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Postprint: A Study on the Influence of Chinese Cities' External Communication under Civilizational Exchanges and Mutual Learning

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Abstract

General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that precise communication approaches tailored to audiences across different regions, countries, and demographic groups should be adopted to promote the global, regional, and segmented expression of Chinese stories and voices, thereby enhancing the affinity and effectiveness of international communication. Research on China's urban external communication within the context of civilizational exchange and mutual learning facilitates understanding of the current state of international communication among Chinese cities. Through analysis of various reports on the international communication influence of Chinese cities, such research examines the characteristics of China's urban external communication and provides analytical insights and supplementary perspectives regarding the challenges and strategies facing current city-level external communication initiatives.

Full Text

Research on the Influence of Chinese Cities' External Communication under Civilization Exchange and Mutual Learning

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Abstract

President Xi Jinping has emphasized the need to adopt precise communication approaches tailored to different regions, countries, and audience groups, advancing the global, regional, and segmented expression of Chinese stories and voices

to enhance the appeal and effectiveness of international communication. Research on Chinese cities' external communication under civilization exchange and mutual learning helps understand the current state of urban international communication in China. By analyzing various reports on Chinese cities' international communication influence, this study examines the characteristics of China's urban external communication and supplements the analysis of current challenges and countermeasures.

Keywords: Chinese cities; external communication; influence

I. Analysis of Current Research on Chinese Cities' External Communication Influence

In the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, President Xi Jinping reiterated the importance of enhancing the dissemination and influence of Chinese civilization, upholding the Chinese cultural stance, telling China's stories well, spreading China's voice effectively, presenting a credible, lovable, and respectable image of China, and promoting Chinese culture to the world. Strengthening the dissemination power and influence of Chinese civilization necessarily requires building international communication capacity and comprehensively improving its effectiveness. As China enhances its international communication capacity and tells its stories effectively, it must present a true, multi-dimensional, and comprehensive image of the nation. At a time when the world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century and China's comprehensive national power continues to grow, boosting the international communication power of Chinese culture and enhancing the external communication influence of Chinese cities has gradually become our consensus for building a positive international image.

Zhang Di, in his article "Research on China's International Communication under Civilization Exchange and Mutual Learning: Paradigm Innovation and Path Reconstruction," points out that "current research on China's international communication primarily relies on Western theoretical frameworks, such as critiquing the unbalanced pattern of international communication between North and South or East and West within the framework of media political economy" [1]. This reliance has led to problems in China's international communication academic research, including a lack of indigenous theory and rigorous research methods. Traditional international communication research has focused on international relations, national sovereignty, and national culture, conducting in-depth studies from the perspectives of international communication and power, communication effects, and information flow.

In the article "Analysis of Chinese Cities' Overseas Online Communication Power under the New Pattern of International Communication" by the Overseas Online Communication Research Group of the School of Journalism and Communication at Beijing Normal University, an in-depth analysis of relevant information on 337 mainland Chinese cities across four online platforms—Google

News, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok—revealed several characteristics of Chinese cities’ overseas online communication: significant disparities in urban communication power with clear head effects; cities like Beijing, Zhuhai, and Kunming focusing on using major events to shape city brands and enhance overseas online communication power; Chongqing and Shanghai leveraging foreign perspectives to construct multi-dimensional urban international images; Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Datong emphasizing narrative approaches that resonate emotionally with overseas social media users; Hangzhou, Weifang, and Xiamen using personalized tags to create differentiated city images; Chengdu, Zhangjiajie, and Jingdezhen fully utilizing TikTok to disseminate traditional and modern culture and natural landscapes; many cities’ external communication being one-way output lacking interaction with overseas users; and homogenized content and forms in urban external communication with innovation needing improvement [2]. In “New Paths for Urban External Communication,” Li Guangmin and Chen Ran propose that the COVID-19 pandemic and its accompanying “infodemic” have posed severe challenges to China’s national image communication, and when national-level exchanges encounter difficulties, cities’ advantages in maintaining people-to-people exchanges and their central role in grassroots activities have become increasingly prominent [3]. The article introduces and analyzes successful cases of Chinese cities’ external communication from different dimensions and proposes various communication paths: emphasizing the crowd-creativity and multi-subject nature of urban external communication, emphasizing the perceptibility and shareability of communication content, emphasizing branding and sustainability, and emphasizing the comprehensive use of new media and integrated media. Current research on Chinese cities’ external communication remains relatively fragmented, primarily case-based, focusing on successful individual cases or similar communication approaches across multiple cities, and has not yet formed a clear and complete research system on Chinese cities’ external communication influence.

II. Analysis of Chinese Cities’ External Communication Reports

In November 2022, Professor Wei Lu, Dean of the School of Media and International Culture at Zhejiang University, released the “2022 Chinese City International Communication Influence Index Report” at the 3rd China Digital City Brand Summit in Hangzhou. The report shows that Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, Macau, Taipei, Chongqing, Wuhan, Shenzhen, Xi’an, and Guangzhou rank among the top ten cities in international communication influence. Excluding Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, the top ten are Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Wuhan, Shenzhen, Xi’an, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Chengdu, and Qingdao. Report data indicates that first-tier and new first-tier cities perform prominently in international communication influence. Geographically, among the top ten cities, the ratio of southern to northern cities is 7:3, showing a significant gap. Among the bottom ten cities, eight are in the north. As western cities such as Chongqing, Chengdu, Xi’an, and Kunming steadily increase their interna-

tional influence, the east-west gap is beginning to narrow while the north-south disparity is becoming increasingly apparent. The report developed the Chinese City International Communication Influence Index System (CICI), selecting five primary dimensions: online communication influence, media coverage influence, social media influence, search engine influence, and international visitor influence, with 11 secondary indicators and 34 tertiary indicators, enabling a relatively comprehensive assessment of Chinese cities' international communication influence.

In December 2022, the Reference News newspaper and Xinhua News Information Center jointly released the “Chinese City Overseas Influence Analysis Report (2022).” This report takes urban international communication as its entry point, tracking and analyzing data and trends in urban international communication, employing a form where quantitative and qualitative analysis complement each other and data evaluation and case studies enhance each other. Through main indicators such as overseas connection degree, overseas media presentation, overseas online attention, overseas tourism reputation, and overseas think tank attention, the report forms clear data comparisons. The report shows that Chinese cities have achieved initial success in telling urban stories and advancing global expression. Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou have further enhanced their international communication effectiveness, while provincial capitals such as Wuhan, Chengdu, Hangzhou, and Shenyang have also increased their international visibility and reputation. Additionally, a group of active practitioners of international communication have emerged, including Qianhai, Yantai, Yancheng, Lianyungang, Zhongshan, Jingdezhen, and Taicheng, who are becoming main forces in conveying China's propositions, wisdom, and solutions to the world. The report analysis indicates that the overall level of Chinese cities' overseas influence has steadily increased compared to the previous year. Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen have strengthened their international communication efforts, enhancing their international image through more innovative and influential communication methods and content. Meanwhile, a group of cities with active international communication has emerged, such as Chengdu, Wuhan, Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Nanjing, which have actively explored and innovated in external exchanges and communication, focusing on tapping into elements of international interest, leveraging their advantages, and highlighting urban characteristics, even surpassing Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen in certain single dimensions.

III. Analysis of Challenges and Strategies for Urban External Communication

(I) Analysis of Challenges Facing Chinese Cities' External Communication

Regarding communication subjects, different cities face various issues in government, media, enterprises, and talent. As the organizer, coordinator, and

manager of city image construction and communication, the government lacks planned, organized, sustainable, and scientific thematic planning for urban international communication to some extent. Compared with international mainstream media, local media have significant gaps in investment and overseas resources, and their local attributes and smaller scale prevent them from forming large-scale communication effects. Some cities also face talent shortages and funding scarcity. Different communication subjects have not formed a planned, holistic, and long-term entity, and their understanding of urban international communication is relatively lagging, making mutual understanding and cooperation difficult among different subjects. Meanwhile, city image positioning is relatively similar, and inaccurate positioning leads to singular promotion lacking distinctive features. Some cities suffer from serious homogenization in promotion and chaotic promotional content, which weakens communication effectiveness. Outdated communication methods and low-level strategies make it difficult to achieve internationalized urban marketing effects. Additionally, many cities' promotional focuses concentrate on external aspects, neglecting cultural soft power and failing to recognize the significance of urban culture dissemination.

The “2022 Chinese City International Communication Influence Index Report” also identifies five problems in Chinese cities' international communication processes: significant north-south disparities in urban international influence, generally low visibility in international mainstream media reports, generally low levels of urban international online communication, relatively single media forms in urban international communication, and insufficiently rich narrative discourse in urban international communication.

(II) Analysis of Strategies for Chinese Cities' External Communication

Enhancing urban international communication power requires intensive cultivation centered on Chinese culture. Since the 18th Party Congress, the Party Central Committee has adhered to socialist core values to guide cultural construction, prospering cultural undertakings and industries with socialist advanced culture and excellent traditional Chinese culture, providing continuous high-quality spiritual sustenance for the people and significantly enhancing cultural confidence among all ethnic groups. Chinese culture is an important component in building China's international discourse system, crucial content in shaping China's national image, and an important driving force for promoting world civilization exchange and mutual learning. Chinese culture has always respected the diversity of world cultures, emphasized equal exchange and mutual learning among civilizations, and opposed the absolute superiority and cultural discrimination advocated by Western civilization. Urban external communication centered on Chinese culture provides an important theoretical foundation for promoting and developing world civilization exchange and mutual learning. Building international communication capacity and enhancing Chinese cities' external communication influence should focus on intensive cultivation centered on Chi-

nese culture in terms of communication content. In the new era and new journey, continuously enhancing national cultural soft power and Chinese culture's influence to promote urban external communication influence must firmly maintain cultural confidence, uphold the Chinese cultural stance, and actively promote Chinese culture to go global. For example, Guangzhou takes urban historical context as its communication core, promoting its reputation as the "Poetry Capital" and "Flower City," spreading excellent traditional Chinese culture to the world in a subtle and effective way, and expanding the depth and breadth of Guangzhou's international expression. Combining regional characteristics, cities should fully explore local cultural heritage and communication resources, leveraging advantages in humanities, history, natural landscapes, and characteristic industries to more fully and vividly present the ideological and spiritual power behind Chinese stories and tell China's stories and spread China's voice to the world.

In conducting urban external communication, establishing management institutions and collaborative models is beneficial for efficiently mobilizing the enthusiasm and communication efficiency of different subjects. Cities should also strive to build professional and comprehensive communication systems, using brand and creative theories to disseminate urban positioning, such as city promotional videos and urban image identification systems. It is essential to construct an all-media communication matrix and innovate international communication methods. President Xi Jinping has emphasized: "We must adopt precise communication approaches that are close to different regions, countries, and audience groups, advancing the global, regional, and segmented expression of Chinese stories and Chinese voices, and enhancing the appeal and effectiveness of international communication." With the comprehensive development of internet technology, emerging technologies such as 5G, big data, cloud computing, VR, and AR provide a strong technical foundation for urban external communication, driving continuous transformation in urban international communication. Faced with constant changes in communication methods and media landscapes, strengthening Chinese cities' external communication capacity building and enhancing communication effectiveness should fully utilize different communication methods and means, telling China's stories and spreading China's voice through new forms, methods, and channels. Simultaneously, cities should promptly grasp the new characteristics of existing media communication channels and exchange platforms, innovating content forms to better adapt to the latest changes in international communication channels.

President Xi Jinping has pointed out that we should carry out various forms of humanistic exchange activities and promote people-to-people bonds between China and other countries through multiple channels. All regions and departments should leverage their unique characteristics and advantages to showcase a colorful, vivid, and multi-dimensional image of China. Strengthening urban external communication capacity building, promoting civilization exchange and mutual learning, and multi-level dialogue are important pathways to continuously enhance the dissemination power of Chinese civilization and national

cultural soft power, as well as necessary requirements for advancing cultural confidence and self-improvement and accelerating the building of a strong socialist cultural nation. In the new era and new journey, we should coordinate various resources for urban international communication, enhance international communication effectiveness, and create a favorable communication environment for telling China's stories well and spreading China's voice effectively.

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