

A Corpus-based Approach to Taizhou's Image in English News Media

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Abstract

The study of national and regional image is a significant topic in language, culture, and communication research. However, there has been limited research on the image of Taizhou City as portrayed in foreign media. This study employs a corpus-based approach to examine Taizhou's image in English media. Using the online corpus, News on the Web, the researchers created a virtual corpus (Taizhou Corpus) containing 98 relevant reports from English news media. The study analyzed the media coverage of Taizhou, the multidimensional image of Taizhou, and the sentiment of news reporting in Taizhou Corpus. The keywords for this study are Taizhou's image, foreign media, corpus-based analysis, media coverage, and sentiment analysis.

Keywords: Taizhou's image, Foreign media, Corpus-based analysis, Media coverage, Sentiment analysis

1. Introduction

The national image is a critical representation of a country's overall strength, global influence, and an essential element of its soft power. National image is a crucial element in a country's global positioning and its ability to attract foreign investment, tourism, and talent. It is also important for diplomacy and international cooperation, as a country's image can influence its relationships with other nations. A positive international reputation helps a country to attract foreign investment, increase its foreign exchange reserves and achieve international status and influence. A positive international image is an invaluable intangible asset that signifies the international community's trust and confidence in a nation (Anholt, 2013).

National image is built through two main means: self-shaping and other-shaping. Self-shaping refers to a country's efforts to present itself to the world in a positive light. This

can be done through various channels, such as marketing campaigns, public diplomacy initiatives, cultural events, and international aid programs. On the other hand, other-shaping refers to the way that a country is perceived by outsiders, based on their interactions with its people, media, products, and policies. This perception can be influenced by factors such as media coverage, social media conversations, academic research, and popular culture.

While there has been a growing interest in studying China's national image in academia, the image-building of China's cities at all levels has also garnered significant attention in the Chinese academic circle. The term "urban image" was first introduced by the American urban planning pioneer Kevin Lynch in 1960. He defined urban image as the perception of the urban physical form by most urban residents (Lynch, 1960).

The construction of an urban image, like a national image, can be achieved through two approaches: self-shaping image and other-shaping image (Zhiying et al., 2021).

Taizhou City, located on the coast of Zhejiang Province, China, has a population of 6.5 million and is known as the birthplace of China's private economy, as well as one of its manufacturing centers. With a well-developed export-oriented economy, Taizhou frequently engages in international exchanges with foreign countries. However, there is limited research on how Taizhou is portrayed in mainstream foreign news media, and the other-shaping of Taizhou's image in foreign media has not been studied in-depth. Therefore, this research aimed to investigate how English news media from 19 countries or regions shape Taizhou's image, in order to provide insights into the city's international perception.

2. City Image in News Media

2.1 From China's National Image to Taizhou's Image

China has been taken enormous efforts to build its national image on the global stage. In recent years, China has made significant investments in promoting its cultural and economic strengths on the global stage to enhance its national image. The Chinese government has been actively promoting the country's national image through various initiatives, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), over 5 hundred Confucius Institutes established around the world, among many other state-sponsored image-enhancing campaigns. As a result of the Chinese government's initiatives, China has greatly enhanced its national image (Debao, 2013).

Apart from shaping its own positive image, the Chinese government has also placed a great deal of importance on shaping the image of cities at all levels throughout the country. The image of a city refers to how it is perceived by others in terms of its culture, politics, economy, and society. This shaping and enhancement of regional image has become increasingly important as cities have intensified their competition in social, economic, and cultural spheres. A positive city or regional image can lead to increased domestic and international competitiveness, attracting more investment and tourism income.

The study of city image in China began in the 1990s, and numerous research studies have been conducted from various perspectives on the image of Chinese cities. For example, Liping (2013) analyzed the image of Guangzhou in foreign media and identified mechanisms

for shaping city images. Zhonghua (2016) analyzed the image of Zhejiang in the New York Times and the Washington Post from 2014 to 2015, revealing that there was more positive and neutral reporting about Zhejiang compared to negative news reports.

Taizhou, an emerging second-tier city with a history dating back over 2,000 years, has been attracting more attention from both domestic and international sources. In recent years, government agencies and academic institutions in Taizhou have taken initiatives to enhance the city's image.

2.2 The Shaping of City Image in News Media

News reporting is the primary means by which the general public learns about a city, and the media plays a crucial role in shaping and disseminating its image. The relationship between news media and city image is complex and multifaceted, as the media can both shape and reflect a city's image. The ways in which the news media present a city have a direct impact on how the public perceives it, and media portrayal of a city can influence its perception by others. Conversely, a city's image can also affect media coverage, as the way it is perceived by others can influence how the media covers it.

The shaping of a city's image is a vital part of China's efforts to build its national image, and the news media can either amplify or distort it. With the rise of social media, individuals now have more control over a city's image, as they can share positive or negative stories and images of the city, potentially amplifying or distorting the way it is perceived by others.

Overall, the relationship between news media and city image is complex and dynamic, and it is influenced by various factors, including media ownership, audience preferences, and global trends.

3. Corpus-based Analysis of Taizhou's Image

3.1 Creation of Taizhou Corpus

In linguistics, a corpus, called a text corpus, is a collection of linguistic data (usually contained in a computer database) used for research, scholarship, and teaching. (O'Keeffe, A. & F. Farr, 2003). Corpus is not only the basic resource of corpus linguistics but also the main resource of empirical language research methods.

This study, for instance, employs the corpus-assisted discourse analysis method to examine how Taizhou city is portrayed in mainstream English news media. The NOW corpus, created by Brigham Young University in the United States, is the most comprehensive English corpus of online news content. It comprises 16.3 billion words of data obtained from web-based newspapers and magazines from 2010 to the present. The corpus continually grows by around 180-200 million words of data per month (equivalent to roughly 300,000 new articles), or approximately two billion words annually.

The researcher constructed a virtual corpus based on the NOW corpus. Firstly, the researcher logged on the website of News on Web (<https://www.english-corpora.org/now/>) and got registered, then clicked on "create new corpus". The search term "Taizhou" was typed in the

bar “words in text”, and chose “5000” in the bar “# texts (max)”, and finally clicked “submit”. Thus, the virtual corpus was created. Taizhou Corpus included 348 search items. The searched items were screened in three ways: 1) removing 2 items extracted from Global Times (English news portal in mainland China) and 5 items from Hongkong media because the study focused on foreign English news media; 2) removing 77 items which referred to Taizhou (泰州) Jiangsu Province. Taizhou (台州) Zhejiang, which was under investigation in present study, and Taizhou (泰州) Jiangsu have the same Mandarin Pingyin. The resulting Taizhou Corpus contained 264 items that contained “Taizhou”.

3.2 Coverage Density of News Reports Concerning Taizhou

The term "coverage density" in news reporting refers to the scope and depth of coverage of a particular news topic (Hunt, 1971). It reflects the amount of information presented in a news report and the level of detail provided on the subject matter. News reports with high coverage density will usually offer a comprehensive account of the reporting, including frequent updates, rich reporting details, and diverse reporting perspectives, as well as background information. Such reports can help readers understand the significance of the subject matter being reported. Therefore, the level of coverage density in news reporting can have significant implications for the public's understanding and perception of the reported subject matter.

To investigate the coverage density of news reports related to Taizhou, we calculated the frequency of reports from media organizations belonging to 15 different countries that made reports concerning Taizhou in the Taizhou Corpus. The top 8 countries in terms of reporting frequency were Australia, Canada, Britain, Ireland, India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and the United States, as listed in Table 1. By analyzing the frequency of reports, we can gain a better understanding of the level of attention that Taizhou received from different media organizations around the world.

Table 1. The Reporting Countries and Reporting Frequencies

Country	Reporting Frequency
United States	53
Singapore	26
Malaysia	25
Canada	21
India	18
Great Britain	13
Philippines	10
South Africa	8

Table 1 indicates that Taizhou has been most frequently reported on by English news media from the United States, Singapore, and Malaysia. These reports mainly focus on economic issues, highlighting the city's strong economic ties with these three countries.

To gain a better understanding of the level of media attention given to Taizhou, we compared the annual frequency of news reports on the city. The results revealed that media attention towards Taizhou has steadily increased over the past 14 years, with a peak in 2020. This is indicative of the city's stable and rapid development in both economic and social sectors during this period, following its establishment as a prefecture-level city in 2011.

However, the outbreak of Covid-19 in late 2020 had a significant impact on Taizhou's social and economic undertakings, resulting in a decline in the coverage density of news reports concerning the city in 2021, 2022, and 2023. This demonstrates the close relationship between the coverage density of news reports and Taizhou's social and economic development.

3.3 Multidimensional Analysis of Taizhou's Image Depicted in Taizhou Corpus

3.3.1 Economic Images of Taizhou

Corpus retrieval approach, COLLOCATES display, can display multiple dimensions of Taizhou's image. COLLOCATES display was done in the following procedures. Firstly, the search term "Taizhou" was typed in the bar of "word/phrase". The span was set to - 5/+5. The occurring frequency of the collocates was set to be greater than or equal to 3. The list of collocates of Taizhou was generated, which manifested different aspects of Taizhou.

Taizhou's economy was the most commonly reported aspect, with high-frequency collocates such as *progress*, *development*, *rapid growth*, *port*, *modernization*, *manufacturing*, *model*, *foreign trade*, *private economy*, *coastal*, and others. These collocates suggest that Taizhou is a newly industrialized city with a well-developed economy. Here are some example sentences that use these collocates.

E.g. 1 Taizhou is adjacent to the sea, has a good *port* location, is investing in *port* construction, and uses the *port* to support the growth of trade to strengthen its economy. (www.newsmaker.com.au)

E.g. 2 With 21 industrial clusters with an output worth more than 10 billion yuan and 68 state-level industrial bases, Taizhou has a strong *manufacturing* system. These bases form several leading industries with significant influence both domestically and internationally, such as automobiles, pharmaceuticals, sewing machines, and other items. (www.ctvnews.ca)

E.g. 3 China's first joint-stock cooperative company was founded in Taizhou City, which has long been at the forefront of the country's *private* economy. Taizhou City also serves as the birthplace of China's private economy. (www.businesswireindia.com)

Based on the collocates and example sentences, it is evident that the economic aspect plays a significant role in shaping Taizhou's image, which includes prosperous private sectors,

advanced manufacturing industry, and export-oriented economy.

In addition to the economic image, the high-frequency collocates also reveal the historical and cultural images of Taizhou. These collocating words or phrases include *Hehe*, *culture*, *Buddhism*, *Taoism*, *regional*, *open*, *Linhai*, and more. Below are three example sentences extracted from Taizhou Corpus:

E.g. 4 The opening ceremony of the Hehe Culture Global Forum kicked off both online and offline on Thursday in Tiantai county, Zhejiang province, which is believed to be the birthplace of *Hehe culture*. (www.standard.co.uk)

E.g. 5 Surrounded by the Jiangnan Great Wall is the capital city of Taizhou. Ziyang Street in the city is one of the most complete *historical* districts in the country and a "living" ancient street. (www.pigprogress.net)

E.g. 6 Because of the openness of Taizhou culture, Taizhou culture has always been in an active state of both input and output and has always maintained vigor and vitality in the general change of *culture*. (www.telegraph.co.uk)

Taizhou is known for its rich cultural and historical heritage, which reflects the city's diverse cultural traditions and long history. In particular, Taizhou is renowned for its unique "Hehe" (harmonious) culture, which emphasizes the importance of cooperation and unity. Numerous landmarks and sites throughout Taizhou testify to its cultural and historical significance. For instance, Tiantai Mountain, the Great Wall, Guoqing Temple, and various other locations are testament to the city's profound cultural heritage. Additionally, there are many historical residences, scenic areas, and other attractions that further showcase Taizhou's unique character and charm.

E.g. 7 The Ancient City of Taizhou Cultural *Scenic* Area, which is located in the county-level city of Linhai, Taizhou, East China's Zhejiang province, has been designated a national 5A *scenic* spot, according to a circular released by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism on July 15. (www.heraldmalaysia.com)

E.g. 8 Taizhou tourism is characterized by "Buddha, *Mountain*, Sea, City and Cave". It has national key *scenic* spots Tiantai Mountain and Changyu Dongtian, Linhai National Geopark, and the national historical and cultural city Linhai. (www.globaltimes.cn)

E.g. 9 There are 62 natural *landscapes* and 62 cultural *landscapes* in Taizhou, including more than 10 national tourist scenic spots, cultural relic protection units, parks, and forest parks, which have high tourism economic development value. (thequietus.com)

The Taizhou Corpus depicts Taizhou City as a bustling and lively metropolis, teeming with rich cultural heritages, modern infrastructure, scenic natural beauty, and historical landmarks. This important industrial center boasts a robust manufacturing sector, producing a diverse array of products ranging from automobiles and motorcycles to electrical appliances and textiles. In addition to being a hub for commerce and manufacturing, the city also supports a thriving fishing industry and features a bustling port that facilitates international trade. Taizhou City attracts visitors from all over the world, drawn to its vibrant atmosphere and

unique cultural offerings.

3.4 Sentiment Analysis of News Reporting in Taizhou Corpus

Sentiment analysis is the process of automatically identifying and extracting subjective information from text data. It involves categorizing text as positive, negative, or neutral based on the expressed opinion or emotion of the author (Pang & Lee, 2008: 465). Sentiment analysis is a valuable tool for understanding public opinion, evaluating news reporting, and analyzing the overall tone and sentiment of news articles. In the Taizhou corpus, sentiment analysis can help to understand how the news is being received by the public.

In this study, corpus-based natural language processing techniques were used to analyze the structure and content of news articles for indicators of sentiment such as emotional language, tone, and polarity. As Pang and Lee (2008:470) pointed out, opinion words and phrases are the dominating indicators for sentiment classification. These words and phrases were divided into positive, negative, and neutral categories based on the opinions expressed in the contexts. The sentiment analysis in this study focused on identifying commonly associated opinion words and phrases, particularly adjectives, with positive, neutral, and negative sentiment.

The researcher adopted KWIC (Keyword in Context) display to find the sentiment words. The researcher selected L for 3 words to the left and selected R for 3 words to the right.

The researcher collected 50 adjectives (see Table 2) that appeared in Taizhou Corpus 3 or more times.

Table 2. Top 48 KWIC Adjectives in Taizhou Corpus

1 Local	13 Foreign	25 Natural	37 Traditional
2 Chinese	14 Economic	26 Pandemic	38 Administrative
3 Public	15 Social	27 Heavy	39 Serious
4 National	16 Dead	28 Scientific	40 Infectious
5 Private	17 International	29 Special	41 Critical
6 Central	18 Industrial	30 Cultural	42 Popular
7 Criminal	19 Illegal	31 Free	43 Solar
8 Top	20 Financial	32 Developed	44 Professional
9 Medical	21 Positive	33 Main	45 Stable
10 Strong	22 Ancient	34 Difficult	46 Sustainable
11 Severe	23 Pharmaceutical	35 Bad	47 Regular
12 Religious	24 Historical	36 Political	48 Ordinary

Most of the KWIC adjectives are neutral in sentimental tone. These neutral words could be traced to reports concerning Taizhou's social and economic development. Therefore, most of the news reports on Taizhou were carried out from a neutral point of view. For instance, *medical* and *pharmaceutical*, proves Taizhou's market position as one of the centers of pharmaceutical production and distribution centers in China. *Developed* and *solar* shows Taizhou's efforts and achievements clean energy industry. Among the reports concerning Taizhou's construction and development, China's first high-speed railway, that mainly spans Taizhou and that is mainly invested and constructed by private capital, has received special attention from the English news media.

Among the 50 adjectives, there were 11 positive opinion words: top, positive, strong, popular, professional, stable, sustainable, and etc. High frequency use of these words shows that the English news media have paid attention to Taizhou's development achievements in the economic field, and can report positively on Taizhou's achievements in manufacturing and cultural tourism, with a positive image of Taizhou depicted in the reporting.

And there were 8 negative opinion words, which were dead, criminal, illegal, heavy, difficult, bad, serious, and severe. These negative opinion words could be traced to the reports related to Taizhou's environmental protection and religious undertakings. Thus, the sentiment stance in the reporting concerning these areas was negative.

4. Conclusion

Taizhou is a modern coastal city with a unique geographical location, rich natural resources, beautiful environment, scenery, and fresh air, which has garnered the attention of English news media.

Since 2011, Taizhou has received increasing coverage from English news media, with the United States, Singapore, and Malaysia being the countries with the most media coverage. Based on the Taizhou Corpus, English news media have reported on three aspects of Taizhou's image: its economy, natural landscape, and other aspects. In sentimental analysis of news media reporting, foreign media reports mostly have a neutral or positive position. However, negative stances have been observed in news coverage on environmental protection and religious issues.

There are several potential research directions that could be explored in examining Taizhou's image. One approach could be to compare Taizhou's image to that of other cities of the same level. Another possible direction could be to examine how perceptions of Taizhou have evolved over time among different international audiences. Since the media plays a significant role in shaping Taizhou's image, analyzing how Taizhou is portrayed in various forms of media, such as news coverage, movies, and television shows, could also be an area of research.

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