-style' cultural spectacle, but rather strives to maintain a natural, unadorned visual style that remains close to everyday life. The expressions on the elders' faces as they recount their stories, the arrangement of old household objects, and the unpretentious atmosphere of the village all lend greater authenticity to the local cultural experience embodied by the coarse cloth. It is precisely this documentary approach that ensures the cultural memories depicted in the film are not suspended at a conceptual level, but are firmly rooted in the concrete realities of daily life.

Furthermore, documentary-style footage provides the film with a relatively stable emotional foundation. Compared to overly stylized and polished imagery, a filming approach that preserves the raw reality of the setting is more effective in conveying an authentic sense of local life. The reason why the coarse cotton cloth evokes cognitive and emotional responses from the audience in the film is precisely because it has never been isolated from real people and real environments. The aged appearance of the objects, the expressions of the characters, and the unpretentious atmosphere of the spaces all render the memory of local culture tangible and palpable. This documentary style not only enhances the persuasive power of the visual narrative but also ensures that the region's traditional material culture retains its inherent warmth in contemporary dissemination.

4.3 Language and Structural Organisation: Facilitating the Unfolding of Cultural Meaning

In addition to its narrative perspective and documentary-style filming, *The Green Endures* organises cultural meaning through colloquial narration and a structured narrative progression. The film's narration avoids overly academic or grand-narrative expressions, favouring instead a plain, colloquial and experiential tone. This linguistic style bridges the gap between the film and its audience, making the cultural narrative more relatable to everyday life and facilitating a stronger connection with local experiences and a sense of place. Relevant research indicates that the organisation of language in documentaries serves not merely to provide background information, but also plays a crucial role in linking objects, characters and cultural significance^{[15][16]}.

At the same time, the film's overall structure avoids a straightforward, expository approach; instead, it forms a progressively unfolding narrative through the presentation of subjects, the introduction of characters and the unfolding of daily life. This arrangement clarifies the audience's path to understanding and allows the film's cultural significance to emerge gradually as the narrative unfolds. Research on rural-themed documentaries indicates that the effective integration of audiovisual language, narrative structure and narrative strategies is a key factor in generating viewing tension and achieving communicative impact^[17]. Consequently, the linguistic expression and structural progression in *The Green Endures* are not merely ancillary means, but rather crucial methods for propelling local traditional material culture from being 'seen' to being 'understood'.

In terms of expressive effect, the conversational narration and the structured progression actually form a mutually supportive relationship. The conversational narration lowers the threshold for understanding, allowing the film to delve into local life and cultural experiences in a more natural manner; the structured progression, meanwhile, ensures a sense of depth within the narrative, ensuring that the audience does not merely absorb fragmented information, but gradually grasps the cultural significance of the coarse cotton fabric within the unfolding narrative. The combination of these two elements enables *The Green Endures* to maintain the unpretentious quality expected of a documentary whilst possessing a strong narrative structure. It is precisely for this reason that the film is able to transform a seemingly minor, everyday local subject into a visual text of cultural depth and communicative value.

Overall, the narrative strategies and audiovisual expression in *The Green Endures* do not operate in isolation; rather, they work in tandem to achieve a visual transformation of local cultural memory. The first-person narrative establishes the subject's perspective, the documentary-style imagery ensures a sense of reality, whilst the language and structural organisation serve to link meanings and unfold layers of meaning. It is precisely through the combined effect of these techniques that the

'objects, people and daily life' depicted in the film are truly integrated into a perceptible and comprehensible text of local cultural memory ^{[6][11]}.

5. The Social Relevance and Implications for Communication of The Green Endures

The significance of *The Green Endures* lies not merely in the completion of a documentary text on old coarse cloth, but rather in the fact that it suggests a viable path for the dissemination of local traditional material culture in the contemporary world. The film does not treat old coarse cloth as a mere craft specimen or local landscape; instead, through the interplay of artefacts, characters and scenes of daily life, it reintroduces it into local experience and public discourse. Precisely for this reason, coarse cotton cloth in the film is no longer merely a preserved traditional artefact, but becomes a visual medium capable of carrying local memory, a sense of place and cultural understanding. This demonstrates that for the dissemination of local traditional material culture to be truly effective, the key lies not in whether the object itself is 'ancient' or 'rare', but in whether it can regain a tangible presence in reality and cultural interpretative power through visual storytelling.

This also illustrates that the impact of documentaries on local traditional material culture largely depends on whether they can transcend the external logic of presenting such culture as mere 'local specialities'. If local cultural objects are presented solely as distinctive resources for aesthetic appreciation, this often tends to undermine their intrinsic significance in daily life and their cultural depth. Conversely, it is only when artefacts, people and the lived world are reorganised into an organic whole that local traditional material culture can truly transform from a passive object of preservation into a cultural text capable of entering the public consciousness. The value of *The Green Endures* lies precisely in the fact that it does not stop at merely 'displaying coarse cotton cloth', but rather uses this cloth to re-establish the connection between local life and cultural memory.

Judging by other works on similar themes, *The Green Endures* offers insights in three key areas. Firstly, documentaries on local traditional material culture should avoid remaining at the level of mere factual explanation and demonstration of skills; instead, they should focus on the social and emotional structures underlying the cultural objects, thereby truly situating artefacts within the context of local society and everyday experience. Secondly, such productions should strengthen the local perspective and subjective experience, using local figures, rural spaces and specific details of daily life to enhance the authenticity and relatability of the narrative, thereby enabling the audience not only to 'see' traditional culture, but also to 'enter' the lived world to which it is attached. Furthermore, documentary production should not treat local traditional material culture as a static relic, but rather regard it as a cultural resource that can still be reorganised, re-narrated and re-identified, enabling visual expression to fulfil the function of bridging the past and the present.

From a broader perspective of dissemination, *The Green Endures* demonstrates that the visual dissemination of local traditional material culture should not merely be an extension of cultural preservation, but should instead form part of the reconstruction of cultural meaning. Rough homespun cloth and the life of its weavers were originally part of the everyday, subtle local experience; yet, through the structure of the documentary, they have gained an opportunity to enter public discourse and be reinterpreted. This implies that the value of documentary filmmaking for local traditional material culture lies not merely in 'capturing images', but in re-establishing its cultural position through visual media, thereby promoting the continued perception, narration and recognition of local culture within contemporary society.

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