Communication towards the World: An Overview of the International Image Construction of Nanjing

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Abstract

With the deepening development of economic globalization and world trade, communication between countries and between cities have become increasingly close. For a city, city communication at home and abroad is very important for the cultural construction of the city. This article takes Nanjing, a new first-tier city in China, as an example, focuses on its communication to the world, and summarizes the current situation, advantages and disadvantages of Nanjing's international communication through literature collection, field investigation, interview and other methods. The effect of current international communication of Nanjing is relatively satisfactory, but there are still some problems, such as the neglect of social media, the unsystematic publicity activities, and the government's insufficient attention.

Keywords

International communication; City image; Nanjing.

1. Introduction

Before 1840, Nanjing was a city with prosperous culture, developed economy and strong political power in both Chinese and world history. In China, Nanjing was the ancient capital of six dynasties. Around the world, Nanjing is the city which produced such elegant handicrafts including cloud brocade and gold foil, and where Hans Christian Andersen recorded the “Chinese porcelain pagoda” named Dabaoen Temple. However, such a city with outstanding achievements has made its own strong mark in the history of the world since modern times. The signing of unequal treaties and the spread of war, made Nanjing suffer humiliation and torture. From the founding to the overthrow of the Republic of China (1912-1949), Nanjing city witnessed the political turmoil throughout China. The Nanjing Massacre is also a terrible memory in human history.

During the period from 1840 to 1949, Nanjing, as one of the most important cities in China, attracted great attention from around the world. Since the founding of People’s Republic of China (1949), Nanjing has followed the pace of development of New China, experiencing the city image publicity from passive to active, the city's international image from decline to rise. Today, the image of Nanjing in the international community has become more comprehensive, diverse and vibrant.

The survey shows seven basic elements of the image of Nanjing: (1) the ancient capital of several dynasties and a cultural city; (2) the city of landscape and a green home; (3) a modern central city full of economic vitality, rich in cultural characteristics and excellent living environment; (4) a city integrating ancient capital style and modern civilization; (5) the most livable city; (6) a city of fraternity; (7) a informationalized, modern and international city. The public's impression of Nanjing is not only based on the historical accumulation, but also on the construction of a more active city image.
In the 1980s and 1990s, Nanjing began to develop its own image planning from the passive publicity to the outside world. “Charming Nanjing” in terms of cultural tourism and “Succeed in Nanjing” in terms of economy were the most powerful means of city image promotion at that time. After 2000, Nanjing made further efforts to create “four cards” for external publicity, that is, dig deep into the resources of historical and cultural city to create “cultural card”, dig deep into the resources of Zheng He’s voyage to the West to create “open card”, dig deep into the resources of Nanjing’s history of anti-Japanese war to create “peace card”, and dig deep into the historical and cultural resources of the Republic of China to create “unified card”. During this period, Nanjing’s external image publicity stepped into a new stage of branding, serialization and continuity. Till today, Nanjing still takes advantage of its own history, geography and other advantages to publicize it vigorously, and take the initiative to go out to the world to improve Nanjing’s reputation in the world.

2. Three Ways of International Image Dissemination of Nanjing

2.1. Great Promotion from the Authorities

Officially, various events in politics, economy, culture, sports, innovation, ecology and other fields has been held in Nanjing over these years. Many international conferences, such as the World Intelligent Manufacturing Conference, the World Vocational Education Conference, the World Chinese Businessman Conference, and the World Science and Technology City Alliance Conference, as well as many international sports events, including the World Women’s Volleyball League, the Badminton World Championships, and the Youth Olympic Games, have all been successfully held in Nanjing. There is no doubt that the success of these international conferences and competitions in Nanjing cannot be achieved without the great efforts and support of the government. It can also be seen that these conferences and events help Nanjing to add more comprehensive and rich features and advantages to the image of an international city, so that the world can see Nanjing not only as an ancient capital and a famous cultural city, but also as a modern and international metropolis.

In addition, Nanjing also focuses on grasping the characteristics of its own history and culture through the opportunity of “One Belt And One Road” construction. Since 2014, Nanjing has held “Nanjing Famous Historical and Cultural Cities Exposition” jointly with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. This exposition drives related topics for the sustainable development of the world famous historical and cultural cities, to carry out a series of activities regarding the urban heritage, museum exhibition, intangible innovation and literature publishing, which create a platform for cultural exchange and learning.

At the same time, under the current theme of peace and development, Nanjing attaches great importance to the historical event of the Nanjing Massacre and takes it as an opportunity to carry out peace publicity work and highlight the image of a peaceful city. In 2018, Nanjing hosted the “Light of Peace: Jiangsu Women Calligraphers and Painters Exhibition” at the UN Headquarters in New York on the occasion of the 10th UN Chinese Language Day celebration. Nanjing also went to Denmark to hold the unveiling ceremony of the Sindberg statue and the supporting exhibition of “Sindberg: Denmark’s Hero of Nanjing”. These activities make the historical memory of Nanjing become the historical memory of the world, turn the historically suffering image of Nanjing into a positive image of calling for peace, and make the world feel more love and peace while not forgetting the suffering. The international image of Nanjing has been positively promoted in many similar activities, letting the world know more about Nanjing.
2.2. Promotion by Business or Organization

From the folk point of view, in this historical period when the economy and culture developed more rapidly, the image of Nanjing as an international city was spread more widely through mass media such as film and TV.

In 2015, “Nanjing Week” was founded. Since its establishment, more than 500 universities, enterprises and industrial parks in Nanjing have been to London, Milan, New York, Paris and other cities for performance, publicity and investment, bringing the cultural undertakings and cultural industries of Nanjing to the world, which has received a very strong response. Nanjing’s folk creative power was on full display.

Not only that, Nanjing is also taking full advantage of the development of new media to publicize. Also in 2015, the “Discover Nanjing” account was set up to spread the image of Nanjing on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. By August 2019, “Discover Nanjing” has more than 520,000 followers worldwide, with more than 1.6 million interactions in 2019. The average number of interactions for a single post on Facebook is more than 7,800. Through these new media platforms, Nanjing’s image as an international city has a more precise outline. Foreign netizens can not only get a partial understanding of Nanjing through their own local media and news reports, but also get a more comprehensive and in-depth view of the city’s development through Nanjing local reports. This is undoubtedly a great progress and an excellent way.

Another well-known new media promotion platform of Nanjing is the "Nanjing Zone" web page of CNBC (US Consumer News and Business Channel). Nanjing has a deep cooperation with CNBC, a professional financial media, to accurately focus on the elite group in the United States, and set up a special section of Nanjing on its website and mobile terminals, showing the charm of Nanjing from different sectors such as culture, education, science, innovation and development. At the same time, the image of Nanjing is also shown to the world through movies and TV shows. The movie “The Flowers of War” shows the great love of the little people to the world during the World War II. In addition, through the recent life records of well-known Nanjing people like Ni Ni and Hai Qing, as well as the promotional films about Nanjing, we can see that the image of Nanjing as an international city is gradually enriched.

2.3. Personal Communication

Personally speaking, with China’s reform and opening up and the improvement of the world environment, exchanges between countries have become simpler and more frequent. Nowadays, it is very common for people from abroad to visit Nanjing or from Nanjing to go abroad. The international students, foreign teachers, We Media workers or tourism teams who come to Nanjing from abroad or from Nanjing to other parts of the world can all promote the image of Nanjing as an international city to become complete and comprehensive. People who live in Nanjing will post their views and impressions about Nanjing on the Internet, and they will also communicate with foreign friends. Foreigners who come to Nanjing will also discuss the image of Nanjing on well-known social software at home and abroad, and spread their views to other foreigners.

Through interviews with some overseas students of several universities in Nanjing, we also get some common impressions of Nanjing in their minds. First of all, in their eyes, Nanjing is a very developed city. With more and more perfect hardware facilities, Nanjing’s infrastructure services are also increasingly complete. Foreign students said that large public transportation, such as buses and subways, or shared bikes, which has emerged in recent years, are all good choices for them to get around in this city. Another point that foreign students often mention is that the students in Nanjing are very friendly and give them much help in both study and life. This also reflects the high moral cultivation of Nanjing citizens in the eyes of foreigners. They said that whether on campus or off campus, the Nanjing residents they met were able to communicate with them enthusiastically.
3. The International Titles of Nanjing

3.1. Forbes List of Chinese Business Cities

Nanjing has been on Forbes list of Chinese business cities since 2004. Nanjing’s position on the list has barely budged, from 3rd in 2007 to 4th in 2017 and 5th in 2018. It is difficult to maintain a stable ranking among so many big cities in China, but this is only the result of longitudinal comparison of Nanjing. Horizontal comparison shows that in recent years, Chengdu rose from 12th place in 2017 to 6th place in 2018, Chongqing rose from 7th place in 2017 to 4th place in 2018, and Zhengzhou rose from 23rd place in 2017 to 12th place in 2018. It can be seen that these cities, which were not at the top of the list, have made great efforts to develop industry and commerce with the rapid rise of tourism and other industries. On the other hand, although Nanjing has always been on the top of the list, its ranking has fallen rather than risen. Beijing, as the nation’s political center, also jumped from No. 3 in 2017 to No. 1 in 2018 in the business category. Therefore, there is still room for greater progress in the construction of the image of Nanjing as a commercial city.

3.2. Special Honorable Mention of the United Nations Habitat Prize

In 2008, Nanjing received the Special Honorary Award of the United Nations Habitat Award. It is the first time the UN Habitat Special Honors Award has been given to a city rather than an individual. The UN Habitat Prize is the highest level of global award in the field of human settlements. It aims to encourage and recognize governments, organizations, individuals and projects that have made outstanding contributions to human settlements development. Before Nanjing, China had won the UN Habitat Prize 16 times, including 10 cities such as Tangshan, Xiamen and Hangzhou. This award is very valuable, and it focuses on human settlements, which is very close to people’s lives. The United Nations made an exception by awarding the Special Honour Award to Nanjing instead of an individual, which was enough to show the recognition of the world for Nanjing’s contribution to the human settlements issue.

3.3. The Roller Skating Capital of the World

In 2016, Nanjing was awarded the title of “Roller Skating Capital of the World”, the only city in the world to receive this title. Nanjing’s relationship with roller skating can be traced back to the Nanjing Youth Olympic Games in 2014. The International Roller Skating Federation was invited to be one of four showcase sports at the “Sports Lab” set up in Nanjing to promote non-Olympic sports popular with young people. Since then, the 2016 and 2017 World Roller Skating Championships have also been held in Nanjing. The title of “World Roller Skating Capital” has greatly enhanced the international visibility of Nanjing. This shows the world that Nanjing not only has history, culture and memories of disasters, but also has the spirit and youthful vigor to look ahead to the new era.

3.4. International City of Peace

In 2017, Nanjing became the only Chinese city to receive the title of “International City of Peace”. The Nanjing Government promoted the international dissemination of historical facts of the Nanjing Massacre, and actively organized overseas exhibitions of “Common Witness: 1937 Nanjing Massacre” and “Common Witness: Memory of 1937 Nanjing” in Minsk, Belarus and Prague, Czech Republic. With the status of “International City of Peace”, Nanjing has made many efforts to call for remembering history and cherishing peace. It has also made the whole world better understand and formalize history and develop better in peace. Up to now, the disasters that Nanjing has endured in history are not only presented to the world in the form of disaster, but actively analyzed and thought about them, and then transmitted the reborn love to the world with a more positive and serious attitude. It can be said that the international image of Nanjing is no longer poor and helpless because of the Nanjing Massacre. Now, the international
image of Nanjing will be particularly brave and strong because of its status as the “International City of Peace”.

3.5. The Literary Capital of the World
Nanjing was awarded the title of “The Literary Capital of the World” in October 2019. Nanjing is the first city in China to win this title, which shows that the literary heritage of Nanjing has been recognized commonly by the world. In the history of China, there are many writers and literary works related to Nanjing, and many works with the marks of Nanjing have been translated into many foreign languages and widely circulated around the world. Being selected as “The Literary Capital of the World” is the proof that the literary image of Nanjing has been widely recognized in the world, which cannot be separated from the historical background of Nanjing and the literary works of the past and present, but also cannot be separated from the publicity of the city image in recent years. The announcement received a lot of attention and helped promote Nanjing’s image on the international stage. This wide range of attention also reflects people’s concern for social hot spots and current affairs in recent years, and reflects that Nanjing has received close attention both at home and abroad.

3.6. Best International Image City in China (mainland)
In 2010, China (Mainland) Best International Image City Award Ceremony was held in Nanjing. Nanjing was awarded the title of “Best International Image City in China (Mainland)” in the first batch and became one of the top ten cities. According to the comprehensive competitiveness of Chinese cities and the number of foreigners in each city and other indicators, the organizing committee finally determined 30 candidate cities including Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjin according to the investigation and evaluation system. The investigation adopts the method of combining subjective investigation with material declaration. In order to ensure the scientific nature of the survey, the respondents covered more than 100 countries on 6 continents, with a total number of 7,980 people, including Chinese domestic institutions in China, enterprises in China and foreign nationals who have been to China. The respondents are between 18 and 60 years old, and only those who have lived or stayed in China for more than one month are eligible to fill in all the evaluation indicators. Among all the indicators, the moral cultivation of citizens in Nanjing was rated highest, and the urban environment was rated second highest, while city culture and government efficiency ranked the third. On the whole, foreign people have a high opinion of Nanjing.

4. The Image of Nanjing on International Media Platforms
4.1. The Story of Japanese Director Takeuchi Ryo and Nanjing
In the spring of 2020, a pandemic caused by COVID-19 brought the world into the fray. Many foreigners are not aware of how much effort and sacrifice China has made to defeat the virus. While Wuhan has received much attention, other cities such as Nanjing have not received much attention from foreign media during the fighting. Takeuchi Ryo, a long-time resident of Nanjing from Japan, used his camera to document the journey of the people of Nanjing to fight against the epidemic. Before he came to China, Takeuchi Ryo had made many documentaries for NHK Television Station. After he and his wife got married, they settled down in Nanjing. He even made a series of short films titled “Why I Live Here” to introduce the city he knew. In order to show China’s efforts and achievements in the epidemic to the whole world, Takeuchi Ryo produced “Nanjing Anti-Epidemic Scene” 1 and 2. After the short film was broadcast, it caused some reactions both at home and abroad. The short film not only attracted the attention of CCTV, but also was reprinted by NHK, TBS, Fuji and other TV stations. After being translated into English, it quickly attracted netizens from all over the world to watch on YouTube.
Through these two short films, countries around the world developed more understanding of China, especially Nanjing’s anti-epidemic process, and thus showed their admiration to Nanjing and China. It is undeniable that the international image of Nanjing has been greatly improved to some extent through these two short films. This promotion breaks away from previous labels such as the long history of Nanjing, and leaves the world with the image of a powerful and enterprising city. At the same time, director Takeuchi Ryo has also made many comments about Nanjing on his Weibo. He said that Nanjing is a city that is less tiring than Beijing, Shanghai and other big cities, and the life in Nanjing is quite easier, which has also aroused a lot of resonance on the Internet.

4.2. Lack of International Communication: Based on Four Major International Social Software and Media

At present, when searching for the keyword “Nanjing” on Twitter, the most popular news is about an actress’ activity in Nanjing. We cannot judge that Nanjing is lack of international influence simply by this phenomenon, but the influence of Nanjing abroad is indeed lower compared to the content reflected by searching the terms of “Beijing”, “Shanghai” and other large cities. Flipping through some popular tweets, we can only see posts from bloggers such as “ChinaExplore” and “NJ_Engineering” about the night view of the Qinhua River or about a company of Nanjing. Occasionally, we can read the tweets of local tour in Nanjing, but after observation, we found that they are just the travel records of Chinese people.

A Facebook search for “Nanjing” also yielded little information. What is better is that, according to the real-time news, some foreigners have visited Nanjing in person and praised Nanjing’s epidemic prevention work (such as showing passports, health codes, etc.) and expressed their love for Nanjing. As can be seen from the photos they posted, the streets of Nanjing are clean, the greenery is beautiful and the air is fresh. Such social dynamics have played a very positive role in building the international image of Nanjing.

Search for “Nanjing” related terms on Instagram and you can see some news about some foreign people visiting Nanjing. The most popular scenic spots in Nanjing for foreigners are Laomendong, Confucius Temple, Xuanwu Lake and other popular places of interest, while Nanjing Museum, Memorial Hall for the Victims in Nanjing Massacre and other historical memorials are almost not visited by foreigners, although they are very necessary for Chinese people to visit. Foreigners who have visited various scenic spots in Nanjing have similar comments on the city, with keywords such as “long history”, “pretty” and “beautiful”. Therefore, in the eyes of foreign visitors, Nanjing is still associated with the impression of a famous historical city and picturesque scenery. It does not give foreign people a sense of the combination of ancient and modern like Beijing.

When we search for “Nanjing” on YouTube, the world’s largest video website, we can see a large number of related videos. Takeuchi Ryo’s documentary videos “Why I Live Here” has gained more than 4,000 thumb ups on YouTube. It can be seen that most foreign netizens appreciate the real life scenes of Nanjing citizens. But some foreign netizens are still prejudiced against Nanjing. In addition to such formal documentaries, there are also videos recording the tour in Nanjing on in the current Vlog era. These short videos show a more real appearance of Nanjing basically, and also introduce to foreigners the image of Nanjing. It seems that the official media did not participate too much, but relying on individuals to export the image of Nanjing to the international community, the Nanjing government needs to perform better in detail in every aspect.
5. Conclusion

Through literature research, field investigation, interview and other methods, this paper systematically expounds several major ways of the international image communication of Nanjing and its current situation. Through analysis, we find that the international image communication of Nanjing is generally satisfactory. It has won many foreign friends’ praise and attained many major international awards and honorary titles. Official and non-governmental forces have also played a role in promoting the international image of Nanjing. However, there are still the following problems in the international image construction of Nanjing: (1) Ignorance of the communication by social media. Social media is an important channel for public opinion expression and communication, and also a key platform for urban culture communication in the era of new media. However, we can barely see the official propaganda of Nanjing’s on several international social media, which leads to the fragmentation, decentralization and low effect of urban communication on these platforms. (2) Publicity activities are not systematic. Although there are international interaction activities about Nanjing’s traditional culture, fashion, history, etc., most of them are scattered and have not formed a complete system. As a result, these activities are often superficial and do not achieve optimal results. (3) The government does not pay enough attention to international communication. During a long time, only a few metropolises such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, etc., have paid more attention to international communication. Many large and medium-sized cities believe that cultural construction is less important than economic development, and international communication is even more unnecessary, so they do not focus on promoting cultural transmission as a vital project to enhance the city’s strength. We must bear in mind that in the 21st century, the competition between countries and between cities is not defined to the economic strength, but a competition of comprehensive strength including economic, cultural, scientific and technological factors. All in all, the international communication of Nanjing has been very effective, but there are still some areas that can be improved.

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