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# Characteristic Town Environment Design Based on Brand Community—A Case Study of the Forest Hot Spring Township in Ninghai

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**Abstract** Brand community is a specific, geographically-unconstrained community based on specific brands and is constructed with consumer groups of different levels, choices and territories. The development issues of characteristic towns were incorporated into the perspective of brand communities, and the development connotation of characteristic towns was discussed in light of the definition, constituent elements and characteristics of brand communities, and a functional platform with organic combination of industry, city, people and literature was established through the exploration of Ninghai forest hot spring town, combined with local spatial resources. Based on this, the planning and design of Ninghai forest hot spring town will form a characteristic town that integrates industrial functions, cultural functions and community functions.

**Key words** Brand community, Space resources, Organic combination, Characteristic town

## 1 Introduction

The current phenomenon of replication in Chinese cities is very serious. The identification of cities is vague, lacking unique independent brands. Although this phenomenon appeared early and was noticed, it has not been fundamentally resolved. The main reason for this is the lack of overall strategic positioning of urban brand building, which is confined to single factors such as urban landscaping, image building and investment. Therefore, scientific urban positioning is an important way to build a city brand. The value of a city brand is irreplaceable in the market<sup>[1]</sup>. At the same time, the history of human culture is composed of irreplaceable individual spirituality. Urban brands are also doomed to appreciate the original spirituality. Similar urban forms only bring boring life and no benefit. The emergence of various types of cities is the real success of urban brands. In addition to cities with large area, this problem also occurs in similar areas with relatively small geographical scale, which is because that the economy, nature and cultural resources in relatively small areas are relatively weak and they face greater challenges.

## 2 Internal links between brand communities and characteristic towns

**2.1 Related concept of branch community** Muniz and O'Guinn first elaborated on the concept of brand community. They believe that brand community is a specific community without geographical boundaries and exists among admirers with a certain social structure<sup>[2]</sup>. Members of brand community can continuously and widely influence the concept and activities of the brand com-

munity. McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig also suggested that brand community is a group that is built between the appreciators of the same brand. They found through investigation that during the activities of the American jeep caravan, the strength of the brand community clearly dictates the players involved in the event. Members of the brand community came from all states to participate in activities to share the driving experience with other members during the event and discuss it. The process of socialization is accelerated by establishing mutual interest and confidence among the interacting members of each other. Therefore, the brand community is a social collective of brand users and an intermediary for consumers and other participants to trust.

**2.2 Key elements of characteristic towns** In 2017, the construction of characteristic towns has paid more attention to cultural conservation, ecological conservation, technological empowerment and historical revival. At the same time, the bothers of characteristic towns are more blurred and industrial functions are more emphasized. Characteristic towns should highlight five core elements.

**2.2.1 Characteristic culture.** The historic context of a characteristic town should be rich in heritage. Traditional culture should be recognizable. Ecological landscape should be ideological.

**2.2.2 Characteristic industries.** The life of a characteristic town lies in the industries. The core of the industry's characteristics is to strengthen characteristic industries and activate special assets starting from the characteristics and featured resources.

**2.2.3 Efficient governance.** The long-term development of a characteristic town requires a good system design and a scientific governance system, forming a symbiotic, co-governance and shared town development pattern.

**2.2.4 Featured landscape.** Characteristic towns should be an integrated space suitable for living, business and entertainment.

**2.2.5 Featured products.** The supply capacity of products and services of characteristic towns is the core of town development, that is, the core of town development is culture. Culture is the

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soul. Therefore, if characteristic towns want to have sustained vitality, they need to focus on creating a cultured town, build an orderly town, and create a story-like town, constituting a brand-new production form and development model for the new era.

**2.3 Correlation between characteristic towns and brand communities** Brand community consists of a group of consumers who share a common interest in a certain brand, and uses information technology as a mean to achieve information research, sharing and relationship building. Brand community is the process of gestation, growth and apoptosis like microorganisms<sup>[3]</sup>. Brand gene is the basic element for the birth and growth of the brand community and the continuation of the brand's life. The influence of brand genes on the environmental design of characteristic towns is not only objective but it is more important that information can be transmitted.

The Guiding Opinions on Accelerating the Planning and Construction of Characteristic Towns proposed that we should find out the industries with local characteristics. In actual situation, there may be not only one characteristic industry, so we have to pay more attention to some of them to make industrial development drive economic development and then drive other industries. In order to win fierce competition in the market, the cultural industry must take the road of brand building. It is necessary to create a

regional brand with core competitiveness. To build a good regional brand, we must re-examine the issue of environmental resources. Orderly development and use will make resources recyclable, generating new value that exceeds the original.

### 3 Environment brand factors of characteristic towns based on brand community

Brand community consists of a group of consumers who share a common interest in a certain brand, and uses information technology as a mean to achieve information research, sharing and relationship building. At the same time, brand community is a process of gestation, growth and apoptosis that is like life. The basic element of the birth and growth of the brand community and the continuation of the brand's life is the brand gene. For the brand community, the impact of environmental design on characteristic towns is objective. More importantly, it can convey information<sup>[4]</sup>. Its influencing factors on the brand community include industrial brand factors, cultural brand factors, environmental brand factors and service brand factors. The specific structure and related content are shown in Fig. 1.

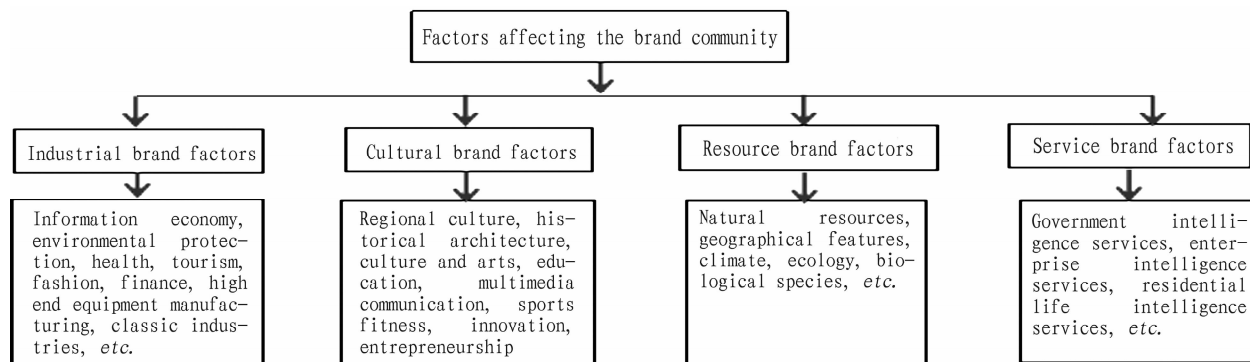


Fig. 1 Factors influencing brand community

**3.1 Industrial brand factors** Regarding the division of industries, in the 1920s, the ILP first made a relatively systematic division of industries by dividing all the industries of a county into primary production departments, secondary production department and service departments. The division of industries in China is as follows: the primary industry is agriculture, including agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fishing; the secondary industry is industry, including mining, manufacturing, tap water, electricity, steam, hot water, gas and construction; and the tertiary industry is divided into two parts<sup>[5]</sup>. What we need to do is to look for industries with local characteristics. In actual situations, there may be more than one characteristic industry, but we must focus on some of them so that the development of the industry can drive economic development and then drive the development of other industries.

**3.2 Cultural brand factors** Facing the increasingly fierce market competition and the need of economic globalization, brand strategies are implemented, and more attention should be paid to the cultivation and protection of self-owned brands. In the face of

the rapid development of the knowledge economy, facing the fierce competition of globalization, cultural industries must take the road of building brands and build cultural brands with core competitiveness in order to min the market, because only the brand products have the economic competitiveness and the appeal of the market. The factors that can be considered in creating a cultural brand include regional culture, historical architecture, history and humanities, culture and arts, education, multimedia communication, innovation and entrepreneurship. After in-depth digging, cultural products that combine key cultures and special cultural contents will be launched, forming high-quality brands.

**3.3 Resource brand factors** Environmental brands are also brands that are dominated by environmental resources, including natural resources, geographical features, climate and other factors. The environment contains resources and resources have value. The environment is also resource, so it also has value. A harmonious and beautiful society cannot be established on the basis of resource depletion and environmental deterioration<sup>[6]</sup>. Environmental re-

sources in China are also an indispensable resource for building a harmonious society. Therefore, in order to build a good regional brand, the issue of environmental resources must be re-examined, *i. e.*, how to make resources recyclable through the orderly development and use, coexist in harmony with humans and create new values that exceed resources themselves. If the resources generated under natural conditions can be exploited as an advantage, they can be built as the main body of the brand to drive economic growth and increase regional competitiveness.

**3.4 Service brand factors** The world today is the era of "Internet Plus". In 2009, IBM proposed building a "Smart City", which is built on the basic framework of a digital city, associating it with a real city through a ubiquitous sensor network to store, calculate, analyze and made decisions on massive data. It automates the control of various facilities by the cloud computing platform and follows the decision-making analysis results. The functions of smart cities include survival, reproduction, economic development, social interaction and cultural enjoyment. These functions need the joint participation of residents, businesses, governments and third-party organizations to achieve the ultimate goal of serving these subjects at the same time in order to improve the quality of life of residents.

## 4 Construction of Ninghai forest hot spring town based on brand community

**4.1 Planning background** Shenquan Town is located on the southeastern coast of China, and in the south part of Yangtze River Delta. It is a mountaineous area surrounded by hills and valleys. Shenquan Town has a subtropical monsoon climate with high-frequency southeast wind, sufficient sunshine, abundant rainfall, annual average temperature of 15.3 – 17.0°C and average annual precipitation of 1 000 – 1 600 mL. The township is in a provincial ecological public welfare forest demonstration area and owns the Nanxi Hot Spring, one of China's three best-quality hot springs, Longgong Village, a Chinese historical and cultural village and Qingtan Village, one of the first-batch ten historical and cultural villages.

The forest spa town is the core of the forest hot spring tourism resort. Its planning area is 3.62 km<sup>2</sup> of which construction area is 0.84 km<sup>2</sup>. The plan will fully amplify the brand advantages of Chinese traditional villages and Chinese historical and cultural villages and dig deeply into the natural and humanistic connotations of the characteristics of Shenquan Town, eventually forming a forest hot spring tourism resort with the hot springs as the carrier, the township as the core and hot spring, forest and ancient village as the characteristics. The forest hot spring town will be built into a god brand of Ninghai tourism.

**4.2 District analysis** Ninghai County is in the middle of China's mainland coastline, in the east coast of Zhejiang Province, between Xiangshan Harbour and Sanmen Bay and at the junction of Tiantai Mountain and Siming Mountain. It is one of the first-batch coastal open areas approved by the State Council. Three highways and provincial road Yu-Lin line run through the county. Forest hot spring township is the core of Ninghai forest hot spring resort and is

located in Shenquan Town, a key national town in the southwest of Ninghai County. Around the town, there are provincial highway Xiangxi line and county road Xishan line. The township is 25 km away from the county seat of Ninghai and 15 km away from the Ninghai entrance of Tai-Wen high-speed highway, characterized with convenient traffic.

**4.3 Planning range** The township is located west of Shadi Village, east of Sansheng Village, north of Nanyuan Hot Spring Villa and south of Dushan Village, covering a planning area of 3.62 km<sup>2</sup>, of which the built-up area is about 2.78 km<sup>2</sup> and the construction area is 0.84 km<sup>2</sup>.

### 4.4 Brand building planning of influencing factors

**4.4.1 Building of industrial brand.** In the past 30 years, since China's reform and opening up, the tourism industry has achieved rapid development, from single reception business to composite industry. It has become a new growth point for the national economy. From the perspective of the tourism itself, the tourism industry is composed of six elements: food, housing, transportation, travel, entertainment and purchase. It involves the various sectors of the national economy. The booming tourism industry has played a leading role in the development of catering, trade, real estate, communications, insurance, consulting, sports, conventions, exhibitions and other related industries<sup>[7]</sup>.

As the leading industry of tertiary industry, tourism industry is a pillar industry that promotes the sustainable development of the economy in Shenquan. The establishment of a forest hot spring town is an important platform for promoting the transformation of the industrial structure of Shenquan and the upgrading of the tourism industry. Relying on the resources of Nanxi Hot Spring and taking the forest park and ecological public welfare forest as the background and Guixi and Nanxi as ecological ties, the three major tourism products of hot spring vocation, mountaineering and cultural leisure can develop vigorously to create forest hot spring tourism industry with the best quality across the province and the most distinctive characteristics in the Yangtze River Delta.

The development of the tourism industry involves many industries and sectors that require the cooperation of many departments. Establishing a sound, perfect and supporting tourism industry system is directly related to the tourism industry's own development capability and competitiveness, which is the key to expanding the tourist source market. With tourism attractions as the core, a social tourism industry cluster that integrates hot spring vacation, mountaineering, cultural leisure, tourism transportation, tourism trade, tourism housing, tourism education, tourism information and tourism security.

**4.4.2 Building of cultural brand.** The cultural orientation of tourism development is an important aspect that embodies the connotation and essence of development. Exploiting fully the cultural factors of tourism development can make tourism industry of forest hot spring towns have a long-lasting vitality.

(i) Traditional Chinese medicine culture of bathing health. Taking advantages of fluoride, metasilicic acid, oxygen and other beneficial nutrients unique to Nanxi Hot Spring, major hot spring tourism projects such as popular hot spring, naked heart spring and Dazhuang hot spring can be developed, and facilities such as hot

spring museums, spas and Chinese traditional medicine museum can be opened up to allow visitors to understand and experience the charm of traditional Chinese medicine culture.

(ii) Fitness culture of aerobic exercise. Taking advantages of the natural resources of Nanxi National Forest Park and the provincial ecological public welfare forest and the humanistic resources of Kusao Road, the knowledge of the correct method of aerobic exercise can be popularized. Trekker alliance can be organized using network. The facilities such as "walking trail", "star sky tent station" and "forest oxygen bar" can be constructed to let visitors feel the joy of aerobic exercise.

(iii) Leisure culture. The well-preserved old residential areas in Shenquan Town can be repaired and renovated. Old style street can be opened up to restore the old-fashioned signboards. Longshan Street, Jiuqu Alley and Guangming Temple should be repaired. Bars, coffee bars, teahouses, restaurants, sporting goods, creative crafts, writing materials, birds, and agricultural and sideline native products can be developed vigorously to give visitors a sense of leisurely life and a rich culture of life.

Relying on famous spring, beautiful mountain and ancient village, with releasing the heart in landscapes for healthy living as the concept and bathing vacation, mountaineering tourism, summer living and humanistic leisure as the development direction, a forest hot spring resort, characterized with convenient transportation, modernized facilities, industrialized products and service, systematic space, distinctive landscapes and functional organization of the town's scenic spots will be built in the Yangtze River Delta.

**4.4.3 Building of environmental resources brand.** Important ecological barriers in the mountains are retained. Making full use of the flat lands in the valleys, a unique landscape with a combination of mountains and towns is formed. The status quo of the main river water systems is analyzed fully, and differentiated functional positioning, dominated by recreation and exercise is proposed for them. The major environmental brand building projects are as follows.

(i) Folk street blocks (core area of hot spring town). The residential buildings in eastern Zhejiang are taken as the background, the transformation is taken as the focus, and the inheritance of cultural context is emphasized. The main features include style street, Fengshan Square and folk inn.

(ii) Cultural dream garden (mass hot spring resort). The main theme is to display the calligraphy culture of Wang Xizhi, the local folk customs of Ninghai and the culture of hot springs, and the main functions include popular hot spring resort hotel project and hot spring culture and art village.

(iii) Quiet hot spring (forest hot spring resort). With quietness as the theme and hot spring as the core, the hot spring resort hotels are built over the open areas of each valley, mainly including Nanyuan Shot Spring, Hot Spring Hotel, Forest Hot Spring Resort Center and Ninghai Forest Hot Spring Tourist Resort.

(iv) Enjoyable landscapes (Dazhuang and Naked Heart Spring Spa Resort). The main theme is health care, and Naked Heart Hot Spring Resort Center, Dazhuang Valley Hot Spring and Nanxi Hot Spring Homestay Village are the main examples.

These projects take full advantages of the environmental ad-

vantages of Ninghai forest hot spring town to create environmental brands, promote the development of other related brands and increase the brand competitiveness of the town.

**4.4.4 Building of service brand.** The tourism business consists of three parts: the tourism industry, the passenger transportation industry and the lodging industry represented by hotels, which are the three pillars of tourism. It is necessary to provide comprehensive services such as transportation, tourism, accommodation, catering, shopping, recreation and entertainment. The quality of services directly affects the sustainable development of the tourism industry. The following are specific measures for brand building on services.

(i) Establishing a visitor center. A modern, humanized one-stop integrated service base has become a window for the image of a forest spa town. A one-stop integrated service base for the purpose of meeting the future tourism development needs of the planning area with a modern and human-oriented concept will be established to realize various functions such as tourism reception consultation, tourism management and dispatch, tourism traffic organization and tourism image display.

Using ecological and modern architectural styles, a visitor service center is created to reflect the ecology of the planning area and the quality and modernization of tourism products and tourism services, leaving a good impression to tourists. In order to satisfy inquires, display, office, shopping, navigation and other service needs, the information construction needs to be strengthened to provide visitors with a full range of navigation, tour guides and guide shopping experience and meet the requirements of scenic spot management.

(ii) Constructing resort hotels and hot spring resort center. A solution to the problems associated with the development of tourism for a large number of travelers is to build resort hotels and hot spring resorts. To create a high-end hot spring resort hotel for travelers is to provide tourism real estate, leisure and vacation and natural spa services and provide visitors with hotels, hot springs, water parks, outdoor sports and other services.

(iii) Constructing culture and art village and style street. As tourists have needs for cultural, artistic, communication and entertainment services, the establishment of a cultural and artistic village will become a necessary measure. The cultural and artistic village will be made into a gateway to the hot spring resort. Wang Xizhi's calligraphic culture and ancient dwelling culture can be digged deeply utilizing the cultural origins of the residences of descendants of Wang Xizhi and combined with local folk customs of Ninghai to create a folk experience village as an integration of cultural experience, exchange training, entertainment and artistic creation.

## 5 Conclusions

From the brand's perspective, the Ninghai forest hot spring town is planned and designed in terms of industry, culture, environment and service. The original advantage resources of the Ninghai Forest Hot Spring Town have been fully utilized to make tourism and related supporting industries integrated. The characteristic hot spring

resources and historic culture can be digged deeply, and the other brand factors related can be developed to make single industry into a coordinated and multi-faceted development system. Thus, a multi-faceted brand that focuses on the tourism industry and other industries will be built, creating a high-quality brand image. In addition, the construction of characteristic town must seriously implement, and the development of relevant industries and relevant departments must be coordinated. In addition to perfecting the planning and construction system, the implementation force also needs to be strengthened to build successfully a high-quality characteristic town that meets the requirements of the characteristic towns, improve the competitiveness of the region and maintain a high-speed and sustainable development of the region. Finally, a high-quality characteristic town, with prosperous industries, integrated functions, connected spaces, smooth transportation, green ecology, sound supporting facilities and rich cultural atmosphere will be constructed.

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