

Possible Routes of Cultural "Warm Power" Spread to Japan: An Interview and Observation-Based Analysis of the Japanese "Panda Boom"

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Abstract. With the steady deepening of the concept of soft power, the "warm power" of international communication, which takes into account emotional elements such as empathy, has become a new academic concept and study topic in the post-epidemic period. "Panda diplomacy" between China and Japan has produced excellent outcomes in recent years, resulting in a "panda boom" among Japanese people. This boom exemplifies the effective international dissemination of China's panda cultural "warm power," as well as a solution for future dissemination. The analysis concludes that tapping into common "cultural memory," constructing "dialogue personality," and utilizing new technology will be the keys to future communication of "warm power" between China and Japan, based on in-depth interviews with Japanese people and observations of Japanese social media platforms like Twitter and YouTube.

Keywords: Cultural "Warming Power"; Communication to Japan; Japanese "Panda Boom".

1. Research Background

The "warm power" of international communication, which considers emotional elements such as empathy, has emerged as a new academic concept and research subject in the post-epidemic era [1]. China and Japan's "panda diplomacy" has yielded excellent results in recent years, and the "panda boom" among Japanese people has demonstrated the "warm power" of panda culture created by Chinese and Japanese people. The "panda boom" among Japanese people has demonstrated cultural sympathy and emotional experience based on panda culture's "warm power," which has improved friendly communication between Chinese and Japanese people. In the future, China's role in international communication as a cultural "warm power" will gradually evolve into a new path for telling the world a good Chinese story in the new era. Concurrently, exploring the potential path of cultural "warm power" in international communication is becoming a more important topic of international communication research.

2. Important Concepts

2.1 "Warm Power" and Cultural "Warm Power"

Wang Shaping, a domestic scholar, proposed the concept of "warm power," which he defined as the ability to eliminate discrimination, resolve conflicts, warm hearts, and sublimate humanity. The international narrative discourse "Warm Power" is based on the meta-narrative of love and the concept of the human destiny community. It embodies the "benevolence, universal love, and common love" of Chinese civilization, earning respect, understanding, support, and collaboration from the deepest part of the human spirit all over the world. Cultural "warm power" refers to the ability to break the monopoly of knowledge and culture in religion, culture, art, science, and technology. It is exemplified by Chinese culture's ability to bridge ideological divides and achieve tolerance and mutual understanding through cultural dialogue, as well as the power of virtue to persuade people. It is the result of multidimensional thinking that breaks down barriers, broadens exchanges, strengthens collaboration, and creates mutual benefit and a win-win situation, as well as the narrative and practical discourse for putting the concept of human destiny community into action. The same can be said for "economic warming power," "political warming power," and other terms. As a cultural icon of China, the panda falls into the category of "cultural warming power."

3. Research Methodology

This study employs in-depth interviews and participant observation to track the basic path of the spread of the "panda boom" in Japan from February 21, 2023, to March 28, 2023.

3.1 In-depth Interviews

The researcher used a semi-structured interview method, with interview questions ranging from an analysis of the reasons for Japan's "panda boom" to the role of pandas in Sino-Japanese relations and the role of social media platforms in spreading panda culture. The interview outline was created with each of the three sections in mind, and follow-up questions were asked at the appropriate times during the interviews to delve deeper into the interviewees' experiences. The information from the interviewees is shown in Table 1 [7].

Table 1. Respondents' information

Number	Time	Area	Identity	Interview format
A	March 27, 2023	Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, China	Japanese language teacher	In-Person Interviews
B	March 27, 2023	Tokyo, Japan	Japanese language teacher	Voice Phone Interviews
C	March 2, 2023	Fukuoka, Japan	Director of Fukuoka Guangzhou Lychee Association, Japan	Text Interview

3.2 Participant Observation

To gain insight into the impact of social media on Japan's "panda boom," the researcher also conducted a month-long participant observation. From February 17 to March 28, we tracked reports about the return of the giant panda Xiangxiang to China and conducted statistical analysis by typing the keyword "panda Xiangxiang" into the popular Japanese video platforms Twitter and YouTube.

4. Research Content

4.1 Tapping the Common "Cultural Memory"

Panda, as a cultural "warm power," relies on the message or symbol of goodwill to improve China's image in flexible communication and gain international discourse through the empowerment of emotional communication, which is the inner power of Chinese cultural "warm power."

To begin, respecting the target audience's daily life culture should be reflected in tapping into the collective "cultural memory." The "cute culture" of Chinese pandas is the most easily accepted cultural element by international audiences and is widely recognized worldwide [8]. This "cute culture" is easily accepted by Japanese people; at the same time, many panda subcultures have emerged from the panda and are effectively integrated into Japanese people's daily lives. For example, through panda cultural and creative products such as the "Giant Panda Xiangxiang" photo exhibition, mascot (ambassador of Japan's Kyoto Railway), panda music festival, brand endorsement (the official panda ambassador of Rakuten), and so on, the panda subculture has been integrated into the Japanese people through cultural and creative products, resulting in a wide cultural dissemination effect [9].

Both Japanese language teachers A and B stated during the interview that the popularity of pandas in Japan is influenced by the country's "cute culture." "Japan has a more developed culture of cuteness than other countries," said A, a Japanese language teacher. "In February, I went to a photo exhibition of Xiang Xiang at a shopping mall near Ueno, Japan, and the panda has really permeated Japanese people's daily lives," Japanese language teacher B said. This demonstrates that panda culture's successful spread in Japan is based on integration with local Japanese culture. Cultural "warming power" dissemination necessitates consideration of the target audience's daily life culture. Second, in

order to promote "warm power" communication with empathy, common "cultural memory" should be combined with each nation's local collective memory. To complete the metaphor of common emotional appeal, cultural "warm power" in foreign communication should be viewed as the reproduction of the value of shared fields such as collective memory, common emotion, and cultural memory. Following the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan in 1972, China donated two pandas, Kang Kang and Lan Lan, to Japan's Ueno Zoo in order to capitalize on the normalization of diplomatic relations. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Japan developed a long-lasting panda boom. The pandas have gradually become a shared memory, carrying the cultural feelings of the two peoples. "Pandas are herbivores that give people a gentle and friendly feeling, and they have really changed Japan's perception of China," Japanese teacher A said in an interview. According to interviewee C, pandas have fostered friendly relations between Chinese and Japanese cities. "The panda carries the history of friendly exchanges between Fukuoka City in Japan and Guangzhou City in Guangdong Province," he said, referring to Fukuoka and Guangzhou's city friendship. Guangzhou City and Fukuoka City built their friendship city association in 1979. The Mayor of Guangzhou made a special gift of two pandas from the Guangzhou Zoo to the Fukuoka Zoo in 1980, and in anticipation of the pandas' arrival, the Fukuoka Zoo's attendance record of 1.72 million has yet to be broken, so it is said that pandas do promote friendly relations between cities."

By discussing and recognizing the value scale and value pursuit of cultural "warm power" communication related to the target country, such as cultural memory, thoughts, and emotions, maintaining the cohesiveness of Chinese discourse identity with local people is an effective means of cultural "warm power" communication with Japan.

4.2 Building a "Dialogue Personality"

The aim of cultural "warm power" international communication is to motivate overseas audiences to "harmonize" the discourse reconstruction process as well as to communicate a good Chinese story. Instead of continuing the one-sided immersion in monologue dialogue, China's cultural "warm power" framework of action must create a national narrative with "dialogue personality" based on mutual subjectivity.

The dissemination of cultural "warming power" necessitates the development of a national narrative with a "dialogical personality" and should effectively respond to the concerns of the target country's people. Because of the high level of interest in the giant panda Xiangxiang in Japan, Chinese media has been updating information about it on the social media platform Twitter. For example, the Chinese Embassy in Japan's publicity department, China Radio International, People's China, Xinhua News Agency, and other Chinese mainstream media actively posted information about the giant panda Xiangxiang on Twitter, a social media platform widely used by Japanese people, and updated panda news in a timely manner, actively adopting an equal "dialogue policy."

Consider the Publicity Department of the Chinese Embassy in Japan: before and after Xiang Xiang's official return to China on February 21, 2023, a total of 42 tweets were posted on Twitter about Xiang Xiang's return to China, seamlessly tracking Xiang Xiang's return throughout the entire process and launching live streams for the Japanese people to watch. From the time Xiang Xiang left Ueno Park to the time she arrived at the Chengdu Giant Panda Conservation Center in Sichuan Province, she was kept up to date every step of the way, promptly engaging in dialogue with the Japanese public and responding to their concerns. Creating a national narrative with "dialogue personality" and precise dialogue with international audiences is another way for Japan to spread cultural "warm power."

4.3 Using New Technology

The evolution of communication technology and media drives the evolution of communication concepts, which has a direct impact on the evolution of audience receiving habits in the global communication pattern, resulting in the gain or loss of international discourse. Specifically, in today's Internet age, various technological means have bridged the gap between transnational information

dissemination and the "warm power" of panda culture, which has been disseminated in Japan via various online platforms and social media.

The use of live streaming and the creation of "presence" is an effective way for technology to empower panda culture's "warm power." If you search for Xiangxiang Panda on the Japanese social media platforms Twitter and Youtube, you will find the official account operated by the Ueno Zoo, which contains life records and archives of pandas as well as exclusive, real-time news streams of pandas, demonstrating the interaction between keepers and pandas and the panda breeding process. Panda fans can follow the pandas' daily lives via social media platforms without leaving their homes [9].

Furthermore, social media has become a new high ground for foreign affairs departments, and Chinese media actively uses text, pictures, short videos, and other forms of media to disseminate panda-related information. The "Publicity Department of the Chinese Embassy in Japan," as shown in the table, has used more graphic or long-form videos in its tweets about Xiang Xiang. We can accurately grasp the cognitive orientation of the audience by using the new path of social media resonating with the "screen."

When asked in the interview, "Do you think it's effective to spread panda culture in Japan through social media?" All three interviewees acknowledged social media's influence on Japanese people. When asked, "What is the most popular form of communication among Japanese people?" all three respondents said that video media platforms YouTube and Tiktok are the most popular. Video and short videos are clearly more widely accepted by the Japanese public than they are in China, and the use of video media can achieve better communication effects.

During a participatory observation of YouTube's report on the giant panda Xiangxiang, the author noticed a lack of discourse from China's mainstream media on Japanese video media platforms. Taking YouTube as an example, only Japanese domestic media (e.g., Japanese TV, TBS TV, etc.) have timely follow-ups to release videos about Xiang Xiang, and there is a lack of Chinese media voices on the platform, with some Chinese panda videos coming from Japanese folk panda enthusiasts. It is clear that the presence of China's mainstream media on Japanese video media platforms, as well as the development of international communication, is still insufficient. Adopting new technologies and strengthening the development of new media platforms will be the primary means of disseminating China's cultural "warm power" to Japan in the future.

5. Conclusion

As a cultural "warm power," giant panda culture should be disseminated to Japan based on China and Japan's "common panda cultural memory."

Simultaneously, instead of continuing the monologue dialogue, a national narrative with a "dialogue personality" should be constructed. Finally, new technologies should be used to improve the effectiveness of "warm power" international communication, strengthen international communication capacity building, promote the dissemination of China's cultural "warm power," and develop friendly relations with the people of Japan.

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