

Shaping of Urban Cultural Brands Based on the Cultural and Tourism Industry

-- A Case Study of Quanzhou City

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Abstract

Taking Quanzhou as an example, this paper studies on the shaping of urban cultural brands based on the cultural and tourism industry. Firstly, it illustrates the connotation of urban cultural brands and emphasizes integrating intangible cultural heritage with tourism in conjunction with relevant policies. Next, it reviews the rich cultural heritage resources of the Hokkien region and summarizes the relevant views and current state of research on the shaping of urban cultural brands. Subsequently, it focuses on analyzing the promotion strategies and existing issues of Quanzhou's city brand, including its core value, promotion process, methods, as well as issues such as homogenization and insufficient international recognition in the integration of cultural tourism and scenic spot development. Finally, it proposes development strategies for Quanzhou's city brand from three aspects: architectural preservation, cultural and creative industries development, and cultural tourism activities, aiming to provide insights for the optimization and enhancement of city cultural brand of Quanzhou City.

Keywords

City cultural brand, cultural tourism industry, cultural heritage, Quanzhou.

1. Introduction

A city cultural brand refers to the distinct brand elements—like geographical environment, historical and cultural heritage, and industrial strengths—that city developers analyze, refine, and integrate. Each city possesses its own unique urban cultural brand, which in turn becomes a fixed label through which other countries and regions perceive the city. Therefore, cities carefully cultivate their cultural brands to ensure they exert positive influence both nationally and internationally.

In February 2023, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China issued the <Notice on Promoting the In-Depth Integration of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Tourism>, emphasizing respect for the forms and connotations of intangible cultural heritage and protection of relevant environment and spaces, safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of the inheritors during tourism development, to facilitate their participation in tourism development, and promote the long-term preservation and utilization of intangible cultural heritage. In the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, it is crucial to adhere to creative transformation and innovative development, actively adapt to contemporary tourism demands and the changes in production and lifestyle brought about by tourism, taking inheritance, development and utilization to next level, and consistently provide tourism with rich cultural resources.

The Hokkien region boasts long history and diverse cultural heritage, including traditional architecture, religious culture, language, music, dance and more. It is home to not only abundant tangible cultural heritage but also a variety of intangible cultural heritage, such as Nanyin

(Southern Music), puppet theater, and folk arts. While preserving both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, the region skillfully integrates cultural elements from its heritage into the cultural and tourism industries. This allows visitors to experience the unique Hokkien cultural characteristics while further promoting the development and protection of its tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

2. Literature Review

Table 1. literature review on City Brand Image

Literature	Opinion	Review
Pathways for Shaping the Brand Image of City Cultural Heritage Driven by City Renewal[1]	1. City cultural heritage branding integrates a city's history, regional traits, and traditional features, visually showcasing its evolution and cultural identity. 2. It converges diverse cultural forms across eras, ethnic groups, and city development patterns.	Theory: The application of urban renewal theory lacks literature review, does not summarize previous research, lacks empirical evidence, and only refers to some literature materials
Brand building and dissemination of Zhengzhou city's cultural brand based on Bilibili Travel Vlogs[2]	1. The "public persona" of the city in vlogs remains ambiguously positioned, merely serving as a transit hub for ancient city tourism within the province. 2. While leveraging food marketing strategies centered around "internet-famous check-in spots," the vlogs lack integration of natural and cultural elements.	The analysis of Bilibili videos uses the method of high-frequency word analysis, applies the scene theory and the theory of brand and media, but it lacks literature review, and rarely summarizes previous research.
Innovative Approaches to rebranding the Cultural Image of Henan City[3]	1. The "de-homogenization" of Henan's urban cultural branding has become a symbol of its distinctive identity and visual innovation. 2. Building urban cultural brands requires enhanced operational management to achieve a "halo effect" for the city's cultural reputation. 3. Highlighting or amplifying unique cultural elements to shape the urban cultural brand. 4. Innovatively crafting a core cultural brand for the city.	A large number of real-life examples were used, as well as numerous reports and data to support the authenticity of the article
Research on the International Dissemination of Fuzhou city's Urban Cultural Brand from the Perspective of "Fu" Culture[4]	1. The commercial and social value of "Fu" culture has yet to be fully developed and unleashed. 2. Fuzhou's urban cultural branding has transitioned from traditional text-image media to the digital mobile era. 3. Language barriers may hinder the complete and accurate expression of these cultural elements, leading to miscommunication, misinterpretation, devaluation of information, and even cultural discrimination or social conflict. 4. Establish a networked communication matrix on overseas social media to break away from the previous single-source dissemination model.	It elaborates on the future innovation directions and the current challenges from multiple perspectives, and makes good references to well-known domestic and foreign literature, providing a multi-angle view of the problems
A Study on Historical Cultural Heritage and the Construction of City Cultural Brands[5]	Highlight the city's historical culture, ecological construction, humanistic value and modern development, and enhance Xi 'an's cultural competitiveness and cultural image	The lack of literature cannot support the ideas

3. Strategies and Problems of City Brand Promotion in Quanzhou

3.1. City Brand Marketing of Quanzhou

In February 1991, Quanzhou, the starting point of the Maritime Silk Road, was designated by UNESCO as a pilot city in the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road under China's "Belt and Road" initiative. As early as the Song and Yuan dynasties, the Houzhuzhou Port in Quanzhou had trade ties with almost a hundred countries and regions, earning its reputation as the "Greatest Eastern Port." This historical prominence facilitated the convergence of diverse cultures—such as ancient Persian, Arab, and Indian—with Central Plains culture and Southern Fujian traditions, creating a rich multicultural legacy in Quanzhou.

Quanzhou city's brand is anchored in three core elements: the ground zero of the Maritime Silk Road, multicultural heritage, and a dynamic private economy. Leveraging its historical significance, cultural landmarks including Kaiyuan Temple and Qingjing Mosque, and the developmental model known as the "Jinjiang Experience," the city has shaped a distinct brand identity encapsulated as "Song-Yuan China · Maritime Quanzhou." The evolution of its promotion can be divided into four phases: initially focused on regional tourism; post-2000, enhancing cultural influence through heritage application campaigns and international art festivals; after successful UNESCO inscription in 2021, integrating world heritage resources to develop comprehensive tourism and promoting intangible heritage and viral attractions via new media; and recently advancing international recognition through global sporting events and cross-sector collaborations.

Promotion strategies emphasize cultural IP development (e.g., the Xunpu Women custom), event-based marketing such as the Maritime Silk Road International Arts Festival, public-private partnerships with local brands, and digital outreach via short video platforms. Current challenges include homogeneous competition with nearby cities and insufficient global visibility. Moving forward, Quanzhou aims to deepen international cooperation around the "Maritime Silk Road" IP, explore youth-oriented expressions such as e-sports and "guochao" (China-chic trends), and strengthen industrial synergy to build a dynamic urban brand ecosystem.

3.2. Cultural and Tourism Integration and Scenic Development

A Christian Church, in Southern Quanzhou, a relatively new building. It sits near the center of the ancient city, close to tourist areas. The surroundings are uninteresting, with little greenery due to the commercial street location. Nearby are many Quanzhou hairpin flower shops and food stalls. A vegetable market stands directly opposite. Access is limited for tourists due to the fixed opening time and many in-house activities of the church, making it hard to enter. It mainly serves local residents. Its cultural value comes mainly from Christianity.

Quanzhou Hairpin Flower Shops

These distinctive shops are common in tourist areas and commercial streets, offering uniform prices. The shops are clean, though with little greenery. Visitors can have hairpin flowers styling done and wear it elsewhere. It's highly portable. Hairpin flowers has cultural value, but its popularity now is largely due to celebrity influence.

Typical Temples

Most temples are in the ancient city district. They are free to enter. Many were built or repaired through private donations. Located in commercial and tourist zones, the surroundings are well-kept. Most structures are new or recently renovated.

Cafés on the old town's commercial street retain the traditional architectural style on the exterior. The interior blends modern and European design elements.

They sell cultural and creative products and combine features of both cafés and bars. The surroundings and interior are very clean, tidy, and modern.

Puppet Theater Shop

Inside a shopping mall in the old town, there is a commercialized puppet theater shop dedicated to intangible cultural heritage. The area has a retro style in both design and décor. The shop offers puppet performances and sells puppet characters. It collaborates with platforms like Meituan and Dianping for promotions and customer discounts.

Snack Shops

Many snack shops on the old town's commercial street gained fame from appearing on CCTV's "A Bite of China." Some use the show for promotion, which can involve exaggerated or false claims. Visitors should treat such advertising with caution. These shops are convenient for takeaway, with reasonable prices and average cleanliness. There's limited greenery around.

Cultural Creative Park

On the edge of the old town lies a cultural creative park with glamping-style hotels and restaurants. The location is relatively remote but well-developed. The environment is pleasant, ideal for travelers from nearby provinces whether they arrive by public traffic tools or by private vehicles. The park works like a small complex with complete facilities, including multiple restaurants and guesthouses. It covers a large area with plenty of greenery and supports online payments.

The creative shops inside the park feature innovative designs and keep up with trends like Labubu. They display models and pets for visitors to enjoy, along with many private collections that easily attract attention. Their cultural products are distinctive, rich in color, and partly handmade. Prices and quality are better than those on the commercial street.

3.3. Brand Development Strategies of Quanzhou City

3.3.1. Architectural Conservation

As a World Heritage city, one of China's first nationally recognized historical and cultural cities, and a Cultural Capital of East Asia, Quanzhou is home to 22 World Heritage sites and over 900 state-level cultural relics protection units. In cultural heritage preservation, Quanzhou has established conservation regulations, strengthened planning control, implemented protection measures, and disseminate historical narratives for its historic blocks, 22 heritage sites, and cultural relics at all levels. The government emphasizes residents' sense of experience and benefit, issuing technical guidelines for the restoration of traditional architecture. A total of 669 traditional historical buildings have been labeled and restored following the principle of "original site, original form, original material, and authentic flavor." For example, the 271-meter-long Goldfish Lane, a representative street for micro-renovation, was repaired using more than ten traditional Hokkien techniques such as oyster shell masonry, brick-and-stone construction, washed gravel finish, lime plaster, rammed earth walls, wood carving, stone carving, and clay sculpture. After restoration, the lane regained its ancient charm and became a must-visit sports

3.3.2. Cultural and Creative Product Development

Hokkien's paper-cutting art, culinary culture derivatives, modern redesigns of traditional musical instruments, culture-themed apparel, architectural culture home products, and traditional handicrafts such as Dehua ceramics, Yangchun joss stick, and puppet show figurines can all be developed into cultural and creative products. Quanzhou has also achieved notable success in this field, with four existing creative cultural souvenir shops. Each integrates rich Hokkien cultural elements, allowing visitors to experience the profound cultural heritage of ancient Quanzhou. These four shops are: the West Street Tourist Service Center on Xijie in Licheng District, Zhongshan Posthouse on Zhongshan Road, Liwu Shop on Xuefu Road in

Licheng District, and Qibulianxiang Zen Culture Hall on Tumen Street in Licheng District. However, excessive homogenization of shops in some areas weakens Quanzhou's overall cultural creativity. Additionally, the city lacks a representative IP image, and its religious, intangible cultural, culinary, and architectural features remain relatively fragmented. The city's image needs to be narrativized to enhance visitors' sense of history and emotional connection.

3.3.3. Cultural and Tourism Activities

In safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, Quanzhou promotes the living inheritance of Nanyin Music, Liyuan Opera, Puppet Theater, and Gaojia Opera, among others. In 2020, Quanzhou's ancient city was designated a Fujian Provincial Tourist Resort; in 2021, the eastern section of West Street was recognized as one of the first national-level nighttime cultural and tourism consumption clusters; in January 2023, Zhongshan Road was named a second batch national-level leisure tourism street; in March 2023, the inaugural China Screenwriters Week opened in Quanzhou, encouraging screenwriters to explore the city's charm and delve into its storytelling potential; in December 2023, the fifth Maritime Silk Road International Arts Festival was held in Quanzhou, with participation from international organizations, foreign officials, experts, artists, and friends from abroad, establishing Quanzhou as an important platform for cultural exchange, people-to-people bonds, and promoting the "Silk Road Spirit" among countries and regions along the Maritime Silk Road. At the same time, Quanzhou integrates contemporary aesthetics with traditional culture, creating must-visit spots through unique landscape design and viral marketing strategies. Through tours, immersive performances, and interactive experiences, it showcases the distinctive features of Hokkien culture in the Quanzhou region.

4. Conclusionu

To address the existing problems, Quanzhou needs to optimize its urban cultural brand development strategy from the three dimensions of "protection-development-activation". In terms of architectural protection, it is necessary to continue adhering to the principle of "original location, original state, original materials, and original charm". Taking the micro-renovation of Jinyu Lane as a model, efforts should be made to deepen the inheritance of traditional crafts and the living protection of historical blocks, so as to lay a solid spatial carrier for brand shaping. In terms of cultural and creative product development, focus should be placed on Minnan cultural characteristics (such as Dehua ceramics, Yongchun incense sticks, and paper-cutting art) to reduce the supply of homogeneous products. At the same time, scattered cultural elements should be integrated to create a representative IP image with storytelling and emotional resonance. In terms of cultural and tourism activity development, it is essential to further promote the living inheritance of ICH (such as immersive performances of Nanyin music and Liyuan opera). Relying on national-level cultural and tourism consumption clusters (such as the eastern section of West Street) and international cultural events (such as the Maritime Silk Road International Arts Festival), and combining the aesthetic trends of the new era with youth-oriented expressions (such as Guochao (Chinese trend) and cross-border cooperation), the cultural experience of tourists and their recognition of the brand should be enhanced.

In conclusion, the optimization and upgrading of Quanzhou's urban cultural brand should be based on the in-depth protection of cultural heritage, driven by the innovative integration of the cultural and tourism industry, and supported by the accurate communication of the brand image. Only in this way can the unique value of "Maritime Silk Road culture" and "Minnan culture" be fully released, promoting Quanzhou's transformation from a "famous historical and cultural city" to a "culturally tourist destination with international influence", and providing a

reference practical model for the cultural brand building of similar cities based on the cultural and tourism industry.

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