

# An Analysis of the International Communication Path of Chengdu's City Image from the Perspective of Transcultural Communication

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**Abstract:** Chengdu's "cozy (*Ba shi*) life" has gone abroad and has become a phenomenal event in international communication in recent years. This paper, guided by transcultural communication theory, conducts a study of Chengdu's city image, exploring its international communication path from three dimensions: communicative subjects, communicative symbols, and narrative strategies. The findings of this research aim to provide new strategies for city international communication and offer insights for promoting China's image and Chinese culture globally.

**Keywords:** City image; Chengdu; Transcultural communication; International communication

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## 1. Introduction

The international communication of the city image is conducive to building a credible, appealing, and respectable image of China, and is an important part of the international communication of Chinese culture. Based on the theory of transcultural communication, this paper interprets the city image of Chengdu from the perspective of transcultural communication and analyzes its international communication path in combination with the development of international communication.

## 2. Cultural transmission

At present, international communication is moving from "cross-cultural communication" to "transcultural communication", the latter emphasizing the construction of a global communication system. It seeks to create an inclusive, harmonious, and mutually respectful environment for communication. China's international communication is built on the concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind", aiming to promote

Chinese narratives and discourse on a stable and clear foundation, through various mediums such as media, educational exchanges, and personnel communication. This goal is to help the world to understand, recognize, and identify with China, thereby shaping and maintaining a credible, appealing, and respectable image of China<sup>[1]</sup>.

### **3. Interpretation of Chengdu's image**

“City image refers to the impression formed by the public based on elements such as the geographical environment, economic level, social security, landscape architecture, public facilities, legal system, governance model, historical and cultural traditions, and citizens' values, lifestyle and behavior patterns”<sup>[2]</sup>. On a macro level, city image is the system of key characteristics recognized by the audience. On a micro level, it is the overall impression shaped by communicators through media channels and accepted by the audience. This section focuses on analyzing Chengdu's city image from a micro perspective.

#### **3.1. Symbolic imagery in city image construction**

In shaping the city image, it is very important to select symbols and interpret them. In the process of viewing, selecting, and communicating, the audience forms their understanding of the concrete symbols. In the process of input and output, decoding and encoding, they strengthen their memory and shape their imagination of the city. According to the survey of China Youth Daily, the most popular cultural elements are Sichuan Opera Face-Painting (50.9%), pandas (49.1%), the sun and immortal bird (48.0%), *Sanxingdui* (45.9%), Shu brocade and Shu embroidery (41.2%), and so on<sup>[3]</sup>. In addition, characteristic symbols such as hot pot, skewers, and Chengdu dialect can influence the foreign audiences' first impression of Chengdu, and establish a connection.

#### **3.2. Media events promote the comprehensive reproduction of city space**

Media events are functional, ritualistic, and performative. These roles make media events a crucial force in the comprehensive reproduction of city space. Chengdu has successfully hosted international events such as the United Nations World Tourism Organization conference, the Triathlon World Cup, and the 81st World Science Fiction Convention. Additionally, the city is actively preparing for international sports events such as the 2024 Thomas & Uber Cup and the 2025 World Games.

As media events, international activities can effectively utilize urban resources, combine with cultural backgrounds, and create a series of dynamic experiences to promote cultural exchange with the city. For example, the short video “Many ‘Curious Babies’ Experience the Magic of TCM in the FISU Games Village” with over 7 million views, published by Chengdu Daily, captures the charm of traditional Chinese medicine and shows that the Chengdu Universiade is not only a sports event, but also a cultural exchange between China and the West.

### **4. The development of international communication of Chengdu's city image**

As China's “national central city”, an inland economic opening-up highland, and a hub for the “Belt and Road” initiative, Chengdu's national strategic position is steadily rising, making it an important window for showcasing China's image. The international communication of Chengdu's city image has evolved along with changing times.

#### **4.1. Exploration period (from nonexistence to existence)**

As exchanges between China and foreign countries gradually deepened, the Chengdu Municipal Party Committee

Propaganda Department and Chengdu Media Group founded *HELLO Chengdu* in 2008 to provide foreign friends living in Chengdu with information about Chengdu and life in China, marking a key step in international communication. Since then, Chengdu has launched the local English website Go Chengdu in 2014, and the TV program “Looking West to Chengdu” in 2015, further enhancing Chengdu’s international image.

#### **4.2. Development period (Integration of resources)**

In 2011, Chengdu took the lead in launching a 30-second tourism promotional video in Times Square, marking a milestone in the city’s international communication. In the same year, Chengdu elements were implanted in the movie *Kung Fu Panda 2*, further advancing Chengdu’s international profile. At the same time, Chengdu cooperated with international media agencies such as Reuters, Bloomberg, and the Associated Press, and various domestic websites, platforms, and streaming media to spread its message globally.

#### **4.3. Growth period (Rapid development)**

In recent years, Chengdu has actively laid out the international communication of its city image, forming an international communication team and establishing the Chengdu International Communication Center to strengthen its international communication channels and capabilities. According to the 2020 “Global City Rankings” by GaWC, Chengdu rose from 71st in 2018 to 59th. In 2022, Chengdu ranked 62nd for “livability” in the “Global Cities Youth Development Potential” report, indicating that the city’s livability has been globally recognized.

### **5. Analysis of Chengdu’s international communication path**

Based on transcultural communication’s emphasis on equal interaction and mutual respect, this paper analyzes the international communication practice of Chengdu’s city image from three aspects: the subject communication subjects, the communication symbols, and the narrative strategies.

#### **5.1. Communicative subjects in transcultural communication**

Under the transcultural communication model, the decentralized nature of media communication results in a more diverse range of communicative subjects. The communication of Chengdu’s city image can be analyzed from two perspectives: self-presentation and other-presentation.

##### **5.1.1. Self-presentation**

Self-presentation is the leading force in the construction of a city’s image, including mainstream media, self-media, and commercial platforms. In terms of mainstream media, such as Sichuan TV, Chengdu TV, *Sichuan Daily*, and *Chengdu Daily*, reports on Chengdu’s major and minor events, providing audiences with detailed and comprehensive information. As for self-media, Chengdu’s open and inclusive attitude has attracted Internet celebrities represented by Li Ziqi to spread Chinese culture on foreign social media. And commercial platforms, such as TikTok, YouTube, and Bilibili, have played key roles in broadcasting Chengdu’s international events.

##### **5.1.2. The other-presentation**

In addition to self-representation, other representation has a subtle yet significant impact on communication. The participation of diverse subjects transforms the traditional “one-way communication” method into a “multi-voice

resonance” approach, “integrating China and foreign countries” in international communication. For example, videos about Chengdu’s life have gained popularity on YouTube, with foreign influencers in China playing a key role in public communication. Their immersive content helps promote Chengdu’s image and reduce stereotypes about Chinese cities.

In the video “Our First Impression of Chengdu” released by Nico, a “foreign internet celebrity”, she shared her life in Chengdu and expressed her feelings. Netizen @Phil commented that Chengdu is a city suitable for vacation and hopes to live in Chengdu in the future. Many netizens expressed their appreciation and yearning for the image of Chengdu shown by the “foreign internet celebrity”<sup>[4]</sup>.

## **5.2. Transcultural communication symbols**

Cultural symbols, as important carriers for constructing a city’s image, play a key role in shaping the audience’s memory and imagination of the city. It directly influences the effectiveness of city image communication. Chengdu’s cultural symbols are characterized by multi-modal contextual empathy, integration of culture and civilization, and co-creation of technology and daily life.

### **5.2.1. Multimodal contextual empathy**

The transcultural communication theory advocates for equal interaction and integration between cultures. This consensus is more easily grasped from an emotional perspective. Empathy is an inherent human ability that, through emotional activation, triggers physiological responses to facilitate intrapersonal communication. Through emotional awakening, individuals develop a desire to share and drive social behaviors, which then leads to compound communication based on personal networks. These two pathways are based on the physiological drive and social construct of empathy. The key to cross-cultural empathetic communication strategies lies in bridging the gap between “you” and “me”, connecting different groups as “companions”, and overcoming differences through cultural stories that gain recognition. The construction of a multi-modal discourse system provides abundant resources for the widespread dissemination of information, which can intuitively evoke emotional resonance among international audiences.

Chengdu’s development concept showcases the rich culture of Tianfu and China to the world. With the rapid growth of digital platforms in the context of intelligent media, audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds gain a unified interpretation and emotional resonance with the city’s image, achieving the goal of empathetic communication.

### **5.2.2. Integration of culture and civilization**

Fan Yugang argues that China’s rise ultimately represents a cultural revival and the rejuvenation of Chinese civilization. In the context of transcultural communication, Chengdu’s international image should emphasize the role of cultural and civilizational integration in enhancing communication effectiveness.

With a 4,500-year civilizational history and over 2,300 years of urban development, Chengdu boasts rich cultural and historical resources, including Ancient Shu culture, Silk Road culture, and landmarks like *Sanxingdui*, Mount Qingcheng, and Wuhou Shrine. Its intangible cultural heritage—such as Shu embroidery, Sichuan opera, and Chengdu lacquerware—also attracts global attention. These unique cultural assets connect Chengdu with the world, highlighting its cultural identity in dialogue with global civilizations.

### **5.2.3. Co-creation of technology and life**

The international communication of a city's image should not only focus on cultural connotations but also modern innovative development. According to the 2023 Global Innovation Index Report, Chengdu surpassed Chicago and Houston in the top 100 "technology clusters" list and ranked 24th in the world. The 2023 Chengdu World Science Fiction Convention will also accumulate more energy to promote original innovation.

Chengdu has long promoted its reputation as a "Park City". For example, the Beihu Future Park Community incorporates a variety of natural and cultural landmarks, such as Beihu Bay, Qianzhu Garden, and the Giant Panda Breeding Research Base. In terms of community governance, a digital transformation model has been adopted to enhance residents' life quality. Each park community explores, experiments, and embodies the "Park City" concept through unique approaches, collectively advancing Chengdu's park city lifestyle toward greater intelligence, efficiency, comfort, convenience, and sustainability.

## **5.3. Transcultural communication narrative strategy**

Narrative is an important support for framework expression and content presentation in cultural communication. The international communication of a city's image requires macro-narrative and micro-narrative, authoritative voice, and trendy expression, which are integrated and complementary to present a comprehensive, three-dimensional, vivid, and real city image.

### **5.3.1. Macro-narrative and micro-narrative**

Macro-narrative and micro-narrative complement each other and enrich the audience's impression. Macro-narrative focuses on the overall development of the city and emphasizes the shaping of general cognition. Mainstream media typically present Chengdu's science and technology, economy, policies, etc., with accurate, comprehensive, and objective information, to enhance the audience's trust and interest. While micro-narratives focus on the sights, sounds, feelings, and thoughts associated with urban life, emphasizing the shaping of unique details. Social media pays attention to the city's daily life and disseminates infectious, fresh, and personalized information, which is conducive to building a vivid image of the city.

### **5.3.2. Authoritative voice and trendy expression**

The coexistence of authoritative voice and trendy expressions helps audiences better understand information about a city's image. Professional and accurate authoritative reporting provides objective and comprehensive city information, while trendy expressions in the new media era create memorable and engaging impressions. Together, these two narrative approaches enhance international audiences' understanding of the city's image. Chengdu's primary international image on platforms like Twitter highlights it as the hometown of pandas, a tourist destination, a transportation hub, a city of international sports events, a gastronomic capital, and an international convention and exhibition capital <sup>[5-7]</sup>.

## **6. Conclusion**

The goal of cross-cultural communication is to build an inclusive, harmonious, and equal communication environment that promotes a community with a shared future for mankind. The international communication of Chengdu's city image, under the perspective of transcultural communication, focuses on two communication subjects: the self and the other. It shapes cultural symbols that embody multi-modal contexts, cultural and

civilizational integration, as well as technology and life co-creation. It employs two complementary narrative strategies—macro-narratives and micro-narratives, as well as the coexistence of authoritative voice and trendy expressions. Chengdu’s achievement provides valuable insights for exploring international communication paths for Chinese cities and offers meaningful explorations for promoting Chinese traditional culture globally.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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