

The Cultural Brand Strategy of Xinyang, China, from the Perspective of an International Garden City: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

This paper takes Xinyang City, China, which was awarded the title of International Garden City, as the entry point to explore Xinyang's opportunities and challenges regarding cultural brand strategy in depth. By analyzing the advantages of Xinyang in terms of natural resources, historical culture, ecological construction, etc., this paper expounds on its favorable conditions for shaping cultural brands. Meanwhile, considering the current actual situations, such as market competition and cultural dissemination, analyze the challenges it faces. In response to these opportunities and challenges, strategic suggestions are put forward for cultural brands, aiming to provide references for Xinyang to enhance the city's cultural soft power and international competitiveness. This study, through various research methods such as field investigation, literature collection, data collection from government official websites, and questionnaire surveys, found that Xinyang City's ability to win the honorary title of International Garden City proves that Xinyang has relatively favorable conditions in terms of natural conditions, humanistic history, and urban construction. However, it also provides opportunities and challenges for the construction of its urban cultural brand. Through in-depth research, it is found that the popularity of Xinyang's urban cultural brand is not high, the competitive pressure is large, the exploration of the characteristics of cultural brands is not in-depth enough, the development of the cultural industry lags, and the dissemination of cultural brands is insufficient. Therefore, it is concluded that Xinyang needs to strengthen the dissemination of urban cultural brands, deeply explore the characteristics of cultural brands, promote the development of the cultural industry, and implement a differentiated competition strategy. This research is conducive to enhancing the cultural brand of Xinyang City and has certain reference significance for the construction of cultural brands in other cities.

Keywords: *International Garden City, Xinyang, Cultural Brand Strategy, Opportunities and Challenges.*

Introduction

In the context of rapid globalization and urbanization, the significance of urban cultural brands has become increasingly prominent. A distinctive and influential cultural brand can enhance a city's identity and appeal, promoting its economic development and social progress. Xinyang, as one of the top ten livable cities in China and an ecological green city in southern Henan Province, is renowned as "the Jiangnan of the north and the North of Jiangnan"(Li,2022).In the 21st International Garden City Global Finals in 2023, it won the Comprehensive Gold Award in the E category of the largest population level group and the individual Gold award in "Art, Culture and Heritage Management"(Bai,2023), This brings new opportunities and challenges to the construction of Xinyang's cultural brand. This article will conduct an in-depth study on Xinyang's cultural brand strategy from the perspective of an international garden city.

With the dissemination of the concept of international garden city, Xinyang is actively developing in this direction and is committed to enhancing the city's image and cultural brand. Finally, on June 2,

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2023, local time in Malta, the results of the 21st International Garden City Global Finals were announced. Xinyang won the gold medal in the largest population category and the only gold medal in the "Art, Culture and Heritage Management" category of the event, showcasing the charming appeal of the city brand "Xinyang for a Better Life" on the international stage. This marks a historic step forward for Xinyang in its efforts to build a garden city (Hu& Diao, 2023).

Xinyang, located in the southernmost part of Henan Province, the Central heartland of China, is renowned for its abundant natural resources and profound cultural heritage. In the process of creating an international garden city, the implementation of the cultural brand strategy is particularly important. However, how to combine the concept of an international garden city with the actual situation of Xinyang and formulate an effective cultural brand strategy has become an urgent problem to be solved at present. By enhancing its cultural brand, Xinyang can better showcase its unique history and culture, attract tourists and investors, and achieve dual development of the economy and society. Xinyang, as a historical and cultural city in central China, known as the capital of Maojian tea in China and one of the top ten livable cities in China, is confronted with both great opportunities and challenges in the process of promoting the construction of an international garden city. This article will begin with the concept of an international garden city, analyze Xinyang's cultural brand strategy, explore its potential in enhancing the city's image, promoting economic development, and enriching cultural connotations, while also highlighting the challenges and coping strategies in the implementation process.

Literature Review

International Garden City

An international garden city refers to those cities that pay attention to the ecological environment, green space, and humanistic care in urban planning and construction. The garden city is an ideal urban model for creating a harmonious living environment. Based on absorbing foreign construction experience, the Chinese-style garden city continues the traditional Chinese natural aesthetic thought. It is an important carrier for promoting ecological civilization construction and high-quality urban development. (Peng, 2024). The proposal of this concept aims to promote sustainable urban development and improve residents' quality of life.

What does the title of "International Garden City" mean to a city? As one of the highest honors in the field of urban construction and human settlements worldwide, the International Garden City Competition, established in 1997, is currently the only international competition globally that covers important issues such as urban and community environmental management, ecological construction, resource utilization, human and nature, and sustainable development (Xia et al.,2024).

The International Garden City Competition is recognized as the selection of the "Green Oscar", which shows the great significance of the "International Garden City". An international garden city attaches great importance to the ecological environment, cultural inheritance, and the quality of life of its residents. Its core concepts include ecological priority, cultural diversity, and sustainable development. Successful cases in many countries and regions show that the garden city model can not only enhance the beauty of a city but also strengthen its cultural appeal and competitiveness. (Chang'an Avenue Reading Club, 2025). (China Discipline Inspection and Supervision News, 2025).

City Culture Brand

City culture brand is a relatively comprehensive component, which is formed based on city culture. Lewis Mumford, a famous American city planner, once said that a city is the "container" of culture (Lewis et al.,2019), and culture is the soul of a city. When a city loses its cultural gene, its personality is obliterated, and it doesn't have a competitive advantage.

City cultural brand is the core cultural concept that a city adopts a series of historical and cultural symbols, city cultural precipitation, industrial economic symbols, humanistic ecological environment, and other elements as communication carriers in the process of promoting its city image according to the strategic positioning of city development, and transmits to the public through effective mass communication (Song, 2014). A city's cultural brand is the result of the acceleration of the urbanization process to promote the city's realization of the brand, and after repositioning and packaging the soft power of the city, it can produce new added value.

International Garden City and Cultural Brand Building

Enhance The City's Reputation and International Influence

Xinyang has been awarded the opportunity for cultural brand building brought by the International Garden City. The International Garden City Competition is globally recognized as the "Green Oscar" and is one of the highest honors in the field of urban construction and human settlements worldwide. Xinyang's winning of this award means that its achievements in urban construction and management have been recognized by the international community, which will greatly enhance Xinyang's reputation and influence on the international stage. More international tourists, investors, and talents will pay attention to Xinyang, providing a broader platform for the dissemination of Xinyang's cultural brand.

Strengthen the Ecological and Cultural Characteristics of the City

Xinyang's ability to win the title of International Garden City is attributed to its excellent ecological environment. Xinyang has a beautiful environment and pleasant climate, and is known as "the Jiangnan of the north and the Jiangnan of the North". Xinyang is a pilot demonstration city for the construction of national main functional zones. Five counties and districts within its jurisdiction have been included in the national key ecological function zones. Xin County and Shihe District have been selected as national all-around tourism demonstration zones. Xin County and Shangcheng County have been successfully created as national ecological civilization construction demonstration counties. Xin County and Guangshan County have been selected as national "Green mountains and clear waters are as good as mountains of gold and silver" practice innovation bases. The forest coverage rate of the whole city reached 36.21%, and the environmental air quality PM2.5 and the number of good air quality days ranked first in the province. It has 1,115 large, medium, and small reservoirs. There are 2,244 species of wild animals and 2,734 species of higher plants within the territory. There are a total of 87 scenic spots rated 3A or above in the city, including 1 national 5A-level scenic spot, 21 4A-level scenic spots, and 64 3A-level scenic spots. Jigong Mountain in Yunzhong Park is a national natural scenic area and one of the four major summer resorts in China. It is known as the "Exhibition Park of Architecture from All Nations". Nanwan Lake, the pearl of southern Henan Province, is a national forest park and enjoys the reputation of "the First Lake in Central Plains". The Chushandian Reservoir is the largest single investment water conservancy project in Henan Province since the reform and opening, and is known as the "First Dam of the Thousand-Mile Huai River". Xinyang is one of the few cities in China that has two large reservoirs near its central urban area. (Xinyang Municipal People's Government, 2023). These ecological advantages have become an important part of Xinyang's cultural brand, strengthening Xinyang's image as an "ecological green city" and laying a solid foundation for creating a city cultural brand with ecological culture as its characteristic.

Promote the Integrated Development of Culture and Tourism

The title of "International Garden City" will attract more tourists to visit Xinyang. Xinyang can make full use of this opportunity to deeply integrate its rich historical culture, folk culture, tea culture, etc. with the tourism industry. For instance, develop tourism routes themed on tea culture, allowing tourists to experience the picking and production process of Xinyang Maojian and feel the profound tea culture heritage. Create a folk culture experience area to showcase the distinctive culture of Henan and Chu. Through the integration of culture and tourism, not only can the cultural connotation of tourism be enhanced, but also the dissemination and inheritance of culture can be promoted, and the construction of cultural brands can be facilitated.

Promote the innovative development of urban culture

To create an international garden city, Xinyang has implemented a series of innovative measures in urban construction and management. These innovative concepts and practical experiences can be extended to the construction of cultural brands. For instance, in the construction of urban parks and public Spaces, emphasis should be placed on the implantation and infiltration of culture, creating multi-functional comprehensive ecological projects that integrate sightseeing, science popularization and education, sports and leisure, health care and fitness, reading and rest, etc. This innovative model helps to stimulate the vitality of urban culture and promote the innovative development of cultural brands.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in the study "The Cultural Brand Strategy of Xinyang, China, from the Perspective of an International Garden City: Opportunities and Challenges" will be based on a few core theories to support the in-depth analysis of Xinyang's cultural brand.

Garden City Theory

The Garden City theory was initially proposed by British urban planner Ebenezer Howard, emphasizing the sustainable development of cities and the harmonious coexistence of the ecological environment and the human living environment. This theory provides a perspective for this study, helping to understand how Xinyang draws on the concept of a garden city when developing its cultural brand, achieves the combination of ecology and culture, and enhances the comprehensive competitiveness of the city.

Cultural Brand Theory

The theory of cultural brand explores the significance of culture in brand building and emphasizes how cultural elements influence consumers' cognition and emotions. By analyzing Xinyang's unique cultural resources, such as tea culture, historical relics, and folk art, this study will clarify how the construction of cultural brands provides support for the improvement of the city's image.

Theory of Sustainable Development

The theory of sustainable development focuses on the coordinated development of the economy, society, and the environment. Against the background of a garden city, Xinyang's cultural brand strategy needs to consider how to promote economic development while protecting and inheriting local culture and ecological environment, and achieving the goal of sustainable development.

Through the construction of the above theoretical framework, this study will systematically analyze Xinyang's cultural brand strategy from the perspective of an international garden city, reveal the opportunities and challenges it faces, and put forward corresponding countermeasures and suggestions.

Methodology

This research mainly uses qualitative analysis methods, relevant planning documents, news reports, academic papers, and other materials from the official website of Xinyang City were collected to analyze the strategies, achievements, and existing problems of cultural brand construction in Xinyang City. Meanwhile, through expert interviews and citizen questionnaires, we understand the public awareness and satisfaction with cultural brand construction in Xinyang City.

Data

The Cultural Brand Advantage of Xinyang

As one of the highest honors in the field of urban construction and human settlements worldwide, the International Garden City Competition, established in 1997, is currently the only international competition globally that covers important issues such as urban and community environmental management, ecological construction, resource utilization, human and nature, and sustainable development (Xia et al.,2024). The core concepts of an international garden city include ecological priority, cultural diversity, and sustainable development. Successful cases in many countries and regions demonstrate that the garden city model can not only enhance the city's beauty but also strengthen its cultural appeal and competitiveness. As a globally recognized "Green Oscar" competition, the International Garden City Competition is the only international competition in the world that focuses on the best examples of local environmental management and is one of the highest honors in the field of urban construction and human settlements worldwide. Why was Xinyang able to "win the championship" and claim two "gold MEDALS" at one go? Building livable, resilient, and smart cities is a clear requirement put forward by the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. CAI Songtao, the Secretary of the Xinyang Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China, frankly stated that Xinyang has been making efforts to adhere to the people-centered development philosophy, build a modern city that satisfies the people, create a beautiful home where the people can live and work in peace and contentment, make the city more tasteful, more aesthetically pleasing and more attractive, and strive to build a demonstration zone for "two better" and a destination for a better life. (Hu& Diao, 2023). Xinyang's ability to win this honor is also closely tied to its advantages.

Abundant Natural Resources

Xinyang, located in China's geographic north-south division line, belongs to the central region of China, which is the Yangtze River Basin and the Huaihe River Basin dividing line, but also Hubei, Henan, and Anhui Provinces. the main road, but also an important transport hub. Xinyang is located at

the southern foot of the Dabie Mountains. It has abundant forest resources and beautiful natural landscapes. Xinyang City is rich in natural resources and human resources. Xinyang also has a unique natural scenery, is a state-level ecological environment demonstration city, “mountains around the green city building jade, the city wrapped in blue water flying rainbow” is the true portrayal of Xinyang city. Yu Feng Chu Yun blend here, cultural landscape and natural scenery complement each other, famous mountains, famous rivers, famous temples, famous cities set off each other, known as “Jiangnan, North Country, North Country, Jiangnan” reputation. (Li & Huang, 2024). (Chen, 2024). This provides a solid foundation for the city to build a garden city and also offers a unique natural background for the construction of cultural brands.

Profound Cultural Background

There are many revolutionary sites, monuments, and cultural relics in Xinyang. There are 6 national cultural relics protection units, more than 400 cultural relics protection units at the provincial level and below, and more than 400 important revolutionary memorial sites and revolutionary old sites, the first in Henan province. Xinyang is a revolutionary red city. Xinyang is a famous revolutionary base, the capital of the Hubei-Henan-Anhui Soviet area, the cradle of the Red Army, and the hometown of a general. Xinyang is a renowned tea-growing area, and Xinyang Maojian tea enjoys a high reputation both at home and abroad. Tea culture is not only an important symbol of Xinyang, but also an important part of its cultural brand. In addition, Xinyang is rich in historical relics and folk culture (as shown in Table 1), all of which are important resources for building cultural brands.

Table 1: Historical Relics and Folk Culture in Xinyang(Author Compiled)

category	Name/Project	brief introduction
historical site	The ruins of Chengyang City	Key cultural relic protection unit in China and has unearthed cultural relics such as bronze wares and jade wares.
	Divine Hill Temple	A famous Buddhist resort in China and a national 4A-level tourist attraction.
	The Ancient City of the State of Huang (Huangchuan County)	A key cultural relic protection unit of China
	The Revolutionary Museum of the E-Hu-Wan Soviet Area	It showcases the revolutionary history of the Dabie Mountains, covering events such as the advance of the Red Fourth Front Army and the Liu Deng Army into the Dabie Mountains.
	Modern architectural complex of Jigong Mountain	One of the four major summer resorts in China, a group of summer villas from the Republic of China period.
folk culture	Xinyang Folk Songs	One of the national intangible cultural heritages.
	Luoshan Shadow puppetry	National intangible cultural heritage, cowhide carving, dialect singing style, performance accompanied by gongs, and strong rural flavor.

category	Name/Project	brief introduction
	Xinyang cuisine and tea culture	Representatives of southern Henan cuisine (Gushi Goose Chunks, Nanwan Fish Head), Xinyang Maojian is one of the top ten famous teas in China.
	Folk crafts (paper-cutting, embroidery)	Xinyang folk paper-cutting has a long history, distinct style, wide range of themes and profound influence. Xin County embroidery techniques are exquisite.
	Ling Shan Temple Fair	From the first to the fifth day of the third lunar month, it integrates blessings, trade and opera performances.

The Improvement of the Ecological Environment

Since 2022, Xinyang City has been taking the demolition of walls to reveal greenery as the lead, addressing illegal construction, promoting the openness and green sharing of urban space, and striving to achieve "cleanliness, greenness, brightness, and beauty", making urban life more tidy and charming.(Xinyang News,2022). Xinyang has achieved remarkable results in ecological environment protection and urban greening. For instance, in terms of ecological protection and restoration projects, it first carried out comprehensive management of the Nanwan Lake Basin, improving water quality and restoring biodiversity. Great efforts have also been made in urban greening and livable construction. New large green Spaces such as the Yangshan Forest Botanical Garden and the third phase of the Shihe riverside Park have been built, and the per capita park space in the central urban area has increased significantly. The CPC Xinyang Municipal Committee and the Xinyang Municipal Government have always regarded afforestation and greening as an important measure to improve the ecological environment and promote economic and social development, and have been persistently working on it. Adhering to the concept of "highlighting characteristics and building a mountain and water garden city", we focus on promoting the integration of urban and rural greening by driving rural areas. Accelerate the greening pace of villages, courtyards, corridors, and the four wastelands by taking a point-to-surface approach. Drive the large-scale development of the base with high-quality projects and promote the construction of tea, Camellia oleifera, chestnut, nursery and flower, and industrial raw material forest bases. Lead by example to drive the participation of all citizens, enhance the enthusiasm of social afforestation, and the ecological civilization quality of the entire population. (Shencheng Yiersan, 2016)All these have laid the foundation for its development into an international garden city. A good ecological environment can attract more tourists and investors, thereby enhancing the cultural brand of the city.

The Challenges Faced by Xinyang's Cultural Brand Construction

Low Brand Recognition

Through questionnaire surveys (mainly targeting citizens of Xinyang and respondents from all walks of life aged 18 to 60 who have worked or lived in Xinyang for more than three years), it is concluded that the recognition of Xinyang's cultural brand at home and abroad is still relatively low(Figure 1). Although tea culture enjoys a high reputation, the overall cultural image has not yet formed a systematic brand promotion strategy.

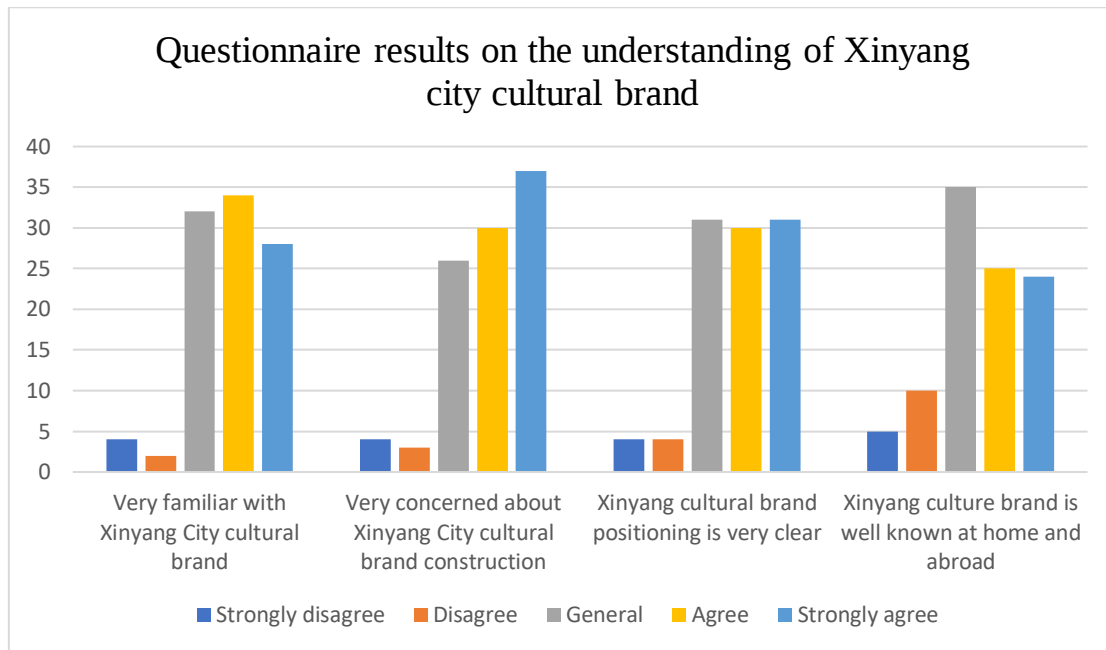


Figure 1: Questionnaire Results on the Understanding of Xinyang City Cultural Brand

The Dissemination of Cultural Brands is Insufficient

Although Xinyang is rich in cultural resources, there are still deficiencies in the dissemination of cultural brands. Compared with some well-known tourist cities, Xinyang's cultural brand promotion channels are relatively single, lacking systematic and targeted communication strategies. In international communication, the promotion of Xinyang's cultural brand is insufficient, resulting in limited understanding of Xinyang among international audiences and making it difficult to form a broad brand recognition.

The Exploration of Cultural Brand Characteristics is Not In-Depth Enough

Xinyang is rich in diverse cultural resources, including the distinctive culture of Henan and Chu styles, folk culture, tea culture, and red culture, etc. However, at present, in the construction of cultural brands, the exploration of these cultural characteristics is not deep enough and their unique charm has not been fully demonstrated. The connotation of cultural brands is not rich enough and lacks core competitiveness, making it difficult for them to stand out in the fierce market competition.

The Development of the Cultural Industry is Relatively Lagging Behind

The cultural industry is an important support for the construction of cultural brands. The development of the cultural industry in Xinyang lags relatively. Cultural enterprises are small in scale, lack innovation capabilities, and are short of cultural products and services with market influence. The cultural industry's integration with other industries is low, and a complete industrial chain has yet to form, which limits the market promotion and value enhancement of cultural brands.

The Market Competition Pressure Is Relatively High

Against the backdrop of increasingly fierce competition among global cities, all regions are actively building distinctive cultural brands. Xinyang is facing competitive pressure from other cities at home and abroad. Some cities have achieved remarkable results in the construction of cultural brands and enjoy high popularity and market share. (Ardhanariswari & Probosari, 2023). (Ozer, 2017). Xinyang needs to accurately position itself and highlight its characteristics in the fierce market competition to achieve a breakthrough in the construction of cultural brands.

Results

Strengthen the Dissemination of Cultural Brands

Comprehensively utilize traditional and new media platforms, such as television, newspapers, magazines, websites, social media, etc., to conduct all-around and multi-level cultural brand

communication. Produce high-quality promotional videos, pictures, and textual materials to showcase the natural scenery, historical culture, folk customs, and other features of Xinyang. Strengthen cooperation with international media and cultural institutions. Through holding cultural exchange activities, participating in international exhibitions and other means, promote Xinyang's cultural brands to the international market. By making use of international communication channels, tell the stories of Xinyang and enhance the international audience's recognition and understanding of Xinyang's cultural brand. By adopting story-based narrative techniques, the cultural elements of Xinyang are integrated into vivid and interesting stories to evoke emotional resonance among the audience. For instance, by telling the historical legends of Xinyang Maojian and the heroic deeds in the red culture, the audience can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural connotation of Xinyang.

Deeply Explore the Characteristics of Cultural Brands

Cultural brand building needs Cultural resource integration. Conduct a comprehensive review and integration of Xinyang's historical culture, folk culture, tea culture, red culture, and other resources, and explore their intrinsic value and characteristics. Create representative cultural brand projects, such as building a tea culture museum and a red culture memorial hall, to showcase the cultural charm of Xinyang in a concentrated manner. Combining traditional culture with modern elements to carry out cultural innovation. For instance, develop cultural and creative products with Xinyang's characteristics and integrate the distinctive cultural features of Henan and Chu into the design. Hold cultural and creative activities to attract young people to participate and inject new vitality into cultural brands. Clearly define the core values of Xinyang's cultural brand, such as ecology, harmony, and humanity, and consistently incorporate these core values throughout the brand-building process. Enhance the recognition and appeal of cultural brands through the transmission of core values.

Promote the Development of the Cultural Industry

The government has introduced relevant policies to increase support for the cultural industry, including financial subsidies, tax incentives, and land supply. Encourage social capital to invest in the cultural industry and cultivate and expand cultural enterprises. Promote the integrated development of the cultural industry with tourism, science and technology, sports and other industries to form a diversified industrial pattern. For instance, developing cultural tourism projects, promoting the integration and innovation of culture and technology, and holding cultural and sports activities, etc., can enhance the added value and market competitiveness of the cultural industry. Strengthen the cultivation of talents in the cultural industry, and introduce and cultivate a group of professional talents with innovative capabilities and market operation experience. Establish a talent incentive mechanism to attract talents to devote themselves to the development of the cultural industry.

Differentiated Competition Strategy

Based on Xinyang's resource advantages and market demands, accurately position the cultural brand. Form a differentiated competition with other cities and highlight the characteristics and advantages of Xinyang. For instance, create a tourist destination with ecological culture as the theme, emphasizing the green, healthy, and livable characteristics of Xinyang. Shape a unique cultural brand image, including brand name, logo, slogan, etc. The brand image should be recognizable and attractive, and be able to accurately convey the cultural connotation and characteristics of Xinyang. Focus on enhancing the quality of cultural brands, starting from the quality and experience of cultural products and services, to increase consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Enhance the market competitiveness of cultural brands through high-quality brand experiences.

Discussion

Xinyang's winning of the title of International Garden City has brought a rare opportunity for the construction of its cultural brand, but at the same time, it also faces many challenges. In terms of cultural brand strategy, Xinyang needs to make full use of opportunities, actively respond to challenges, strengthen the dissemination of cultural brands, deeply explore the characteristics of cultural brands, promote the development of the cultural industry, and implement differentiated competition strategies. Through the implementation of these measures, Xinyang is expected to create a cultural brand with distinctive features and influence, enhance the city's cultural soft power and international competitiveness, and achieve sustainable development of the city.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the editors and reviewers of the *Journal of Architectural Image Studies* for their valuable and constructive comments and to the Interviewee who gave the answers and opinions on the questionnaire.

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