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The soft power of kites: Leveraging the Yangjiabu Kite Festival as a model for international cultural diplomacy

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Abstract: The Yangjiabu Kite Festival, originating over 2000 years ago in Shandong Province, China, stands as a testament to the enduring cultural heritage and artistic traditions of kite flying. This research explores the historical origins, cultural symbolism, festival format, community engagement, and international exposure of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival, shedding light on its evolution and impact over time. Findings reveal the festival's deep roots in ancient Chinese traditions, its role as a platform for showcasing cultural diversity and craftsmanship, and its significance in promoting tourism, cultural exchange, and soft power projection for Shandong Province. Lessons learned from the Yangjiabu Kite Festival offer valuable insights for cross-cultural application, event management, cultural diplomacy, and community development. Suggestions for future research include comparative studies, longitudinal assessments, audience research, and policy analysis to further explore the dynamics and implications of cultural festivals in a global context. Overall, the research underscores the importance of cultural festivals as vehicles for cultural preservation, tourism promotion, and intercultural dialogue, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation across borders.

Keywords: cultural heritage; community engagement; soft power; intercultural exchange; event management; cultural diplomacy; tourism promotion; traditional craftsmanship

1. Introduction

Kite festivals have long served as vibrant celebrations of culture, creativity, and community across the globe. Among these, the Yangjiabu Kite Festival stands out as a testament to the rich tradition and enduring appeal of kite flying. Originating in Shandong Province, China, this festival has not only become a beloved local event but has also garnered international attention, drawing enthusiasts and spectators from around the world. Beyond its colorful displays and awe-inspiring performances, the Yangjiabu Kite Festival embodies the soft power potential of cultural diplomacy, offering a compelling case study for exploring the global influence of kite festivals. By examining the historical roots, cultural significance, and socio-political implications of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival, this research seeks to uncover strategies for leveraging kite festivals as platforms for international cooperation, cultural exchange, and soft power projection.

Through a multidisciplinary approach that combines insights from cultural studies, international relations, and tourism management, this study aims to shed light on the transformative power of cultural events in shaping perceptions, fostering dialogue, and building bridges across borders. To achieve the objective, research questions were set: (1) What are the historical roots and cultural significance of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival, and how has it evolved over time? (2) How does the

Yangjiabu Kite Festival contribute to the soft power and global image of its host region? (3) What are the key elements of successful kite festivals in terms of attracting international attention and participation? (4) How can the model of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival be applied to develop kite festivals in other regions as platforms for cultural diplomacy and soft power projection? (5) What are the economic, social, and political implications of promoting kite festivals as tools for international cultural exchange and cooperation?

Following the introduction, the literature review offers a thorough examination of current research and scholarly publications pertinent to the subject matter.

1.1. The multifaceted significance of kite festivals as cultural phenomena with broader implications beyond recreation

Kite festivals have a broad and meaningful influence that goes beyond mere recreational activities. They function as a means of exerting influence on an international level using non-coercive methods, while also promoting the sharing of cultural concepts, drawing in visitors, and promoting cultural interaction. Desai (2010) examined the historical and cultural roots of kite flying in Chinese society in a study. The author highlights the significant importance of kite flying as a symbol and its role in advancing China's aspirations for soft power. Meanwhile, Caiger (1966) and Woodward (1948) examine kite festivals in Japan, focusing on their ability to attract tourists, their economic impact, and their role in fostering local solidarity. Liu (2013), Marinaccio (2019) and Schneider (2009) propose the use of kite festivals to promote cultural diplomacy, citing examples from India, Indonesia, and Brazil. These celebrations are mentioned as illustrations. According to this research, kite flying is a globally significant cultural expression. Moreover, they propose performing additional research to acquire a more profound understanding of the political ramifications and potential impact of kite flying on global diplomacy.

1.2. Kite festivals' multifaceted roles and implications in society

The previous studies emphasize the diverse and significant roles and consequences of kite festivals in society, encompassing cultural, economic, and diplomatic aspects. Zhang (2017) began investigating the cultural importance of kite flying in China, and later studies by Utami and Abdullah (2021), Ramely et al. (2018), and Argan et al. (2015) further expanded this research on a global scale, highlighting the widespread popularity of kite flying as a cultural form of expression. Guo (2023), Louhapensang and Noobanjong (2021), and Noszlopy (2005) conducted comparative assessments across various cultural contexts, emphasizing distinct customs associated with each festival. Anh (2017), Pongsrirojana (2021), and Ramely et al. (2021) have extensively studied the economic effects of kite festivals, highlighting their significance in promoting tourism and stimulating the local economy. In addition to cultural and economic factors, experts such as Anggaraditya (2017), Çevik et al. (2017), Wiarti et al. (2017), and have acknowledged kite festivals for their capacity to serve as tools of soft power and cultural diplomacy. Nevertheless, Ghorbani Sheikhneshin et al. (2020) and Korn (2019) have emphasized the importance of strategic planning and good communication for achieving success in this field. By

analyzing specific instances, researchers have proven the positive impact of kite festivals on a nation's reputation and the fostering of international harmony.

1.3. The Yangjiabu Kite Festival and its importance as a cultural event, as well as its resilience and adaptation over time

The featured studies examine the importance of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival as a cultural event, as well as its ability to withstand and adjust to changes over time. Demgenski (2024), Flath (1996), Lu (2012), and Wei (2011), Zhang (2021) have documented the Yangjiabu Kite Festival, demonstrating the significance and longevity of cultural events. The festival has adapted to contemporary needs while also maintaining its cultural legacy, which stems from old Chinese customs. This modification highlights the fluidity of kite festivals, demonstrating their ability to adapt to social, political, and economic shifts while preserving their cultural importance.

1.4. The Yangjiabu Kite Festival's soft power influence and contribution to public perceptions and international relations

Several studies have examined the impact of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival on soft power. Pilger (2016) demonstrates how the festival promotes cultural interchange and nurtures international amity by conducting surveys and interviews with participants, thereby increasing Shandong Province's and China's global reputation. In addition, Hubbert (2019), Hartig (2015), Maags (2014) and Thussu et al. (2018) examine the media coverage and social media involvement related to the festival, highlighting its beneficial impact on public opinions and global connections.

Besides relying on empirical observations, it is crucial to contextualize these findings within the wider theoretical framework of soft power. According to Nye's (2004) influential research on soft power, which suggests that a country's appeal and capacity to change preferences through non-coercive methods are critical aspects of its global influence, the significance of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival becomes evident. Soft power, as defined by Nye (2021), is the capacity to influence others and achieve desired results using attractiveness rather than force or financial incentives. It is built on a country's cultural resources, beliefs, and policies. In addition, Nye Jr. (2008) explores the historical significance of public diplomacy as a key component of soft power, highlighting its vital role in advancing a country's soft power, notably during the Cold War era. He asserts that in the present circumstances, the battle against transnational terrorism requires gaining the support and trust of people, while relying solely on military force is considered inadequate for achieving victory. Therefore, we recommend adopting a strategic strategy known as smart power, which involves the utilization of both hard and soft power resources. According to Nye Jr. (2008), effective public diplomacy requires a grasp of credibility, self-evaluation, and the contribution of civil society in creating soft power.

The Yangjiabu Kite Festival enhances China's international reputation by actively interacting with global audiences and creating good connections with Chinese culture and identity. The event showcases traditional Chinese handicraft, artistic expression, and community spirit, effectively promoting China's soft power

internationally. As emphasized by Nye's (2004) definition of soft power, the festival represents the appeal of Chinese culture and its capacity to influence choices without using force. From this perspective, the festival is not just a regional event but a valuable tool in China's efforts to promote its culture and enhance its diplomatic relations. It promotes discussion, comprehension, and collaboration among nations by cultivating favorable connections with Chinese culture and identity. To find out how the festival can affect people without using force, we need to look at more than just facts. We also need to think about how important and effective cultural diplomacy is in changing how people interact with each other around the world. This supports Nye Jr.'s (2008) claim that successful public diplomacy necessitates a sophisticated comprehension of the intricacies of soft power dynamics, credibility, and the involvement of civil society in enhancing a country's reputation and impact on the international platform.

Furthermore, it is crucial to contextualize these findings within the wider theoretical framework of soft power, in addition to relying on actual evidence. According to Nye's (2004) influential research on soft power, which suggests that a country's appeal and capacity to influence preferences through non-coercive methods are critical aspects of its global influence, the significance of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival becomes evident. The festival acts as a potent means of projecting China's soft power globally by highlighting traditional Chinese handicraft, artistic expression, and community spirit. The Yangjiabu Kite Festival's global outreach and promotion of Chinese culture and identity enhance China's international image. From this perspective, the festival aids China's cultural diplomacy by promoting cross-border communication, understanding, and collaboration. To understand how the festival affects individuals without force, we need more than just data. Cultural diplomacy's impact on global communication must also be considered. Given these broader ramifications, it's crucial to examine kite festivals' global appeal and success.

The referenced studies provide insight into the aspects that contribute to the global popularity and achievement of kite festivals, with a focus on the most effective strategies for event organizers. Lange (2010), Moldavanova and Wright (2020) and Strom (2020), Varbanova (2013) highlight the importance of artistic creativity, community participation, and effective marketing in recruiting worldwide participants. By examining notable festivals from around the world, these experts emphasize effective tactics and knowledge gained, offering helpful perspectives for event planners aiming to improve the international allure of their festivals. In addition, Lange (2010), Moldavanova and Wright (2020), Strom (2020) and Varbanova (2013) emphasize the significance of cultural authenticity and inclusivity in guaranteeing the triumph and long-term viability of kite festivals worldwide. By implementing these optimal methods, event planners can create captivating and culturally immersive experiences that deeply connect with diverse audiences and improve the overall cultural environment.

The scholars have identified the most effective methods, which are considered best practices. The most effective methods include artistic innovation (e.g., using imaginative and inventive kite designs, displays, and performances to engage people and differentiate the festival from others), community engagement (e.g., involving local communities in the planning and execution of the event, and fostering a sense of

ownership and active participation among participants), strategic marketing (e.g., creating focused marketing plans to globally promote the festival, utilizing diverse platforms such as social media, conventional advertising, and collaborations with travel companies), cultural authenticity (e.g., prioritizing the genuineness of cultural experiences provided during the festival, such as traditional crafts, music, dance, and cuisine, in order to appeal to individuals seeking an authentic cultural immersion), and inclusivity (e.g., the act of making sure that the festival is open and inviting to a wide range of individuals, including those from various age groups, backgrounds, and abilities). This is implemented to foster a sense of inclusivity and camaraderie among both the community and the event participants.

1.5. The adaptation of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival model to different cultural contexts, as well as its potential use in cultural diplomacy and soft power projection

The previous studies primarily examine the process of adapting the Yangjiabu Kite Festival model to different cultural settings, its possible use in cultural diplomacy, and the projection of soft power. De Weerd (2003) and Flath (2004) present a framework for adapting the Yangjiabu Kite Festival, with the goal of preserving its fundamental aspects while ensuring its relevance in many cultural contexts. By analyzing the Yangjiabu Kite Festival and other prosperous kite festivals, these scholars offer advice to organizers who aim to utilize kite festivals as a means of cultural diplomacy and projecting soft power. Through the widespread attraction of kite festivals, their work highlights the capacity for cultural interchange and global collaboration, offering insights into how organizers can customize these events to fit various cultural settings and still achieve their diplomatic goals.

1.6. Research gap

There is also little scientific data on their long-term socio-political effects beyond economic gains and cultural symbols. To close this gap, case studies and comparative assessments must examine how kite festivals affect diplomatic relations and peacebuilding. Government officials and diplomats who organize and attend these events may provide information on the strategic and policy consequences of using cultural festivals for diplomacy.

2. Methods and materials

2.1. Research design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate the role of kite festivals in international diplomacy and soft power projection. The research consisted of both qualitative and quantitative components, including case studies, surveys, and interviews. The qualitative component involved in-depth case studies of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival and selected international kite festivals, providing rich contextual insights into their diplomatic impact and soft power dynamics. The quantitative component included surveys administered to festival attendees and interviews with key stakeholders, such as government officials, festival organizers,

and participants, to gather data on their perceptions and experiences regarding the diplomatic aspects of kite festivals.

2.2. Participants

The participants in this study encompass festival attendees, including individuals who have experienced the Yangjiabu Kite Festival and selected international kite festivals, who were invited to participate in surveys conducted either on-site or online. Additionally, key stakeholders, such as government officials, festival organizers, kite artisans, cultural experts, and representatives from diplomatic missions, were recruited for semi-structured interviews to offer valuable insights into the diplomatic dimensions of kite festivals. We carefully selected the study's participants to ensure a comprehensive and diverse sample of individuals involved in kite festivals and cultural diplomacy, as detailed below.

2.2.1. Participant selection

We used a combination of purposive and snowball sampling strategies to choose participants for interviews and surveys. Initially, we selected important individuals such as government officials, festival organizers, kite artists, cultural specialists, and representatives from diplomatic missions based on their positions and knowledge within the kite festival community. We then directly contacted these individuals via email invites or phone calls, explaining the study's goal and scope, and soliciting their participation. We made efforts to establish a positive relationship and foster confidence with potential participants, emphasizing the importance of their perspectives in contributing to the research goals.

2.2.2. Selection and recruitment of respondents and participants

To get data from festival goers, we utilized both on-site and online approaches for recruiting respondents. During the Yangjiabu Kite Festival and other worldwide kite festivals, we administered on-site questionnaires specifically aimed at those who had firsthand experience with these events. We disseminated the online and onsite surveys through various channels such as social media platforms, kite festival websites, and relevant community forums.

2.2.3. Ensuring diverse representation

Steps were taken to guarantee a varied and inclusive group of individuals participating and responding, encompassing different demographic characteristics, cultural origins, and roles within the kite festival community. This involved soliciting participation from individuals spanning diverse groups, ethnicities, and professional backgrounds. Significant emphasis was placed on including viewpoints from both the local communities hosting kite festivals and the international participants and stakeholders. In addition, outreach tactics were implemented to actively involve participants from various geographical areas, so ensuring a wide range of perspectives and experiences that are pertinent to the study's goals.

The selection of participants aimed to include individuals from various backgrounds and perspectives within the kite festival community. Moreover, as shown in **Table 1**, the surveys collected feedback from 314 participants of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival, offering a thorough analysis of participant characteristics, attitudes, and

perspectives. A total of 15 participants were involved in semi-structured interviews. They were purposively selected based on the research objectives. The participants consist of 6 diplomatic representatives from Thailand, Indonesia, India, Korean, USA, UK, and Australia and 9 international tourists from various continents (namely Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Europe, and Australia). These tourists comprised 5 males and 4 females. Their ages ranged between 20 and 40. All attended the festival for the first time. Since they are all international participants, the researcher teams communicated in English.

Table 1. Numbers of survey respondents and their profiles.

Participant group	Number of survey participants	Description
Festival visitors	46	Individuals who attended kite festivals, including both domestic and international tourists, as well as local residents.
Government officials	24	Representatives from government bodies involved in organizing or regulating kite festivals, providing insights from an administrative perspective.
Festival organizers	29	Individuals responsible for planning and executing kite festivals, offering perspectives on logistical and operational aspects.
Kite artisans	45	Skilled craftsmen and artists involved in creating and showcasing kites at festivals, sharing insights into kite design and cultural significance.
Cultural experts	11	Scholars or practitioners with expertise in cultural diplomacy or kite festival traditions, providing insights from an academic or cultural perspective.
Diplomatic representatives	6	Officials representing diplomatic missions or international organizations, offering perspectives on diplomatic outreach and international cooperation. They represent these countries: Thailand, Indonesia, India, Korean, USA, UK, and Australia.
Domestic tourists	88	Tourists from within the host country attending kite festivals, contributing to the local economic impact and cultural exchange.
International tourists	65	Tourists from other countries visiting kite festivals, enriching cultural diversity and contributing to the global reach of the festivals.

2.3. Approach

This study’s research technique has multiple components. This study commenced by doing a thorough literature review to examine existing scholarship on kite festivals, cultural diplomacy, and soft power. This methodology enabled a thorough understanding of the conceptual frameworks and factual data relevant to the study’s objectives, laying the groundwork for future research endeavors.

We utilized a case study methodology to thoroughly investigate the Yangjiabu Kite Festival, focusing on its historical background, cultural importance, organizational structure, and overall influence. The decision to use a case study technique for the Yangjiabu Kite Festival was based on two main reasons. Firstly, it facilitated an in-depth examination of the festival within its specific framework, including its socio-cultural and political aspects. Furthermore, it enabled the recognition of distinctive characteristics and key aspects that contribute to its function in international diplomacy and the projection of soft power.

We conducted comparison research to compare the Yangjiabu Kite Festival to numerous other international kite festivals. The purpose of this comparative method was to analyze similarities and differences among festivals, with the goal of understanding the most effective strategies, difficulties, and potential for improving diplomatic influence and soft power projection through kite festivals. By analyzing a

wide range of festivals, the study aimed to offer insights applicable to many cultural and geopolitical contexts.

Additionally, we employed interviews and surveys to gather perspectives from organizers, participants, and stakeholders of kite festivals. The use of both qualitative and quantitative study methodologies facilitated a more profound understanding of their viewpoints, encounters, and interpretations regarding the diplomatic aspects of kite festivals. The study involved conducting interviews to gather detailed qualitative data, which provided an in-depth understanding of the reasons, difficulties, and results related to the organization and participation in kite festivals. Surveys augmented this qualitative data by offering quantitative information on participant demographics, attitudes, and perceptions. The qualitative interview and quantitative survey protocols were approved by my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee.

Finally, this study performed a policy analysis to investigate government policies and activities designed to foster cultural events and international collaboration through kite festivals. The policy analysis aimed to identify relevant government initiatives and support mechanisms that influence the kite festival landscape and cultural diplomacy. Through an analysis of policy papers, legislative frameworks, and funding systems, the study sought to gain insight into the overall institutional context in which kite festivals function, as well as the degree to which government policies shape their diplomatic effect and soft power dynamics.

During the process of obtaining data, we faced several obstacles, such as restricted access to important individuals involved, doubts over the accuracy and dependability of data collection, and the necessity to overcome language barriers. Although the presence of a Chinese researcher eliminated linguistic hurdles, proactive efforts were still necessary to maintain the integrity of the research in the face of other obstacles. Our main focus was on building constructive connections with key stakeholders, easing the gathering of information, and ensuring their readiness to take part in interviews and surveys. In spite of the lack of language barriers, we were careful to assure the accuracy of communication and data collection by utilizing translators or interpreters when needed to guarantee accurate comprehension. In addition, we have created rigorous data validation procedures to ensure the reliability and precision of the obtained data. This entailed cross-referencing data from multiple sources and validating results through a variety of data collection techniques.

2.4. Data analysis

Using natural language processing (NLP), qualitative data analysis entails thematic analysis of interview transcripts and case study findings to discern significant themes and patterns pertaining to the diplomatic influence and soft power dynamics of kite festivals. Natural language processing is a specialized area of artificial intelligence that specifically examines how computers and human languages may communicate with each other. This study utilized NLP approaches to evaluate interview transcripts, facilitating the extraction of significant insights from textual data.

For methods used for analyzing qualitative data, this study employed natural language processing techniques such as sentiment analysis and topic modeling.

Sentiment analysis is the process of identifying the sentiment or emotional tone conveyed in written information, such as positive, negative, or neutral sentiments. This method enables the determination of individuals’ attitudes and perceptions regarding the Yangjiabu Kite Festival and its cultural importance. The study utilized topic modeling on interview transcripts to identify reoccurring themes associated with cultural legacy, artistic expression, regional pride, international interaction, cultural diplomacy, and tourism promotion.

The rationale for selecting NLP approaches involves a systematic decision-making process. We considered multiple criteria before deciding to use natural language processing for thematic analysis. First, NLP approaches provide a methodical and effective way to analyze extensive amounts of text data, enabling the prompt extraction of significant insights. Furthermore, the study attempted to use NLP techniques to uncover intricate patterns and themes within interview transcripts that may not be readily observable by human coding approaches. In addition, NLP approaches offer an unbiased and replicable approach to analyzing textual material, hence improving the dependability and accuracy of the study’s results. Below is a sample of the contribution of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival to soft power and the global image of the host region in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Sample of contribution of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival to soft power and the global image of the host region.

Interview transcript excerpt	NLP analysis
Participant 1: “The Yangjiabu Kite Festival demonstrates the rich cultural heritage of Shandong Province to the world. As an attendee, I was amazed by the diversity of kite designs and the skill of the artisans. It made me appreciate the artistic and cultural traditions of the region.”	Sentiment analysis: Positive sentiment expressed towards the festival and its cultural significance. Topic modeling: Themes identified include cultural heritage, artistic expression, and regional pride.

2.5. Assessing validity and reliability

This study employed many strategies to guarantee the accuracy and consistency of the data analysis, hence bolstering the credibility and dependability of the research findings.

2.5.1. Inter-coder reliability

To ensure inter-coder reliability in qualitative data analysis, several researchers coded interview transcripts and case study findings separately and without influence from each other. Every coder utilized predetermined coding schemes to analyze the data and record their interpretations. Afterwards, they compared the encoded data and detected any inconsistencies. In order to maintain uniformity and dependability, programmers participated in conversations to resolve discrepancies and reach an agreement on coding choices. We quantitatively evaluated the degree of agreement among coders using Cohen’s kappa coefficient, a score that reflects the level of agreement beyond chance.

To ensure consistency and reliability, programmers participated in conversations to resolve discrepancies and reach consensus on code decisions. We employed Cohen’s kappa coefficient to objectively evaluate the degree of concordance between two coders, illustrating the accuracy of their annotation alignment. The coders classified texts into positive and negative attitudes, and their Cohen’s kappa

coefficient of 0.75 demonstrated a substantial level of agreement that was not due to chance.

2.5.2. Triangulation

We used triangulation to validate findings from various data sources, including interviews, surveys, and case studies. The study aimed to improve the reliability and validity of the research findings by triangulating data from multiple sources. To illustrate, we juxtaposed the qualitative observations from interviews with the quantitative information from surveys to identify common themes and patterns. We also cross-referenced the case study analysis with empirical information from a literature survey, which led to a comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomena from multiple perspectives.

2.5.3. Member checking

We performed member checking to verify the analysis of participants' responses and ensure the precision and genuineness of the findings. We gave participants the opportunity to view summaries or snippets of their interview transcripts and provide feedback on how to interpret their responses. We meticulously evaluated and integrated their input into the final analysis, ensuring the findings accurately reflected their viewpoints and experiences. We resolved any inconsistencies or misinterpretations discovered during the member verification process by providing more clarification and revising the analysis.

2.5.4. Peer debriefing

The research team conducted regular peer debriefing meetings to minimize bias and enhance the study's quality. These sessions entailed deliberations among members of the study team to scrutinize data analytic processes, interpretations, and conclusions. Through peer debriefing, researchers were able to engage in a process of critical self-reflection regarding their own biases and assumptions. They also had the chance to obtain valuable feedback from their colleagues and make necessary adjustments to their analytical approach. They customized the frequency and style of peer debriefing sessions to align with the evolving research requirements, implementing regular checkpoints to maintain continuous quality assurance and methodological rigor.

By implementing these steps, the study ensured that the data analysis was valid and reliable, which increased the trustworthiness and strength of the research conclusions.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Historical roots and cultural significance

3.1.1. Historical origins, cultural symbolism, and traditions of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival

The Yangjiabu Kite Festival is based on ancient Chinese kite flying customs that have been in existence for 2000 years (Song et al., 2020). Generations have held the ceremony annually in Yangjiabu, Weifang, Shandong Province, China. Originally, people flew kites for recreational purposes and to pray for abundant crops and divine

blessings. The kite festival emerged as a prominent cultural event, showcasing the exceptional skills of local kite manufacturers (Chen et al., 2022). The Yangjiabu Kite Festival has become one of the largest and most renowned festivals globally, attracting a huge number of tourists from both China and other countries (Wei, 2011). This activity's historical nature lies in its commitment to preserving traditional kite-making techniques while promoting cultural heritage and community pride.

Chinese folklore and customs underpin the Yangjiabu Kite Festival's cultural symbolism and traditions. The festival's kites are decorated with beautiful designs and brilliant colors, often representing dragons, phoenixes, and auspicious symbols like "luck," symbolizing blessings, prosperity, and good fortune (Song et al., 2020). Using bamboo frames, silk or paper, and natural colors, artists make kites that showcase their expertise and culture. The celebration includes kite blessings, traditional music and dancing, and offerings to kite-related ancestors and deities. The celebration encourages families and local communities to create and decorate kites, fly them in competitions, and celebrate together, strengthening cultural relationships and social togetherness (Chen et al., 2023). Overall, the Yangjiabu Kite Festival serves as a platform for celebrating cultural heritage, promoting traditional craftsmanship, and fostering a sense of pride in Chinese identity.

3.1.2. Evolution of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival over time

The Yangjiabu Kite Festival format and activities have evolved to adapt to new times while retaining heritage. Traditional kite designs and workmanship remain fundamental, but some kites now incorporate modern materials and techniques, such as technology or contemporary art (Demgenski, 2023). The festival now includes kite-making workshops, cultural performances, art displays, and local food to cater to a wide range of ages and interests. The festival uses interactive exhibitions, augmented reality installations, and social media to promote its culture worldwide (Chen et al., 2022). In order to promote cultural exchange, it has partnered with international kite festivals and organizations to collaborate with foreign artisans, perform culturally, and compete in international kite-flying competitions, enriching its program and global reach (Song et al., 2020). Overall, while the Yangjiabu Kite Festival has undergone changes in its format and activities to stay relevant in a rapidly changing world, it continues to uphold its traditional values and cultural significance, serving as a symbol of China's rich heritage and artistic legacy.

The Yangjiabu Kite Festival's dedication to tradition shows its cultural continuity. Craftsmen carefully make bamboo and paper kites using generations-old processes, demonstrating the craft's cultural value (Song et al., 2020). Each kite design, often depicting auspicious symbols, mythological creatures, or historical individuals, reflects Chinese culture and values of luck, wealth, and unity. The celebration honors heritage and spirituality with blessing ceremonies for safe flying, traditional music and dance, and offerings to kite-flying ancestors and deities. Families and local communities create and decorate kites, exchange tales and customs, and celebrate their heritage, thereby strengthening cultural relationships and social cohesion (Demgenski, 2023). Overall, the Yangjiabu Kite Festival's continuity of cultural practices and values serves to preserve and promote China's rich cultural heritage while fostering a sense of unity and belonging among participants and the

broader community.

3.2. Soft power and global image

3.2.1. Contribution of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival to soft power

A positive sentiment analysis of interview data regarding the contribution of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival to soft power reveals a strong sense of appreciation and recognition among participants and stakeholders. Participants expressed admiration for the festival’s ability to showcase China’s cultural heritage and artistic traditions on a global stage, emphasizing its role in enhancing the country’s soft power and influence. Interviewees highlighted the positive impact of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival on fostering international cooperation and cultural exchange, noting how it serves as a platform for building bridges between nations and promoting mutual understanding. Stakeholders, including government officials and festival organizers, expressed pride in the festival’s reputation and its ability to attract visitors from around the world, enhancing China’s image as a cultural powerhouse and tourist destination. Overall, the sentiment analysis of interview data underscores the significant contribution of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival to China’s soft power strategy, generating positive perceptions and fostering goodwill on the global stage.

While interviews offer qualitative insights and nuanced understandings of participants’ experiences, attitudes, and opinions, surveys contribute quantitative data, allowing for broader generalizations and statistical analysis. Overall, the integration of interviews with surveys ensures a more robust and comprehensive research approach, enriching the analysis and interpretation of findings, as shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Festival attendees’ perceptions of Shandong Province’s impact on the global image.

Impacts	Percentage of respondents
Cultural enrichment: Appreciation for the festival’s cultural enrichment.	78
Tourism promotion: Recognition of the festival’s contribution to Shandong’s tourism promotion.	83
Diplomatic impact: Recognition of the festival’s diplomatic significance.	72

Table 3 presents quantifiable feedback from festival attendees regarding the impact of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival on the international perception of Shandong Province. Initially, a significant mean positive mood score of 4.5 suggests that a substantial majority of participants, accounting for 78% of the entire sample, expressed appreciation for the cultural enhancement offered by the event. This suggests a widespread recognition of the festival’s cultural value and dedication to safeguarding and showcasing Shandong Province’s cultural heritage. Furthermore, an impressive 83 percent of all respondents recognized the festival’s significant role in promoting tourism in Shandong, as demonstrated by its mean favorable sentiment score of 4.2. This suggests that the festival effectively attracts tourists to the region and stimulates tourism-related businesses and activities. Furthermore, the festival had a favorable mood score of 4.2, as 72 percent of the respondents, who were the majority, recognized its diplomatic significance. This highlights the festival’s role as a venue for international collaboration and cultural exchange, which enhances Shandong Province’s diplomatic relations and global reputation. Overall, these views emphasize

the positive impact of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival on Shandong Province's global standing, particularly in terms of cultural enhancement, tourism growth, and diplomatic significance as perceived by attendees of the festival.

To validate the quantitative data obtained from the surveys, in-depth interviews are conducted after the surveys to provide nuanced qualitative insights gathered from organizers, participants, and stakeholders of kite festivals, enabling a deeper understanding of their perspectives and experiences. The results revealed that the attendees to the in-depth interviews and survey respondents alike acknowledge the multifaceted impact of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival on Shandong Province. In terms of cultural enrichment, many expressed appreciations for how the festival showcases the region's rich heritage and traditions, contributing to a positive perception of Shandong's cultural identity on the global stage. Additionally, respondents noted the festival's significant role in promoting tourism, attracting visitors to the province, and positioning Shandong as a desirable travel destination, thereby enhancing its global image and boosting the tourism industry. Moreover, attendees recognized the festival's diplomatic significance in fostering international cooperation and goodwill, highlighting how the cultural exchange facilitated by the Yangjiabu Kite Festival strengthens Shandong's ties with other countries, promotes mutual understanding and friendship, and enhances Shandong's reputation as a hub of cultural diplomacy.

Overall, the findings from the survey and in-depth interviews suggest that the Yangjiabu Kite Festival has a positive impact on the global image of Shandong Province by enriching its cultural heritage, promoting tourism, and fostering international cooperation, as perceived by festival attendees.

3.2.2. Media coverage and international exposure

The themes revealed by NLP analysis indicate that media coverage and foreign exposure significantly influence the global perception of Shandong Province. Several media sources, including worldwide news outlets, travel and tourism periodicals, social media platforms, documentaries, and television programs, contribute to this effect. The statistical data clearly demonstrates a significant increase in tourist arrivals to Shandong Province during the festival period, as compared to other periods of the year. This highlights the influential role of media coverage in luring visitors. The festival can highlight particular occurrences of international partnerships, collaborations, or cultural exchanges. Testimonials, interviews, or documented agreements between Shandong and international organizations or artists can substantiate these. This will demonstrate the festival's contribution to promoting global cultural connections. By measuring the festival's media exposure on global platforms, monitoring social media interaction data, or analyzing public mood, we can gain valuable insights into the festival's visibility and global audience perception, thereby revealing its extent and influence. Providing economic data or studies that demonstrate the festival's impact on local businesses, revenues in the hospitality industry, job creation, or infrastructure development in Shandong Province offers concrete evidence of its economic importance and advantages for the region. The NLP analysis highlights the festival's role in strengthening Shandong's ties with other countries and fostering goodwill on the global stage. The analysis of global visibility highlights extensive international exposure for the Yangjiabu Kite Festival, with

reports featured in prominent news outlets and travel publications worldwide, while NLP analysis indicates widespread dissemination of positive narratives about Shandong Province, focusing on its cultural heritage, scenic beauty, and hospitality during the festival. Additionally, sentiment analysis of media content reflects overwhelmingly positive perceptions of Shandong Province. **Table 4** displays participants’ analysis of contribution of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival to soft power and the global image of the host region.

Table 4. Contribution of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival to soft power and the global image of the host region.

Interview transcript excerpt	NLP analysis
Participant 1: “The Yangjiabu Kite Festival demonstrates the rich cultural heritage of Shandong Province to the world. As an attendee, I was amazed by the diversity of kite designs and the skill of the artisans. It made me appreciate the artistic and cultural traditions of the region.”	Sentiment analysis: Positive sentiment expressed towards the festival and its cultural significance. Topic modeling: Themes identified include cultural heritage, artistic expression, and regional pride.
Participant 2: “Attending the Yangjiabu Kite Festival was a transformative experience for me. I had the opportunity to interact with people from different countries and learn about their cultures. It opened my eyes to the power of cultural exchange and diplomacy through shared experiences.”	Sentiment analysis: Positive sentiment towards the festival and its role in fostering cultural exchange. Topic modeling: Themes identified include international interaction, cultural diplomacy, and shared experiences.
Participant 3: “The media coverage of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival has helped to elevate Shandong Province’s global image. News articles, social media posts, and travel blogs have introduced people around the world to the beauty and charm of our region. It has positioned Shandong as a cultural hub and tourist destination.”	Sentiment analysis: Positive sentiment towards the festival’s impact on the global image of Shandong Province. Topic modeling: Themes identified include media coverage, global exposure, and tourism promotion.
Participant 4: “Schedules are consistently inaccurate and there are unanticipated delays in the schedules!”	Sentiment analysis: Negative sentiment expressed towards the scheduling and organization of events. Topic modeling: Topics identified may include event logistics, time management, and organization efficiency.
Participant 5: “The language is a big problem in China. Nonetheless, using translation tools may make communication more accessible but it still causes some misunderstandings. Even with translation tools, nuances, idiomatic expressions, and cultural contexts may be lost in translation, leading to misunderstandings between speakers of different languages.”	Sentiment analysis: Negative sentiment towards the challenges posed by language barriers, despite the availability of translation tools. Topic modeling: Topics identified include language barriers, translation challenges, cross-cultural communication, and the limitations of translation technology.
Participant 6: “There are significant cultural variations between China and the West, including differences in religious practices and eating habits, which should be taken into consideration. The objective of travel is not to push one’s own will on other people but rather to experience the richness of the festival.”	Sentiment analysis: Negative sentiment towards cultural insensitivity and the imposition of one’s own cultural norms. Topic modeling: Topics identified include cultural differences, cultural sensitivity, intercultural communication, and the importance of respecting diverse cultural practices.

Table 4 presents the contribution of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival to soft power and the global image of the host region. With keywords such as “charming,” “vibrant,” and “cultural gem” commonly associated with coverage of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival, fostering a favorable impression among international audiences, and enhancing its global reputation as a tourist destination. Furthermore, analysis of outreach and engagement indicates that the festival serves as a catalyst for international cooperation and diplomacy, with representatives from diplomatic missions attending the event and participating in cultural exchange activities, highlighting its role in fostering engagement and cultural understanding. Nevertheless, there are still prevailing negative opinions about Shandong Province, as indicated by terms such as “inaccurate schedules,” “unanticipated delays,” and “language barrier,” which emphasize the difficulties encountered by participants. Organizers can adopt

several measures in order to tackle these problems and further augment the festival's impact on soft power and the region's global reputation.

To maximize attendee happiness and perception of the event, it is important to improve logistical coordination and communication in order to overcome difficulties such as erroneous schedules and unplanned delays. To address language barriers, these actions may include the implementation of more efficient scheduling systems, the provision of immediate updates on festival activities, and the availability of language assistance services. Furthermore, implementing cultural sensitivity training for staff and volunteers can effectively reduce misconceptions that may arise due to cultural variations, disparities in religious practices, and divergent eating habits. This program has the potential to foster mutual respect and enhance comprehension among participants from various cultural backgrounds. In addition, event coordinators should actively encourage cultural interchange and debate throughout the festival in order to cultivate a deeper comprehension and admiration for diverse cultures. This will help reduce unfavorable attitudes and create a more inclusive and hospitable atmosphere. By employing these measures, organizers can effectively tackle unfavorable opinions and further amplify the positive influence of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival on soft power and Shandong Province's global reputation.

Overall, media coverage and international exposure generated by the Yangjiabu Kite Festival contribute significantly to shaping the global image of Shandong Province, portraying it as a culturally rich, welcoming, and diplomatically engaged region.

3.3. Key elements of successful kite festivals

3.3.1. Successful kite festivals: Common elements

The analysis of comparative case studies reveals common elements of successful kite festivals, highlighting key factors contributing to their effectiveness (Argan et al., 2015). Successful festivals celebrate cultural diversity by featuring a wide range of kite designs, performances, and activities representing various traditions and artistic expressions, enriching the experience, and attracting participants and spectators from diverse backgrounds (Çevik et al., 2017). Engaging local communities in planning and execution fosters a sense of ownership and pride, ensuring sustainability and success (Wiarti et al., 2017). Creative innovation in kite design, technology, and programming sets festivals apart, capturing attention and excitement from participants and media alike (Laundry et al., n.d.). Strategic partnerships with local governments, tourism agencies, cultural organizations, and corporate sponsors provide essential resources, expertise, and promotional support, enhancing visibility and financial viability (Argan et al., 2015). Moreover, adopting environmentally sustainable practices demonstrates a commitment to stewardship, while prioritizing safety and accessibility ensures a positive festival experience for all participants (Çevik et al., 2017).

By incorporating these common elements into their planning and execution, kite festivals can enhance their appeal, impact, and longevity, establishing themselves as vibrant cultural events that captivate audiences and enrich communities.

3.3.2. Strategies for attracting international attention and factors influencing the Yangjiabu Kite Festival

This section consists of two parts: strategies used by kite festivals to attract attention worldwide and the factors influenced by these strategies, as perceived by attendees of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival. The former one delineates a variety of strategies used by kite festivals to gain international recognition and increase their worldwide prominence (Argan et al., 2015). The initiatives encompass international marketing campaigns, cultural exchange programs, international artist collaborations, kite-flying competitions, diplomatic outreach, and international media alliances (Çevik et al., 2017). Specific kite festivals exemplify each technique, demonstrating their contribution to increased global recognition and participation. Using survey results from respondents at the Yangjiabu Kite Festival as a basis, the latter one, directly influenced by the earlier ones, outline the factors that impact participation and satisfaction at kite festivals (Wiarti et al., 2017). The initiatives encompass international marketing campaigns, cultural exchange programs, international artist collaborations, kite-flying competitions, diplomatic outreach, and international media alliances. Distinct kite festivals demonstrate each technique, highlighting their role in enhancing international recognition and involvement. Here are the specific details of the two parts, respectively.

1) The strategies used by kite festivals worldwide

The strategies for attracting international attention to kite festivals, gleaned from comparative case studies, encompass a variety of approaches: International marketing campaigns, exemplified by the Taipei International Kite Festival and the Washington State International Kite Festival, contribute to heightened global visibility and participation through targeted marketing efforts. Cultural exchange programs, showcased by the Berck-sur-Mer International Kite Festival and the Dieppe International Kite Festival, attract international audiences by offering diverse cultural experiences and fostering cross-cultural understanding. International artist collaborations, observed in festivals like the Dieppe International Kite Festival and the Bristol International Kite Festival, enrich festival programs and generate international interest by inviting renowned kite artists and performers. Kite-flying competitions, demonstrated by events such as the Dieppe International Kite Festival and the Weifang International Kite Festival, elevate festival profiles and attract skilled enthusiasts globally through organized competitions. Diplomatic outreach, as seen in festivals like the Dieppe International Kite Festival and the Washington State International Kite Festival, enhances diplomatic impact and global reach by engaging diplomatic missions and international organizations. Finally, international media partnerships, as exemplified by the Weifang International Kite Festival and the Dieppe International Kite Festival, broaden global exposure and establish festivals as premier cultural events through partnerships with international media outlets and influencers.

By implementing these strategies, kite festivals can effectively attract international attention, increase participation from diverse audiences, and position themselves as premier cultural events with global appeal. The results of the survey on factors influencing participation and satisfaction at kite festivals are shown in the next section.

2) The factors influencing the Yangjiabu Kite Festival

The Yangjiabu Kite Festival employs various strategies. This section presents the factors influenced by the international strategies and the strategies for Enhancing the Yangjiabu Kite Festival experience, as perceived by attendees of kite festivals as shown in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Factors influencing participation and satisfaction at the Yangjiabu Kite Festival.

Factors	Percentage of respondents
Cultural experience	92%
Kite variety and quality	87%
Interactive activities	95%
Entertainment and performances	88%
Family-friendly environment	91%
Accessibility and amenities	89%

Table 5 outlines the factors that influence participation and satisfaction at kite festivals. The survey results indicate that attendees highly value the cultural experience offered at kite festivals, with 92% expressing appreciation for the opportunity to celebrate diverse cultures through kite displays, performances, and traditional food and crafts. Additionally, 87% emphasize the importance of kite variety and quality, noting that the range of kites showcased significantly influences their satisfaction. Interactive activities such as kite-making workshops and demonstrations are also highly regarded, with 95% of respondents highlighting their appeal to attendees of all ages and skill levels, fostering a sense of involvement and enjoyment. Furthermore, 88% underscore the significance of high-quality entertainment, including live music and cultural performances, in enhancing the festival atmosphere and creating memorable experiences. 91% of respondents consider a family-friendly environment essential, valuing activities that cater to children and amenities that ensure comfort and enjoyment for families. Lastly, 89% stress the importance of accessible facilities, such as parking and restrooms, in contributing to overall satisfaction by enhancing the festival experience and ease of navigation.

Table 6. Strategies for enhancing the Yangjiabu Kite Festival experience.

Strategies		Percentage in favor	Percentage interested
Diversify kite offerings	Traditional styles	93%	47%
	Innovative styles	93%	56%
Expand interactive activities	Kite-making workshops	95%	72%
	Kite-flying demonstrations	95%	81%
	Arts and crafts booths	95%	67%
Enhance cultural programming	Traditional music performances	88%	64%
	Dance performances	88%	58%
	Theatrical presentations	88%	49%

Table 6. (Continued).

Strategies		Percentage in favor	Percentage interested
Improve accessibility and amenities	Accessible parking	90%	76%
	Accessible restrooms	90%	82%
	Signage	90%	68%
Foster family-friendly environment	Face painting activities	92%	73%
	Storytelling sessions	92%	69%
	Games	92%	68%
Incorporate sustainable practices	Waste reduction initiatives	85%	62%
	Recycling programs	85%	57%
	Eco-friendly materials usage	85%	53%
Communicate effectively	Social media communication	94%	68%
	Email newsletters	94%	61%
	Signage	94%	53%

By addressing these factors and meeting attendee preferences and expectations, kite festivals can attract greater participation and satisfaction, create memorable experiences for attendees, and foster continued support and enthusiasm for the event. Based on survey results of attendee preferences and expectations, organizers of kite festivals can consider the following recommendations to enhance attendee satisfaction and participation, as shown in **Table 6**.

Table 6 presents a comprehensive overview of methods to improve the Yangjiabu Kite Festival experience. It includes the percentage of respondents who support each plan as well as the percentage who express interest in it. Firstly, with regards to diversifying kite offerings, a significant majority of respondents (93%) show a positive inclination towards both classic and innovative forms of kites. However, although 47% of individuals express interest in traditional styles, a greater proportion (56%) demonstrate interest in creative styles. Furthermore, there is a strong preference for expanding interactive activities, as evidenced by the high favorability ratings of 95% for kite-making workshops and kite-flying demonstrations. Additionally, there is considerable interest in these activities, with percentages of 72% and 81%, respectively. Arts and crafts booths are highly preferred, with 95% of people favoring them and 67% expressing interest. Furthermore, there is a strong inclination towards improving cultural programming, as evidenced by the high favorability rating of 88% for traditional music performances, dance performances, and theater presentations. Nevertheless, traditional music performances generate slightly more interest (64%) compared to dance (58%) and dramatic presentations (49%). Furthermore, it is critical to improve accessibility and amenities, as demonstrated by the 90% favorable ratings for accessible parking and accessible facilities. Additionally, there is considerable interest, with percentages of 76% and 82% for accessible parking and accessible restrooms, respectively. In addition, there is strong support for creating a family-friendly atmosphere, as seen by the high favorability ratings of 92% for face painting activities and considerable levels of engagement at 73%, 69%, and 68% for storytelling sessions and games, respectively. In addition, it is crucial to integrate sustainable practices, such as waste reduction initiatives,

recycling programs, and the utilization of eco-friendly products. These measures have received favorable ratings of 85%, but the level of interest varies. Finally, good communication is critical, with social media communication and email newsletters highly preferred (94%) and generating significant attention (68% and 61%, respectively). Signage, although slightly less desired (94%), nonetheless attracts considerable interest (53%). These data offer significant insights into the tastes of participants and highlight areas for enhancing the festival experience. The next section presents significant insights drawn upon the tables above.

3) Insights from the surveys

Insights in relation to **Table 5** emphasize the importance of providing a diverse range of kite displays, exceptional entertainment, and an engaging cultural experience as essential components for successfully hosting popular kite festivals. Participants also praise the inclusive atmosphere of interactive activities such as kite-making seminars and demonstrations, emphasizing that they are open to people of all ages and ability levels. Furthermore, in order to ensure a smooth festival experience and enhance overall contentment, it is imperative to offer family-oriented activities and facilities that are conveniently accessible, including parking and restroom facilities. Event organizers should prioritize the inclusion of these aspects in order to attract guests, foster connections, and create a unique experience for every event.

The detailed study shown in **Table 6** provides valuable insights for organizing the Yangjiabu Kite Festival. First and foremost, it is evident that both traditional and contemporary kite designs are highly regarded, with a focus on innovative and imaginative designs. Given the high level of interest among participants, it would be advisable to enhance the interactive aspect of the event by incorporating activities such as kite-making workshops and kite-flying demonstrations. The significant demand for arts and crafts booths further underscores the need for experiential learning. Traditional music performances are highly esteemed for their cultural significance, although they are less popular compared to dance or dramatic plays. High favorability ratings and significant curiosity indicate that accessibility and amenities, such as accessible restrooms and parking, are critical for ensuring an exceptional festival experience. Family-friendly events, such as storytelling sessions, games, and face painting, also garner significant support. Everyone is interested in the topic, and everyone agrees that we must adopt sustainable techniques. It is critical to maintain festival interest and promote guest engagement through email newsletters and social media. The organizers can use these remarks as a reference to more effectively tailor the festival to each attendee's specific interests and requirements, enhancing both attendance and satisfaction levels.

By acknowledging the insights, organizers can create a more engaging, inclusive, and sustainable kite festival experience that meets the preferences and expectations of attendees, ultimately enhancing overall satisfaction and participation in the event.

3.4. Application of the Yangjiabu Kite Festival model

3.4.1. Framework for cross-cultural application

The Yangjiabu Kite Festival offers valuable insights for crafting a framework adaptable to various cultural contexts when organizing kite festivals. Key takeaways

include embracing cultural diversity by showcasing varied designs and activities to cater to diverse audiences, fostering community engagement to instill a sense of local pride and ownership, and promoting cross-cultural dialogue to facilitate mutual understanding and collaboration. Organizers should tailor festival models to fit the cultural, geographical, and logistical nuances of the host region, while also cultivating strategic partnerships with relevant stakeholders to bolster resources and support. Additionally, a steadfast commitment to quality and excellence, demonstrated through innovative programming and meticulous attention to detail, ensures the festival's enduring success and reputation.

Also, the above survey information allows us to propose the following framework for worldwide kite festivals: The festival's organizers could team up with regional artists and cultural organizations to add traditional arts and crafts, concerts, and kite displays—all things that bring people of all backgrounds together. By stocking a wide variety of kites with a wide range of cultural themes, patterns, and manufacturing skills, we want to satisfy the interests and palates of tourists from all over the world. People of all ages and abilities can come together through activities like kite-making classes and exhibits to learn more about the cultural importance of the art form. Investing in top-notch entertainment, such as cultural performances and live music, will ensure that festivalgoers have an unforgettable experience. A family-friendly setting, thoughtfully planned with specific play areas and practical amenities, guarantees a fantastic time for all involved parties. The festival also prioritizes accessibility, with features like wheelchair access and sign language interpreters, to promote diversity, encourage community involvement, and build cross-cultural contact.

Lastly, to accommodate a diverse range of participants, the event organizers should provide a selection of kite styles, encompassing both conventional and modern designs. It is important to increase the prevalence of activities such as arts and crafts stalls and workshops for making kites in order to promote more involvement and enhance intercultural understanding. Cultural programming at festivals, including traditional music acts and a diverse range of cultural expressions, is more captivating and intellectually stimulating for the audience. In order to ensure inclusivity, we have ensured that the facilities and parking are easily accessible to all individuals. Assemble the entire family for enjoyable and imaginative activities such as face painting and storytelling sessions. Recycling and other environmentally responsible actions enhance festivalgoers' values and contribute to the festival's long-term benefits. Disseminating information and involving individuals through efficient communication platforms, such as social media and email newsletters, is critical in ensuring that people from diverse backgrounds can both enjoy and actively participate in the event.

By applying these lessons learned from the Yangjiabu Kite Festival, organizers can develop a framework for cross-cultural application that promotes cultural exchange, fosters community engagement, and celebrates the diversity of kite festivals around the world.

3.4.2. Guidelines for adapting the festival model to other regions

The Yangjiabu Kite Festival model adaptation guidelines encompass several

crucial strategies within a framework designed for cross-cultural implementation. Begin by meticulously researching the host area's culture, traditions, and preferences, while ensuring the preservation of local traditions and values to maintain authenticity. In order to ensure that the festival program adequately meets the requirements of the local community, it is important to engage in partnerships with neighborhood groups, government agencies, and cultural organizations. Customize the festival schedule to emphasize the distinctiveness of the local cuisine, art, and music. Pay homage to the historical significance of the location by including local customs and rituals into festival proceedings. Ensure inclusivity within the community by implementing measures that cater to individuals of various ages, abilities, and backgrounds. Incorporate sustainable practices to minimize environmental impact and promote environmental awareness. Develop a comprehensive marketing strategy that utilizes partnerships, social media platforms, and traditional media channels to attract both local and international visitors. Conduct post-event assessments to obtain feedback and improve future iterations for continued success and relevance.

3.5. Policy implications for cultural diplomacy and soft power

3.5.1. Recommendations for government support and funding

We recommend various crucial strategies for securing government financing and assistance in the domains of soft power and cultural diplomacy. Initially, it is imperative for governments to allocate dedicated cash or grants to bolster soft power and cultural diplomacy initiatives. This would enable the funding of cultural exchange programs, foreign festivals, art exhibitions, and other activities that promote the nation's cultural heritage and values abroad. Furthermore, it is imperative for governments to actively encourage the formation of collaborative partnerships between public and private entities in order to use their resources and expertise to advance cultural diplomacy efforts. In order to optimize impact and distribute expenses, it is advisable for them to collaborate with corporations, cultural establishments, and philanthropic entities. Furthermore, supporting the establishment and maintenance of cultural infrastructure, such as museums, theaters, galleries, and cultural centers, both inside the country and internationally, enhances the nation's cultural resources and provides platforms for diplomatic and cultural exchange. To enhance diplomatic and soft power efforts, governments should actively encourage and facilitate cultural exchange programs that enable scholars, artists, performers, and cultural practitioners to travel internationally and disseminate their expertise and knowledge. Moreover, it is imperative to allocate resources towards enhancing tourism infrastructure, implementing effective marketing campaigns, and organizing cultural events and festivals. This would boost cultural tourism, allowing the nation to showcase its rich cultural heritage and attract tourists from around the world. Incorporating cultural diplomacy into foreign policy initiatives is essential, as culture serves as a powerful tool for establishing connections and influencing perspectives. It is recommended that governments appoint cultural ambassadors to facilitate collaboration and cultural exchange as integral components of broader diplomatic endeavors. Ultimately, it is imperative for governments to allocate resources towards cultural education programs and initiatives that promote early intercultural

comprehension and admiration. In addition, it is imperative that they provide backing for cultural exchange initiatives aimed at facilitating cross-cultural education and collaboration among educators, researchers, and students. This will lay the foundation for nurturing future generations of cultural ambassadors.

3.5.2. Strategies for international collaboration and exchange

International collaboration and exchange employ a wide range of strategies, which significantly impact soft power and cultural diplomacy policies. It is advisable for governments to endorse initiatives that facilitate bilateral and multilateral cultural exchange, enabling scholars, artists, performers, and cultural practitioners to disseminate their expertise and heritage to others. This would effectively foster mutual comprehension and enhance diplomatic endeavors. By collaborating with foreign governments and cultural groups, we demonstrate and encourage the ideals of sharing and cooperation. We achieve this by collaborating to produce cultural projects like music festivals and art exhibitions. The creation of artist residence programs also provides opportunities for collaboration and cultural exchange. Conferences and forums on cultural diplomacy provide a platform for field professionals and policymakers to discuss concerns and share effective techniques. Grants, scholarships, and fellowships promote collaboration and cultural interchange between different countries. The utilization of digital technologies for international collaboration and cultural exchange enhances accessibility and engagement. Collaborating to save cultural heritage locations and traditions fosters comprehension and admiration for different cultures, thus promoting the long-term goals of cultural diplomacy.

4. Discussion

This study lends support to the previous studies (Caiger, 1966; Desai, 2010; Woodward, 1948) that kite festivals have cultural significance beyond recreation and underscore the universality of kite flying as a means of cultural expression and celebration. In this study, the stakeholders demonstrate a sense of satisfaction with the festival's esteemed standing and its capacity to draw in tourists, bolstering China's global reputation. In addition, the survey data provides more evidence to support the positive impressions of guests, who saw the festival as a means of enhancing Shandong's cultural identity, stimulating tourism, and cultivating diplomatic relations. Lastly, the media coverage and worldwide exposure enhance the festival's global reputation as a tourist destination and encourage diplomatic engagement. These insights are consistent with studies such as Schneider (2009), Marinaccio (2019), and Liu (2013), who found kite festivals are soft power and tools for cultural diplomacy.

Like several studies (Argan et al., 2015; Ramely et al., 2018; Utami and Abdullah, 2021) that support the universal appeals of the kite art and festivals and the appeals turn kite festivals into the global phenomenon (Guo, 2023; Louhapensang and Noobanjong, 2021; Noszlopy, 2005) as cultural expression and the unique traditions of festivals worldwide, this study identifies common elements (including celebrating cultural diversity, engaging local communities, fostering creative innovation, forming strategic partnerships, and prioritizing sustainability and accessibility) and strategies for attracting international attention (namely, international marketing campaigns, cultural exchange programs, artist collaborations, kite-flying competitions, diplomatic

outreach, and international media partnerships).

However, to gain global recognition and enhance their appeal and economic impact, a theoretical framework that aims to facilitate the adaptation of the festival concept to many cultural contexts while also safeguarding its fundamental components (De Weerd, 2003; Flath, 2004). This study also suggests establishing dedicated funding mechanisms, fostering public-private partnerships, investing in cultural infrastructure, supporting cultural exchange programs, promoting cultural tourism, integrating cultural diplomacy into foreign policy, and supporting cultural education and exchange. These tactics use cultural assets to improve international relations, advance national goals, and influence global perceptions. International collaboration and exchange strategies include cultural exchange programs, joint cultural projects, artist residency programs, cultural diplomacy forums and summits, grants and scholarships, digital cultural platforms, and cultural heritage preservation and conservation. These methods encourage cultural diplomacy, soft power, beneficial international partnerships, and global peace, understanding, and prosperity.

When examining the factors that influence attendance and satisfaction at kite festivals using Joseph Nye's model of soft power, it becomes evident that cultural events have a substantial influence on people's beliefs and decisions. Nye introduces the concept of soft power, which emphasizes the importance of a nation's cultural resources and policies in influencing its global opinions. When considering the circumstances, the Yangjiabu Kite Festival is notable for its ability to effectively display the diverse and abundant customs of the local area.

Nye's research (2004) emphasizes the importance of cultural events, such as kite festivals, in achieving a country's soft power objectives through public diplomacy. The study reveals that the integration of cultural experiences, a wide range of choices, and engaging activities amplifies the festival's success and influence, resulting in increased satisfaction and involvement among participants.

Moreover, the recent discoveries have practical consequences that align with the concept of smart power, as proposed by Nye (2008). Smart power emphasizes the deliberate use of both soft and hard power. Cultural activities possess the capacity to enhance intercultural communication, fortify neighborhood relationships, and amplify overall diplomatic endeavors. Event planners can leverage this capability by being cognizant of and proficient in utilizing the factors that impact participant satisfaction at kite festivals.

The new findings enhance the theoretical understanding of cultural events from the perspective of soft power and offer practical guidance for event organizers on effectively utilizing cultural resources. Nye (2021) argues that in the contemporary era of increased worldwide interconnectedness, kite festivals have the potential to serve as influential forums for enhancing global influence by leveraging public diplomacy, smart power, and cross-cultural interactions.

5. Conclusion

The analysis reveals several key findings regarding the Yangjiabu Kite Festival's soft power impact, common elements of successful kite festivals, cross-cultural application of the festival model, and recommendations for government support and

international collaboration in cultural diplomacy. First, the Yangjiabu Kite Festival's soft power contribution is evident through positive sentiment analysis and survey data, highlighting its role in showcasing China's cultural heritage and fostering international cooperation. Media coverage enhances its global reputation as a tourist destination and fosters diplomatic engagement. Second, successful kite festivals share common elements such as celebrating cultural diversity, community engagement, creative innovation, strategic partnerships, sustainability, and accessibility. Strategies for attracting international attention include marketing campaigns, cultural exchange programs, artist collaborations, and media partnerships. Third, the Yangjiabu Kite Festival provides a framework for cross-cultural application, emphasizing cultural diversity, community engagement, and cross-cultural dialogue. Customizing programming, integrating traditional elements, and ensuring inclusivity and sustainability are essential for adapting the model to other regions. Lastly, recommendations for government support in cultural diplomacy include establishing funding mechanisms, public-private partnerships, cultural infrastructure investment, and promoting cultural exchange programs. International collaboration strategies involve facilitating cultural exchange programs, joint projects, cultural diplomacy forums, and digital platforms. These findings provide insights into enhancing kite festivals' impact, promoting cultural diplomacy, and fostering international cooperation and understanding.

Research on the Yangjiabu Kite Festival has significant implications for cultural studies, event management, international relations, community development, and environmental sustainability. It underscores the importance of preserving intangible cultural heritage, driving tourism, and promoting global image-building through cultural festivals. The festival's role in fostering community pride and social cohesion highlights its broader significance in community development. Lessons learned offer insights for cross-cultural adaptation and sustainable event management practices. The study also suggests areas for further research, such as comparing kite festivals, following their development over time, evaluating their effects, studying their audiences, analyzing policies, and looking into the part that technological advances play. Overall, research on the Yangjiabu Kite Festival enriches our understanding of cultural diversity, promotes intercultural understanding, and contributes to a more peaceful and harmonious world.

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