SHAOLIN CULTURAL BRAND UNDER THE BACKGROUND OF THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

Qinye Li*

Abstract: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has brought the importance of a sustainable economy to the forefront. Establishing a sustainable development path that conforms to human ethical standards and promotes economic growth has been an urgent issue. The implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative has presented both opportunities and challenges in the external communication of the Shaolin cultural brand. On the one hand, the implementation of the proposal urgently requires external cultural communication; the spread of Buddhism on the ancient Silk Road laid a solid foundation for the external communication of the Shaolin cultural brand. Since China's reform and opening up, the Shaolin temple has gradually become a face of Chinese culture and has had a strong international influence. However, the lack of shared culture with the countries along the route, the asymmetry of the discourse system, and the imperfect support mechanism for external communication make the external communication of Shaolin cultural brand face cultural discounts. Based on the research on the development and dissemination of Shaolin cultural industry under the background of the 'Belt and Road Initiative,' this article attempts to explore a new path for sustainable economic and cultural development in the 21st century and promote the maintenance of the cultural diversity of the world, the breaking of the self-centred thinking paradigm, and the construction of a Community with a Shared Future for Humanity.

Keywords: Common Culture, Discourse System, Support Mechanism for External Communication, Sustainable Development.

Dr Qinye Li is a Lecturer, at the School of Journalism and Communication, Pingdingshan University, with a PhD in Management from Ocean University of China. Her research interests are in cultural communication and industrialization. Email: p_walker@163.com.

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1. Introduction

The concept of Sustainable Development was originally used in ecology and then expanded to various fields such as economy, technology, society, and culture (Zhang et al. 20). In 1980, the World Conservation Strategy proposed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature stated that it is necessary to study the basic relationships between nature, society, ecology, economy, and natural resources to ensure sustainable global development (Zhou 133).

The core concept of sustainable development includes two aspects: one is to manage the relationship between humans and nature (Herrera-Franco et al. 308); that is, what humanity takes from nature can be balanced by human contribution to nature (Aras 976), and the other is to handle the relationship among humans (Chowdhury et al. 98); that is, the development of one region should take into account different regional and global interests, and humanity's contemporary efforts is to be balanced with needs of the future generations (Niu 2012). In the field of culture, traditional knowledge and culture have made many contributions to the sustainable development of human society in terms of cultural diversity and protection of traditional cultural heritage (Ren 88). For example, the United Nations' "World Declaration on Cultural Diversity" relates cultural diversity with biological diversity (Brika et al. 34). Sustainable development essentially discusses the relationship between needs and restrictions. To achieve sustainable development, it is necessary to change the paradigm of thinking, that is, to achieve a breakthrough in the vision of eqocentricity (Fei 106).

In 2013, the Belt and Road was proposed as a new international, regional economic cooperation model in China. This model learns from the experiences and lessons of countries around the world in the field of sustainable economic development, but also conforms to the trend of seeking peace and development, promoting cooperation, and seeking a win-win situation. (Jiang 88) This initiative is an attempt for the construction of a community with a shared future for humanity (Zhao144) and a mode of human civilization exchange based on maintaining cultural diversity (Li 40).

The implementation of the Belt and Road initiative provides more opportunities for the external communication and development of the Shaolin cultural brand. The development of the Shaolin cultural brand has promoted the appearance and development of emerging cultural

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industries, advanced inter-regional economic development from one industry to others, and created new economic growth points, contributing to the cause of sustainable economic development (Afroz et al. 46). This article systematically investigates the positive significance and difficulties in the external communication and development of Shaolin cultural brands and suggests corresponding solutions to the problems to enrich the research results of Shaolin cultural brands to a certain extent and move forward the high-quality, sustainable economic projects.

2. Shaolin Cultural Brand

Hidden deep in Mount Song, Shaolin Temple, which has 1,500 years, is revered as the ancestral court of Zen Buddhism. In the 20th year of Taihe in the Northern Wei Dynasty (496 AD), Emperor Xiaowen began to build the Shaolin Temple for the monk Batuo. Since then, Shaolin Temple has always maintained its own religious and cultural model as a royal temple located in central China. Zhang Guochen first proposed the concept of Shaolin Culture in the book Chinese Shaolin Culture. He suggested that Shaolin Culture was the historical and cultural features in and around Shaolin Temple from ancient times to the present, embodying the integration of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Contemporary scholars describe Shaolin Culture more concretely as a complete cultural system, including Zen Buddhism, Shaolin Kung Fu, Shaolin Temple's traditional medicine health culture, architecture, inscriptions, art, inheritance management system, etc. (Wang et al. 240; Li 43). The research of these scholars explains the connotation, extension, and basic characteristics of Shaolin Culture.

The contemporary Shaolin cultural brand was born in the mass communication activities of modern media. The rich connotation of Shaolin Culture gradually got to be known with the popularity of the early 1980s' film Shaolin Temple, Jin Yong and other writers' martial arts novels, the films and TV dramas derived from the novels, and Chinese Kung Fu. The Shaolin Temple has gradually become the primary destination for Buddhist worship, tourism, and Kung fu learning. And also, the related industries derived from Shaolin Culture have developed rapidly and have formed the embryonic form of an industrial chain. At present, the Shaolin cultural brand has been extended to tourism, Zen tea, vegetarian cakes, books, medicine, charity, animation, online games, performances, film and television dramas, meditation experience, and authorized industries at home abroad. When identifying the conceptual categories of Shaolin Cultural Brand, this article mainly adopts the viewpoint of Li Haixia, who argues that Shaolin monks are the subjects of Shaolin Culture inheritance. Shaolin Temple is the inheritance space of the Shaolin Culture, and the Shaolin Temple brand is a non-profit Buddhist organization brand. The main body of the Shaolin Cultural brand is a brand system based on Shaolin Temple and taking Shaolin Culture as the core. Its extension includes the brands of Shaolin Temple, Shaolin Kungfu, Shaolin Huanxidi, etc.

As having a critical international influence, the Shaolin Cultural brand has been a cultural business card of Henan Province and China. For example, the overseas performances of Shaolin Kungfu have taken the world by storm. As disseminating information by way of performance, it overcomes language barriers, circumvents some prejudices on ideological and cultural differences, breaks up the barriers among different ideologies, different civilizations, different races, and religious beliefs, and makes the people of the countries along the route have a unique sense of unity with Shaolin Culture (Shi 37). The dissemination of Shaolin culture drives the development of regions and related cultural industries, thereby promoting economic prosperity. So the Shaolin Cultural brand and its external dissemination have increasingly become an essential path for sustainable development.

3. External Communication of the Brand

Since the reform and opening up, China has implemented the Going Global strategy in economy and culture, and the Going Global model in the cultural field has continued to innovate. And also, the Going Global pace of the Shaolin Cultural Brand is constantly accelerating. The implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative has given new impetus to the external communication of the Shaolin Cultural brand. However, due to the complex and changeable international political, economic, and cultural environment, the external communication of the Shaolin Cultural Brand presents a situation where opportunities, advantages, and challenges coexist.

3.1 Opportunities and Advantages in Communication

First of all, at the macro level, the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative urgently requires the assistance of foreign cultural communication. Many countries and regions along the route have different religious and ethnic traditions. And because of their abundant energy, they have become important targets of the global strategy of major powers. Under the influence of these complex internal and external factors, the situation in these areas is turbulent, and there are many difficulties in cooperation between China and these regions, even various misunderstandings and doubts. During the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, the value recognition and pursuit of contemporary China are gradually recognized by the people of the world. In the face of various complex issues, the Chinese government advocates to inherit and fully display the content of its excellent culture that has a wide range of affinity and appeal, strengthen cultural exchanges and mutual learning with countries along the route, and to continuously build and enhance mutual trust with them. (Fan and Zhou 44). The measures have created good opportunities for the external communication of the Shaolin Cultural brand.

Secondly, the spread of Buddhism on the ancient Silk Road laid a solid foundation for the spread of the Shaolin Cultural brand (Xue 38). As an important channel for trade and cultural exchanges between the East and the West in ancient times, the Silk Road effectively promoted the cultural integration of the East and the West and the development of human civilization. In the communication of religion and culture, the Silk Road also played a critical channel function. For example, during the spread of early Buddhism, many Chinese and foreign monks such as Xuanzang, Faxian, Tamayas, Bodhidharma, and Yijing have chosen the Silk Road as their travel route. Many Buddhist scriptures in Sanskrit and Pali are also spread to China along the Silk Road. After integrating Buddhism and Chinese traditional culture, Tiantai Sect, Huayan Sect, Zen Sect, etc., came into being. These sects have spread to Japan, North Korea, Vietnam, and other countries and have had many local influences. Buddhist culture spread along the Silk Road and contributed a lot to the harmonious coexistence and friendly exchanges of various ethnic groups in Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and other Asian countries and regions. While undertaking cultural exchanges, the Silk Road is also a vital trade channel between the East and the West. From the opening of the Silk Road in the Western Han Dynasty until Ming Dynasty, the Silk Road maintained its central position in the economic exchanges between the East and the West. Starting from Chang'an or Luoyang, the merchants crossed the Hexi Corridor to reach Central Asia and West Asia. It gradually became the land route connecting the Mediterranean countries. Cultural exchanges promote the prosperity of commerce, which further stimulates mutual learning and integration of cultures. This is how a benign and sustainable model of economic and cultural development takes root, sprouts, develops, and grows in the long history. Even though time flies, but memory is passed on with culture and history. This precious legacy from the ancestors is a lesson for the realization of coordinated economic and cultural development and a guideline on the road to sustainable development.

Third, Shaolin Temple has played an important role in China's foreign cultural exchanges and cooperation since the reform and opening up. For example, Shaolin Kungfu and Shaolin Meditation have participated in Sino-Russian cultural exchanges and cooperation activities many times. In 2019, many important cultural exchange activities took place, and the Minister of Culture of Thailand, the Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia, and a group of Japan-China Friendly Exchange Meeting visited Shaolin Temple. Statistics show that the number of people practising Shaolin Kungfu in the world is as high as 60 million and that there are more than 40 Shaolin cultural research centres in Great Britain, the United States, Russia, and other countries. Hundreds of Shaolin cultural institutions are distributed in more than 100 countries or regions worldwide (Xu 73). As the ancestor home of Zen Buddhism, Shaolin Temple plays an important role in the cultural exchanges between China and other countries. The Shaolin Temple has also established a good model for promoting cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries and serving national diplomacy.

3.2 Cultural Discounts in Communication

The concept of cultural discount was first proposed by Canadian scholars (Hoskins C., McFadyen S., Finn A.) who studied the phenomenon of film and television trade. They believe that due to the huge differences in the history, natural environment, social system, religious beliefs, aesthetic habits, values, and behaviour patterns of

different countries or nations, film and television products rooted in a cultural form positively impact the domestic market. But the products' attractiveness will be reduced to varying degrees in other heterogeneous cultural environments. They defined this phenomenon as Cultural Discount (Hoskins et al. 6). Because of its strong explanatory power for cross-cultural communication, the concept of Cultural Discount was widely used in the cross-cultural trade and communication of various cultural products later.

At present, there are also serious Cultural Discounts in the external communication of Shaolin Culture. The main reasons for the cultural discount problem are the asymmetry of the discourse system with the countries along the route, the lack of shared culture, and the imperfect communication support mechanism of cultural brands (Tamariz 65).

From the perspective of the discourse system, China and some countries along the route are quite different among the cultural traditions, worldviews, values, ways of thinking, language structure, etc. To varying degrees, the parties have asymmetrical perceptions of the cultures of each other. Since there is currently no shared speech system that exceeds the inherent discourse system of each country, which can be semantically compared, misunderstandings often occur in cultural exchanges between China and countries along the route. The spread of Shaolin Culture and its brand faces numerous obstacles.

From the perspective of a common culture, the Belt and Road Initiative covers most of Asia and the vast areas of North Africa, Central and Eastern Europe. Most countries along the route have distinctive intra-regional cultures. At the same time, most Chinese do not have a deep understanding of the countries along the Belt and Road. There are many communication barriers in non-governmental cultural exchanges and the dissemination and acceptance of cultural information (Zhao 145). The religious beliefs and value orientations of Shaolin Culture are guite different from many countries along the Belt and Road. The local cultural brand is a comprehensive cognitive evaluation system, which contains the history, emotional value, cultural concept, cultural heritage, lifestyle, and spiritual outlook of the region (Zhou 137). The history, emotional value, cultural concept and heritage, lifestyle, and spiritual perspective of the region contained in the Shaolin Cultural Brand are very different from those of many countries along the Belt and Road. As there are many obstacles to the localized spread of Shaolin Culture, a little carelessness may cause substantial adverse effects.

In addition to being based on a solid mutual trust system, the dissemination of a country's culture is highly dependent on the support mechanism of its cultural dissemination. However, the current external communication of the Shaolin Cultural brand has not yet achieved effective docking with the cultural development support mechanisms of countries along the route, and problems such as information asymmetry in the communication process are widespread. At the same time, some countries along the Belt and Road are affected by the complex and changeable international environment, unique cultural traditions, and other regional factors, which have produced obstacles to the Belt and Road Initiative, making the spread of Shaolin Culture lack realistic conditions (Ding and Li 129-130). Some countries along the Belt and Road are developing slowly because of being suffered from wars and economic sanctions year-round, their own historical domestic and foreign problems. Their cultural infrastructure is often weak, and the development of cultural industries is seriously lagging behind, so the corresponding supporting facilities cannot be provided to meet the cultural communication needs of the people. All these have affected the effective spread of the Shaolin Cultural brand and further affected the prosperous development of a sustainable economy (Barrett 135).

4. External Communication Strategy of Shaolin Cultural Brand

Facing the dilemma in the external communication of Shaolin Cultural brand under the Belt and Road Initiative background, the related subjects need to respond actively. The communication subjects of Shaolin Cultural brand should inherit the ancient Silk Road cultural concept, make full use of the current opportunities of the Belt and Road Initiative, constantly seek common culture with countries along the route, find the right entry point, take the supply-side structural reform as the guide, continuously improve the brand communication content, improve the support mechanism for brand communication outside the territory, and constantly and effectively reduce the cultural discount of the brand's external communication, to speed up the Shaolin Culture, drive the development of emerging industries, and open up a new direction for the sustainable development of the economy.

4.1 Inherit Ancient Ideas and Cultural Concepts of the Silk Road

The cultural concept of the Silk Road should be inherited and carried forward, and the symbolic function of the Silk Road should be fully utilized in the process of external communication of the brand. For thousands of years, the Silk Road has carried the spirit of peaceful cooperation, openness and tolerance, mutual learning, and mutual benefit. The Silk Road culture was the precious cultural heritage of the ancient Silk Road, and the Silk Road spirit is also the common cultural concept of the countries along the Belt and Road today (Yu and Wang 176). The history of the Silk Road is a history of cultural exchanges, integration, and development of various ethnic groups along the route. The history of the Silk Road shows that the mutual acceptance, cooperation, and enrichment of different cultures are the basis for the peaceful progress of human civilization. The external communication of the Shaolin Cultural brand must be based on the concepts of openness and innovation. The Going Global strategy of the brand takes meditation, Kung Fu, Zen medicine, and Buddhist art as expression forms and integrates multi-cultural dimensions. The brand should also demonstrate its function of Chinese cultural symbolism and its distinctive sharing characteristics. During the current COVID-19 pandemic, Shaolin Temple's official website introduced Shaolin Baduanjin to help the public keep fit and relieve the mood. In response to this major public health emergency, this experience and practice can be promoted in countries along the Belt and Road.

4.2 Spread of Chinese Stories Based on Common Culture

People share common physiological mechanisms and psychological tendencies. For example, the ancient peoples had surprisingly similar concepts, customs, and desires. There are different cultural circles and nation-states along the Belt and Road, and there are also other regions, ethnic groups, and sub-cultural groups within the same country. Only by fully tapping the commonality of different ethnic cultures and the core values shared by different cultures, sharing a simple and good story connects people's hearts. Conveying universal emotions that can resonate with the audiences of the countries along the Belt and Road can bring the people to have a sense of identity with Chinese culture and minimize the cultural discounts faced by Chinese cultural transmission.

It is necessary to take the Chinese culture as the root and share Shaolin stories based on the shared values of all ethnic groups. Shaolin Culture is rich in connotation and various forms and contains many ancient Chinese stories. Based on an in-depth exploration of the intent of Shaolin Culture, it is necessary to continuously innovate communication methods and tell Shaolin stories based on the values and emotions common to all ethnic groups. At the same time, it is important to carry out a moderate creative transformation, and innovative development of Shaolin Culture based on the actual context of different countries and regions of the Belt and Road and win respect and recognition of the people of other countries or regions with a new spiritual outlook and good humanistic spirit, and then enhance the general awareness of Chinese culture including Shaolin Culture among the people of various countries and regions along the route. In this complex process, utmost care is to be paid to consciously use the theory of empathy, take the initiative to focus on topics of general concern to the international community as well as those value concepts that can resonate, and narrow the psychological distances between cultural brands and people around the world.

4.3 Optimizing the Content and Mechanism of Communication

It is necessary to optimize the supply of Shaolin cultural content continuously to promote the external dissemination of the Shaolin Cultural Brand. First of all, it is essential to provide high-quality, marketable cultural products and services based on the people's spiritual and cultural consumption needs along the route. Researchers should thoroughly and systematically study the characteristics of the religion, culture, customs, and cultural consumption in the countries along the route, especially the central target countries or regions of Shaolin Cultural brand communication, and then design and disseminate cultural products suitable for these regions. It is also necessary to continuously improve the quality of the supply of Shaolin cultural products. To achieve this goal, the government must issue relevant policies and methods to guide, guarantee, and encourage relevant subjects to create and produce cultural products in the spirit of artisans. In the production process of cultural products, the related main bodies must promote the organic integration of Shaolin cultural resources with modern science and technology, various cultural industry forms, and continuous collaborative innovation (Baheti 518).

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Secondly, it is necessary to innovate the external communication mode of the cultural brand continuously. It is essential to establish a communication channel three-dimensional and a cooperative communication mechanism so that the multiple communication subjects of the Shaolin Cultural brand can effectively coordinate and form a joint force. All communication entities should pay full attention to constructing a foreign communication system for the Shaolin Cultural brand. The combination of expert production content and user production content can alleviate the shortage of monks in Shaolin Temple and effectively stimulate the wisdom of the group. Therefore, it is necessary to cooperate with professional media companies to strengthen exchanges with other relevant cultural brands, continue to learn from successful experiences, and strengthen the cultivation of Shaolin monks and talents to form a Shaolin Cultural trust. Efforts must be made to continuously study and make full use of various media with communication advantages and influence at home and abroad, and establish synergistic relationships with the government, domestic and foreign cultural enterprises, and non-governmental cultural organizations to realize the multi-channel communication of Shaolin Cultural. For example, the dissemination of Shaolin Culture can be implanted in sports events, ethnic festivals, and other activities, and cultural tourism cooperation with countries along the route can be launched and strengthened. So tourists from countries or regions along the route can fully experience Shaolin Culture and continue to enhance their close understanding of it.

Meanwhile, it is necessary to promote the formation of a cultural communication pattern in which the government, social organizations, and brand companies cooperate and support each other. The government must provide adequate guarantees for Shaolin culture in terms of policies, laws, and financial support on the national level. Enterprises related to the Shaolin Cultural brand must intensify their efforts to expand external communication channels into developing high-quality Shaolin cultural products vigorously.

5. Conclusion

Based on the current policies, this article analyses the cons and pros of the development and dissemination path of the Shaolin culture, takes the Belt and Road Initiative as an opportunity and supply-side reform as the orientation, and puts forward corresponding feasible suggestions. The above measures can guide the development and dissemination of a new sustainable economic industry – the Shaolin Cultural Industry. This new economic model is conducive to improving the sluggish economic situation in the post-pandemic era, stimulating economic growth, driving a new industrial chain development, and increasing more work. It has an inestimable positive effect on the happiness of individuals and the continuous progress of society (Elliott 276). Furthermore, the Zen thoughts embodied in Shaolin culture, such as balance, harmony, and tranquillity, also promote the progress of human spiritual civilization and the improvement of moral standards.

At present, sustainable development has become an essential issue for all countries in the world. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development proposes to ensure that all people can enjoy a prosperous and fulfilling life, economic, social, technological progress, and the harmonious coexistence of nature. The realization of the goals requires concerted efforts and continuous exploration among countries all over the world. The example of the Shaolin cultural industry cited in this article is a valuable exploration attempt and has a valuable lesson for the sustainable development of human society.

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