

# Research on Large-scale Sports Events and the Construction of City Image

-- Taking the 2025 Chengdu Asian Games as an Example

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**Abstract:** With the evolution of the global urbanization process, major sports events have transcended their original arena status and evolved into strategic engines for urban space production, symbol reconfiguration, and image governance. The 15th National Games (referred to as the "15th Games") in 2025 was jointly held by the three regions of Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao. This not only represents an institutional innovation in China's sports history but also constitutes a "grand narrative" for the collaborative construction of the image of the Greater Bay Area urban agglomeration. This paper, based on the theory of space production and the perspective of urban communication, deeply analyzes the internal mechanism by which large-scale sports events drive the construction of urban image. The research finds that the 15th Games effectively promoted the paradigm shift of the city identification system through the re-creation of physical space as a landscape, the mediaization of cultural symbols, and the window display of governance effectiveness. This paper not only focuses on the instantaneous image shaping during the event preparation period but also emphasizes the long-term communication strategies for regional image communities in the post-Games era. The research aims to provide theoretical support for empowering cities with high-quality development through large-scale events and to offer practical paths for cross-regional collaborative construction of urban images under the national strategy.

**Keywords:** Large-scale sports events; Urban image; 2025 National Games; Spatial production; Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area; Collaborative governance.

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## 1. Theoretical Coupling and Logical Starting Point: The Internal Mechanism of How Large-scale Sports Events Drive the Construction of a City's Image

### 1.1. Conceptual Linkage: The Interweaving of Sports Event Space and Urban Representational Space

From the perspective of urban sociology, large-scale sports events are not isolated athletic activities but a "spatio-temporal heterogeneity" practice that strongly intervenes in the urban fabric. According to Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, sports events reshape the "material space" through the physical transformation of venue clusters, public spaces, and transportation networks; more deeply, by means of media rituals and social mobilization, they convert physical space into a "representational space" that carries specific ideologies and aesthetic values.

In the context of the 2025 National Games, venues across Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao are no longer merely physical carriers of competition. Through unified event branding, cultural discourse, and visual aesthetics, they achieve a logical interweaving of the city's tangible space and the virtual symbolic space [1]. This embedding mechanism makes urban image no longer a collection of fragmented geographic pieces but integrated into a highly coherent visual narrative system. The fluidity of the event and the fixed nature of the city reconcile within this space, endowing the city with a dynamic representation under a grand narrative, thereby

bridging the city's image from a "static display" to a "dynamic production."

### 1.2. Driving Mechanisms: The Updating Logic of City Image Recognition Systems Triggered by Major Events

The driving force of a large-scale sports event on urban image is essentially a reconstruction of recognition systems based on a "semiotics economy." First, at the perceptual level, the massive infrastructure investments associated with event preparation directly trigger iterations of the city's Visual Identity (VI) system. The rise of landmark buildings and the aestheticization of the urban landscape allow the city to achieve a rapid assault on its material landscape. Second, at the psychological level, the event's social mobilization effects strengthen citizens' sense of belonging and pride; this endogenous emotional resonance translates into the core of the city's Behavioral Identity (BI) system, increasing the resilience and warmth of the city's image [2].

The core driving force lies in the value orientation of the Mission Identity (MI) system. Large events, as a potent discursive lever, can embed the city's development aims (such as green transformation, smart cities, and collaborative development) into the agenda of international communication. Through the National Games window, the innovation genes, openness, and cultural depth of the Greater Bay Area cities can be distilled, packaged, and projected. This step-by-step progression from "material appearance" to "spiritual core" forms a complete power loop that empowers the city's image through the event, giving the city a unique competitive edge in intense regional competition.

### **1.3. Value Anchors: The Special Significance of Building the Greater Bay Area City Image under the National Games**

The 2025 National Games, as the first comprehensive sports event jointly hosted across the border of Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao, holds highly distinctive political significance and strategic value in its dimension of image construction. First, it marks an in-depth experimental exploration of regional coordinated governance within the process of Chinese-style modernization. In this context, the construction of urban image is no longer a solo performance by a single city, but a “symphony” under the joint action of three regions. How to use sport as a soft vehicle to demonstrate the harmonious coexistence of different urban systems under “One Country, Two Systems” is the core proposition of this edition’s image construction [3].

Moreover, the National Games provides the Greater Bay Area with a strategic opportunity to present its “world-class urban agglomeration” image to the world. For a long time, external perception of the Greater Bay Area has been confined to functional concepts such as a “world factory” or a “financial center,” lacking a unified emotional consensus and cultural identity. The Games, through the commonality of sports culture, effectively bridges psychological rifts across different governance and cultural backgrounds, creating a composite regional brand that includes Guangzhou’s heritage, Hong Kong’s dynamism, Shenzhen’s innovation, and Macao’s charm. This regionally integrated image construction not only extends traditional urban image theory but also serves as a vivid practice of the national strategic space narrative.

## **2. Reality assessment and scene anchoring: The multi-dimensional landscape of the 2025 National Games in enhancing the city's image**

### **2.1. Reshaping the Physical Landscape: Enhancing the Quality of Urban Space through Sports Landmarks**

The most direct impact of major sporting events on a city's image lies in the "spectacular" reshaping of its physical landscape. The 2025 National Games, relying on core venues such as the Nansha Gymnasium and the Hong Kong Kai Tak Sports Park, not only filled the gap in high-end sports facilities in the region but also created highly recognizable urban visual anchors through the integration of Lingnan culture, maritime civilization, and modern technology elements in architectural design [4]. These venues are no longer isolated sports containers but have evolved into public spaces with social cohesion, capable of triggering collective memories among citizens.

A more profound impact lies in the "spillover effect" of the events on the city's infrastructure. To prepare for the National Games, the governments of the three cities invested significant effort in areas such as rail transit interconnection, urban micro-renewal, and ecological governance. This event-driven urban renewal deeply integrates sports functions with urban life and industrial layout, achieving an image transmission from "inside the stadium" to "outside the stadium." Through the "acupuncture-style" renovation of old urban areas and the "garden-style" construction of green new

districts, the city has presented a new, efficient, livable, and aesthetically pleasing appearance on a physical level, providing a solid material foundation for the international dissemination of its urban image.

### **2.2. Cultural Symbol Extraction: Media Narrative of Lingnan Culture and Modern Sports Spirit**

In the era of media convergence, the competition for urban image is essentially a competition for symbolic premium. The 2025 National Games profoundly grasped the shared cultural gene of "Lingnan culture" across the three regions, constructing a discourse system that transcends institutional barriers through symbolic deconstruction and reconstruction [5]. For example, it combined symbols with strong regional attributes, such as the lion dance, kapok flowers, and dragon boats, with the dynamic aesthetics of modern track and field and water sports, shaping a cultural image that is both traditional and fashionable, both national and global, through IP-based operation and viral dissemination on social media.

In terms of narrative logic, the National Games' image construction has shifted from the previous one-dimensional "propaganda model" to a "story model" based on empathy and participation. By exploring the stories of athletes' hard work, the ordinary contributions of volunteers, and the passion for sports among ordinary citizens from the three regions, the grand national strategy is concretized into warm and relatable individual narratives. This strategy of "de-grand narrative" makes the image of the National Games more penetrating and effectively overcomes potential cultural discounts and cognitive biases in international communication. This symbolic extraction based on cultural resonance allows the Greater Bay Area's urban image to maintain diversity while possessing a unified and distinctive cultural identity.

### **2.3. Governance Effectiveness Representation: A Window Showcasing Cross-Regional Collaborative Event Hosting and Urban Administrative Efficiency**

Large-scale sporting events are not only a competition of sports but also a "stress test" of urban administrative efficiency and governance levels. The cross-administrative regional collaboration involved in the 2025 National Games, including the optimization of entry and exit policies, smart transportation linkage, security data sharing, and customs clearance facilitation, is itself a highly valuable image showcase. Through the event's organization, the Greater Bay Area demonstrates to the world its institutional image in handling complex affairs and achieving policy coordination and institutional innovation. This "governance image" is an important component of a city's core competitiveness and a crucial standard for investors and global talent to assess a city's creditworthiness. Furthermore, the application of smart venues, big data scheduling platforms, and 5G/6G communication technologies during the Games has deeply solidified the Greater Bay Area's image as a "digital city." By enhancing the spectator experience and urban service efficiency through digital means, it showcases China's pioneering role in smart governance. When global audiences witness the intelligent management of venues, the precision of traffic guidance, and the standardization of social volunteer services, the city's image transcends superficial aesthetic perception, evolving into a deeper level of institutional trust.

This "city governance" reflected in "Games governance" is one of the most valuable image assets that the 2025 National Games leaves for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

### **3. Communication Matrix and Discourse Deconstruction: International Communication Strategies for the City Image of the 2025 National Games**

#### **3.1. Narrative System Construction: A Discourse Shift from "Event Communication" to "City Story"**

In the context of international communication, the image communication of major sporting events has shifted from simply reporting on competitive results to a comprehensive and multi-dimensional urban narrative. The 2025 National Games, as a strategic fulcrum for showcasing the image of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, has a core task of achieving a paradigm shift from "sports discourse" to "city brand discourse." This shift requires communicators not only to explain the struggles on the field but also to deeply embed the spirit of the event with the open spirit and innovative genes of the Greater Bay Area through an "intertextual" narrative strategy.

The key to constructing this narrative system lies in "de-labeling" and "meaning regeneration." Communicators need to break through the paradigm of traditional sports news and explore the urban development blueprint behind the event. For example, by telling the story of the technological collaboration and cultural integration between Hong Kong, Macao, and mainland cities in the event preparation, a city cluster image narrative based on the dimension of a "community of shared future" can be constructed. This narrative not only dissolves cognitive barriers in cross-cultural communication but also reflects grand themes through "micro-narratives," achieving a unity of emotional resonance and rational understanding of the Greater Bay Area's image, thus gaining an initiative in the discourse of global city competition.

#### **3.2. Optimization of Communication Paths: A Multi-Modal, All-Time Communication Matrix in an Intelligent Media Environment**

The deep application of mobile internet and artificial intelligence technologies has fundamentally changed the communication ecosystem of city images. The communication of the 2025 National Games will no longer be limited to traditional television and newspapers but will require the construction of an intelligent communication matrix that is "all-time locked and multi-modal perceptive." Utilizing big data profiling and algorithm recommendation technologies, "precise targeting" will be implemented for audiences from different countries and cultural backgrounds to achieve a differentiated presentation of the city's image.

In terms of path selection, "immersive" and "interactive" communication should be strengthened. VR/AR technology will enable a cross-temporal experience of the virtual stadium, allowing global audiences who cannot be present in person to perceive the vibrancy of Guangzhou, the technological

sophistication of Shenzhen, and the international flair of Hong Kong and Macau through a digital window. Simultaneously, fully leveraging the matrix effect of social media (such as TikTok, WeChat, and X), athletes, coaches, and international visitors are encouraged to share their experiences of the Games from a "first-person perspective." This decentralized communication model can create a highly authentic "word-of-mouth landscape," effectively counteracting the stereotypes of singular political narratives and achieving widespread penetration and value enhancement of the city's image in the digital space.

#### **3.3. Identity and Emotional Resonance: The Psychological Construction of the City Image by Participants in the National Games**

The city image is not merely a symbol constructed by the media, but also a psychological fact shared and perceived by participants. The ultimate value of major sporting events lies in evoking emotional resonance and identity that transcends the competition itself. In the 2025 National Games, athletes, volunteers, spectators, and local residents constitute a "living business card" of the city's image. Their participation is itself a practice and confirmation of the city's values.

From a social psychology perspective, the National Games, through its ritualistic opening and closing ceremonies and high-frequency social interactions, cultivates a collective sense of belonging among the people of the three regions, fostering a sense of belonging as "Greater Bay Area residents." This intrinsic emotional bond forms the strongest psychological foundation of a city's image. When this internal sense of identity spills outward through social media, it transforms into a compelling urban charm. Therefore, the construction of a city's image must focus on the "human" dimension. By enhancing the professionalism of volunteer services and optimizing citizen participation mechanisms, every participant can become an endorser of the city's image, thereby achieving a profound leap from "visual presentation" to "emotional resonance."

### **4. Continuation of Effects and Iteration of Strategies: Sustainable Development Path of Urban Image in the Post-National Games Era**

#### **4.1. Legacy Transformation Path: From "Highlight Moments of the Games" to "Normalized City Brand"**

Large-scale sporting events often face the risk of image decline after the "theatrical effect" fades, the so-called "post-Games effect." The city image construction of the 2025 National Games should not stop at the closing ceremony, but should proactively plan for the normalized transformation of the "sports legacy." This transformation includes not only the post-Games utilization of sports venues, but also the continuous revitalization of the brand assets, governance experience, and social capital accumulated during the Games.

Specifically, the soft power of the city formed during the Games should be transformed into long-term urban development dividends. By hosting subsequent international single-sport events, cultural festivals, or trade forums, a deep integration of "sports + tourism + industry" can be achieved,

transforming the city's reputation established during the National Games into a lasting attraction for investment and talent. Simultaneously, a long-term mechanism for managing the Games legacy should be established. Through digital archiving and IP-based redevelopment, the memory symbols of the National Games can be preserved in urban spaces and media narratives for a long time, ensuring that the city's image maintains its vitality and communicative activity in the post-National Games era.

#### **4.2. Deepening Regional Collaboration: Building a Community of Shared Image Based on Greater Bay Area Identity Consensus**

The biggest institutional benefit of the 2025 National Games lies in breaking down the isolated model of city image building. In the post-National Games era, Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao should seize this opportunity to deepen regional image collaboration and build a "Greater Bay Area Image Community." This community does not require erasing differences between cities, but rather forming a cluster matrix of differentiated competition and complementary advantages under the banner of the "Greater Bay Area Brand."

At the practical level, efforts should be made to promote the integration of regional tourism routes and the joint construction of public service brands. For example, using the National Games venues as nodes, cross-city sports tourism routes can be developed, organically linking Hong Kong's international event experience, Guangzhou's Lingnan cultural heritage, Macao's comprehensive entertainment advantages, and Shenzhen's hard technology strength. By establishing a regular joint external publicity mechanism among the three regions, a unified international promotional context for the Greater Bay Area can be achieved, forming a scale effect of "1+1+1>3." This strategic leap from individual cities to a cluster image not only elevates the Greater Bay Area's position among global city clusters but also provides a Chinese model for image collaboration in global regional governance.

#### **4.3. Risk Governance and Dynamic Correction: Strategies for Predicting City Image Crises and Mitigating Negative Perceptions**

In a highly complex public opinion environment, any negative deviations during the preparation of large-scale events can lead to a collapse of the city's image. The 2025 National Games involves collaboration among three regions, with potential risks in policy implementation, security, and unforeseen events. Therefore, establishing a scientific mechanism for city image risk governance and feedback

correction is crucial.

First, a sentiment early warning system based on big data monitoring should be established to dynamically track the evaluation trends of the event by domestic and international media and social media platforms, promptly identifying and guiding potential negative public opinion. Second, transparent communication strategies should be developed to address potential issues such as cost overruns, traffic congestion, or cultural conflicts, proactively releasing information and honestly responding to concerns to dispel misunderstandings. Finally, a "post-evaluation" mechanism should be emphasized, using quantitative public opinion surveys and communication data analysis to identify weaknesses and blind spots in the city's image and iterate strategies accordingly. This self-healing image management system ensures that cities demonstrate strong resilience in the face of negative impacts, thus maintaining a long-term positive reputation in a dynamic interplay of factors.

This study argues that the 2025 National Games is not only a grand event for sports in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, but also a strategic juncture for its urban image to undergo a paradigm shift. Through a four-pronged approach encompassing "space, symbolism, governance, and communication," the Greater Bay Area is poised to leap from a single geographical concept to a high-quality, high-level, and highly collaborative globalized image community on the international stage. Future research should continue to focus on the social effects of the Games' legacy, providing ongoing theoretical support for the brand building of China's megacities.

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