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Research on the Multinarrative Construction and International Communication of Tianjin's Urban Image Under the Framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

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Abstract: This study focuses on the multinarrative construction and international communication effectiveness of Tianjin's urban image within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). It mainly explores four narrative modes shaping Tianjin's urban image: the official "opening-up and innovation" strategic narrative, the historical "blend of Chinese and Western cultures" cultural narrative, the artistic "modern and livable" visual narrative, and the folk "lively urban life" digital narrative. These narratives collectively form a rich and complex narrative ecology. The research shows that in communication targeting SCO member states, culturally affinitive narratives are more likely to gain recognition than single modernization narratives, and significant differences exist in the interpretation of various narratives among member states. Theoretically, this study constructs a "multinarrative" analytical framework for urban images; practically, it provides strategic references for cities' precise communication in multilateral cooperation.

Keywords: Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO); Tianjin; Urban Image; International Communication

1. Introduction

As China increasingly moves closer to the center of the world stage, cities, as specific carriers of national image and active nodes of international exchanges, have become crucial in shaping and communicating their international images. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) serves as an important platform for China's political, security, and economic cooperation, as well as a key venue for international cultural exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations. It has been clearly stated at relevant cooperation conferences of SCO member states that the organization should "adhere to openness and inclusiveness," strive to "foster mutual understanding and affection through people-to-people and cultural exchanges," and work together to build "a garden of diverse civilizations coexisting in harmony." This proposition profoundly reveals the fundamental role of people-to-people and cultural exchanges and mutual understanding between peoples in promoting the sustainable development of regional cooperation, and also provides fundamental ideological guidance for cities of various member states to carry out image construction and international communication within the organizational framework.

Tianjin, as an important coastal city in northern China, a national famous historical and cultural city, and a modern manufacturing base, is not only a land-sea intersection of the "Belt and Road" Initiative but also shares profound historical origins and practical cooperation needs with many SCO member states. Tianjin's unique historical context of "blending Chinese and Western cultures," its realistic role positioning of "opening-up and innovation," and its rich folk life of "lively urban atmosphere" make it an excellent case for studying how urban images are constructed, communicated, and interpreted against the background of exchanges and mutual learning among diverse civilizations.

However, existing research on urban images either focuses on single official discourse analysis or generalized communication effects of mass media, often failing to capture the complex multidimensionality and subject diversity of urban images in the era of globalization and digitalization, as well as under special multilateral frameworks such as the SCO. Meanwhile, targeted research on urban image orientation in the context of specific international organizations remains insufficient.

2. Literature Review and Construction of Analytical Framework

2.1 Review of Research on Urban Image and International Communication

The international communication of urban images is an interdisciplinary and dynamic research field. With the development of globalization and digital technology, its research paradigm has shifted from the early one-way urban marketing and promotion to a more critical and constructive multi-perspective approach. Urban images are no longer static objects passively shaped but dynamic construction processes involving multiple subjects. Scholars such as Shi Xu further propose that urban internationalization should be examined from the perspective of "cultural discourse" in global communication to analyze the inherent laws of its communication strategies. This marks a shift in research focus from "managing images" to "decoding narratives."

In the context of digital communication, the research frontier focuses on the profound changes in narrative strategies and communication paradigms. Effective urban external communication requires the adoption of shared, consensual, and empathetic narrative strategies to seek value resonance and emotional connection. In practice, communication presents characteristics of diversified subjects, multimodal content, and integrated channels.

Overall, existing research emphasizes that the international communication of urban images is a process in which multiple subjects collaboratively narrate and co-construct meanings in the digital ecosystem. Future research needs to theoretically deepen the understanding of the interaction mechanism of the "narrative ecology" and practically explore how to integrate the diverse voices of officials and the public, as well as local and international perspectives, to construct a comprehensive, three-dimensional, and credible urban narrative.

2.2 Construction of the "Multinarrative" Analytical Framework

Based on narrative theory and social constructivist perspectives, this paper constructs a "multinarrative" analytical framework for urban images. Centering on the dynamic representation co-constructed by "story clusters" about urban space, history, characters, and activities, the framework explores the narrative types of urban images. It argues that an urban image is not a fixed entity but is constructed by different subjects through specific texts and media. These narratives are interrelated, competing with or complementing each other, forming the city's "narrative ecology." The narrative ecology can be studied mainly from four dimensions: narrative subject, narrative theme, narrative carrier, and communication channel.

3. Multinarrative Construction of Tianjin's Urban Image

Based on the "multinarrative" analytical framework, through a systematic investigation of multimodal corpora such as official documents, media texts, cultural products, and online social media, it is identified that Tianjin's urban image in the specific cross-cultural communication context of the "SCO" is mainly co-constructed by four distinct yet interrelated core narrative types.

3.1 The Strategic Official Narrative of "Opening-up and Innovation"

The official narrative is a typical institutional discourse dominated by administrative forces, mainly constructed by the Tianjin Municipal Government, commercial departments, and other authorities in official policy documents, investment promotion brochures, and cooperation initiatives under the SCO framework. Its core lies in establishing Tianjin's role as an agent of national strategies. The narrative themes focus on functional orientations entrusted by the state, such as "the core area of international shipping in northern China," "a pilot area for reform and opening-up," and "an advanced manufacturing and R&D base."

In narrative rhetoric, images such as modern ports, automated container terminals, and the grand skyline of the Binhai New Area are repeatedly used to jointly construct a picture of an efficient, reliable, and global-oriented "city of the future." Examples of narrative carriers include: the "Tianjin Municipal Government Work Report," multilingual introductions on the official website "China Tianjin," and Tianjin's special promotion conferences at the "SCO International Investment and Trade Expo." The narrative cites quantitative indicators such as innovative achievements of the pilot free trade zone, hub operation data of China-Europe Railway Express, and the rapidly growing trade volume with SCO member states, transforming the city into a measurable and trustworthy

economic node and cooperation interface.

Its communication intention is to shape the image of an international cooperative partner that complies with international rules, possesses both stability and vitality. It aims to send clear institutional trust signals to SCO member states and other international actors, lay an official discourse foundation for undertaking high-end industrial investment, deepening regional economic cooperation and strategic alignment, and serving economic cooperation and strategic docking.

3.2 The Cultural and Historical Narrative of "Blending Chinese and Western Cultures"

The historical narrative is a "cultural heritage discourse" co-constructed by multiple cultural subjects. The producers and communicators include historians, cultural institutions, tourism promotion departments, and cultural heritage protection organizations. Through academic research, archives collation, cultural product development, and experiential tourism, a historical text about Tianjin's urban identity is formed. Its core is to construct Tianjin as a "microcosmic model of mutual learning among civilizations." The narrative theme focuses on Tianjin's unique modern history, telling the story of it being a "gallery of world architectures." Instead of simply listing historical relics, this narrative strives to interpret the underlying logic of cultural integration—how the Eastern foundation engages in dialogue and integration with Western architectural styles, lifestyles, and commercial spirits, highlighting the unique temperament of the blend of Chinese and Western cultures. Wudadao (Five Great Avenues), Italian Style Town, and Ancient Culture Street have been refined and symbolized as representative spaces of "symbiotic modernity."

In terms of discourse strategy, this narrative tends to adopt "visitable" and "experiential" rhetoric. For example, the documentary "Wudadao" reveals the people and events behind the buildings layer by layer through image archaeology; the foreign language guide "Discover Tianjin" overlays historical maps with contemporary landmarks to guide international tourists on a time-space journey; and activities such as "Chinese Culture Courses on the Haihe River" transform static historical knowledge into dynamic and participatory cultural practices. Its visual symbol system emphasizes the details of

building facades, the spatial texture of streets, and the restoration of historical scenes, creating an immersive atmosphere of a "tangible past."

The deep communication intention of this type of narrative is to provide "historical legitimacy" and "cultural communicability" for Tianjin's modern international role. It aims to show audiences from SCO member states and other civilizations that Tianjin's "openness" is not a product of recent economic policies but a historical character and cultural tradition deeply rooted in its urban genes. By demonstrating this long-standing inclusiveness and dialogue capacity, the historical narrative effectively transforms the city into an understandable and affable cultural communicator, thereby eliminating the sense of strangeness and estrangement in cross-cultural cooperation and laying a solid and emotionally warm foundation of humanistic consensus for the economic and strategic cooperation promoted by the official narrative.

3.3 The Visual and Artistic Narrative of "Modern and Livable"

The artistic narrative is mainly a "sensory rhetorical discourse" centered on images, videos, and spatial aesthetics. Its constructors are mainly urban planners, architects, artists, and film and television creators. Through highly aestheticized visual media, they transform the city into a series of modern images that can be gazed at, consumed, and yearned for.

Its core is to present Tianjin as a "modern work embodying humanistic care." The narrative theme does not merely display the modernization achievements of physical space but strives to interpret a "warm modernity"— how economic development and technical rationality coexist harmoniously with human sensory experiences, quality of life, and ecological ethics. The landscape corridor along the Haihe River, the streamlined space of the Binhai Library, carefully designed urban furniture, and green public areas are collectively encoded as perceptual evidence of this development concept.

This narrative makes extreme use of "spectacularized" and "stylized" visual rhetoric. For example, the internet-famous building "Binhai Library" has been transformed into a world-wide symbol representing knowledge, the future, and aesthetic taste through its dissemination on global social media; city

promotional videos depict the night view of the Haihe River beautifully with film-level lens language, constructing a romantic image of a metropolis that is both prosperous and peaceful; film and television works often use specific blocks in Tianjin as backdrops for modern urban life, allowing its modern landscapes to naturally integrate into daily narratives, thereby gaining an "inadvertent persuasiveness."

The communication intention of this type of narrative is to inject key "attraction capital" into Tianjin's international image. By shaping the image of a "charming city" and "livable place" with a beautiful environment, active culture, and convenient life, the artistic narrative directly serves the city's flexible competition for global talents and capital, providing strong perceptual persuasion for attracting high-quality investment, tourism consumption, and long-term residence.

3.4 The Digital Folk Narrative of "Lively Urban Life"

This type of narrative is a typical network-native discourse that grows and spreads spontaneously on digital platforms. Its producers and communicators are mainly ordinary citizens, internet bloggers, and domestic and foreign tourists. Through instant and interactive media such as short videos, social media graphics, and travel blogs, they jointly weave a "liquid text" about Tianjin's urban temperament.

Its core is to present Tianjin as a "charming stage for daily life." The narrative theme highly focuses on the freshest, unadorned micro-moments and perceptual experiences in urban life. The unique humorous tone of Tianjin dialect, the urban breakfast ritual represented by "pancake rolls with crisp fritters," the collective laughter in teahouse cross-talk, and the lively atmosphere rising from night markets are collectively extracted and sublimated into a "digital archive of local vitality." This narrative does not pursue grand historical logic or perfect visual spectacles but strives to capture and communicate the specific details that make the city approachable, perceptible, and livable.

In terms of discourse strategy, this narrative naturally conforms to and maximizes the digital logic of "viral communication" and "participatory culture." For example, the series of videos "Tianjin Uncles Diving" triggered a phenomenal wave of imitation and interaction on global social platforms with their unexpected spirit of joy; clips from food documentaries such as "A Bite of Tianjin" transform local flavors into sensory invitations that cross language barriers through close-up shots; and Vlogs by foreign bloggers experiencing morning culture provide others with a first-person, immersive path to "becoming a temporary Tianjin local." Its symbol system favors unplanned life scenes, intuitive and strong sensory stimuli (such as food close-ups), and the true and natural emotional expressions of people, collectively constructing an atmosphere of "overwhelming authenticity."

The communication intention of this type of folk narrative lies in its de-officialized and de-elitist digital expression, which effectively decodes the city into a "community of life" with no cognitive thresholds and full of life interest, shaping an approachable, humorous, and life-filled "down-to-earth" urban image. Thus, it establishes direct connections based on shared life emotions among ordinary netizens across countries and cultures, laying an indispensable micro-emotional foundation with strong resonance for the macro urban image constructed by other narrative dimensions.

These four narratives collectively constitute Tianjin's "narrative ecology." They are not isolated but interact with and tension each other. For example, the modern port in the "official narrative" and the lively urban life in the "folk narrative" jointly define Tianjin's "openness" trait, but with distinct focuses.

4. Analysis of Communication Effects Based on Differences Among Member States

By analyzing media reprints, social media comments, and audience feedback targeting major member states such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, and India, this study finds that significant differences exist in the effectiveness of Tianjin's multinarrative in communication.

4.1 Advantages of Culturally Affinitive Narratives

The research shows that compared with the single "opening-up and innovation" economic narrative, the historical narrative of "blending Chinese and Western cultures" and the folk narrative of "lively urban life" are more likely to resonate among SCO member states with different cultural backgrounds. For example, for Central Asian countries with rich historical heritage, Tianjin's story of protecting and activating modern history can trigger their reflections and recognition on cultural

inheritance in their own urbanization processes. For people in countries such as Pakistan, the life-filled "lively urban life" narrative effectively eliminates cultural distance and establishes emotional connections due to its authenticity and emotional warmth.

4.2 Differences in Interpretation Among Member States

For Russia, Kazakhstan, and other countries: They have a high acceptance of the logistics hub and industrial cooperation content in the "opening-up and innovation" narrative, which is related to the solid economic and trade cooperation foundation between the two sides. At the same time, they show strong interest in Tianjin as a cultural sample of "East meeting West."

For Pakistan, India, and other countries: The influence of folk digital narratives and visual artistic narratives is particularly prominent. Dynamic short video content, food experiences, and other elements have become the main windows for them to perceive Tianjin. They are relatively less sensitive to official grand narratives and pay more attention to specific information related to personal life, tourism, and education.

5. Conclusions and Countermeasure Suggestions

This study confirms that under the framework of the SCO, Tianjin's urban image is a multinarrative complex co-constructed by four major subjects: officials, history, art, and the public. This diversity not only reflects the complexity of Tianjin as a city but also constitutes the potential of its international communication. The research further reveals that in international communication, especially in the culturally diverse SCO region, "flexible" narratives based on shared emotions and historical and cultural resonance are often more effective than single "rigid" strategic economic narratives.

Based on the above findings, the following strategic suggestions are put forward to enhance the international communication effects of Chinese cities such as Tianjin under similar multilateral frameworks like the SCO:

5.1 Implement Narrative Integration and Hierarchical Communication

Avoid a "one-size-fits-all" approach to publicity.

Instead, align with the cultural concerns and information needs of different member states to conduct precise narrative combinations. For governments and the business community, strengthen the "opening-up and innovation" narrative; for the cultural sector and young audiences, focus on promoting the "blend of cultures" and "lively urban life" narratives.

5.2 Expand Communication Subjects and Make Good Use of "Civilian Ambassadors"

Encourage and support international students, businessmen, travel bloggers, and others in SCO member states to become narrators of Tianjin's stories. Their first-person perspectives and personal experiences are more credible and persuasive.

5.3 Build a Cross-Cultural Visual Symbol System

Centering on the themes of "blending Chinese and Western cultures" and "modern and livable," produce a series of high-quality, story-driven visual products (such as micro-documentaries and photo collections) to make them cultural universal symbols that cross language barriers.

5.4 Deepen Thematic People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges Under the SCO Framework

Proactively set up "Tianjin Theme Weeks/Months" under SCO mechanisms such as youth exchanges, media cooperation, film festivals, and cultural years, integrating multinarratives into specific people-to-people and cultural cooperation projects to realize the in-depth integration of urban image communication and organizational development. In conclusion, under the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind, through meticulous multinarrative communication, Tianjin can fully demonstrate a comprehensive, three-dimensional, and authentic international urban image on the SCO stage—one that carries a profound history, is full of innovative vitality, embraces strategic aspirations, and is rich in lively urban life.

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