A Corpus-based Studyof Shaoxing's International Image and its Enhancement Strategies

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Abstract

In the context of global urbanization and the gradual upgrading of urban competitiveness, a good city image is an important factor to improve local attractiveness. Shaoxing, as a representative city in the Yangtze River Delta with a long history and cultural heritage, the study of its international image shaping and dissemination undoubtedly has enlightenment for other cities. In order to investigate the image of Shaoxing in the English-speaking world, based on the NOW corpus developed by Professor Mark Davis of Brigham Young University, the data about Shaoxing reported in online news from major English-speaking countries and regions around the world were collected and analyzed. Through the specific statistics and analysis of the frequency of occurrence of English-language online news related to Shaoxing, reporting countries and sources, annual distribution characteristics, hot topics, and reporting tendencies, this paper interprets the image of Shaoxing in the mainstream English media, explored the root causes of the formation of Shaoxing's international image, and put forward such measures as refining Shaoxing's cultural characteristics, strengthening Shaoxing's foreign economic ties, and establishing an international opinion monitoring mechanism to improve Shaoxing's international image.

Keywords: Shaoxing International Image, NOW Corpus, Enhancement Strategy

1. Introduction

The rapid rise of China has attracted the attention of the world, and its national strength in economy, diplomacy, and military has approached or reached the level of world-class countries. However, the construction of China's national image has not been clearly positioned, and its international influence is hardly matched by its status as a great power (Fan Hong, 2013). This requires the country to actively promote its international image building, "to tell the Chinese story well, to spread the Chinese voice well, and to show the world a real China, a multi-dimensional China, and a comprehensive China." (Xi Jinping, 2016, p.209)

As for the theoretical significance, the study creatively combines the quantitative-based corpus linguistic analysis method and the qualitative-based news discourse analysis method, which not only improves the objectivity and persuasiveness of the study, but also expands the research perspective on the construction of the international image of the city.

Besides, as a part of the national image, the image of a city is of great significance to the construction of the overall image of a country, because people usually construct the overall image of a country through the cognition of individual regions or cities. As a result, we should pay special attention to the construction of the international image of cities. With a history of more

than 2,500 years, Shaoxing is one of the first national historical and cultural cities, the Cultural Capital of East Asia, the outstanding tourist city in China, and the most dynamic city of private economy in China.In recent years, Shaoxing had attached great importance to external publicity, but in the process of building Shaoxing's image overseas, although domestic media and government organizations at all levels are actively committed to "self-shaping" and external publicity, the report of English mainstream media is still the direct medium to influence and determine the cognition of most of the foreigners. As a core city of the Yangtze River Delta economic zone and an important host city of the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou, the effective construction of Shaoxing's international image is conducive to better attracting foreign investment and thus realising the upgrading of the city. Therefore, the study of Shaoxing's image of "other-shaping" is conducive to improving the effect of Shaoxing's external communication and adjusting the communication strategy.

2. Related Studies of City Image

Overseas research on city image started earlier. Kevin Lynch (1960) first proposed the concept of "city image", and on this basis, Lewis Mumford (2005) further clarified the connotation of the international image of a city. Foreign scholars' research on the international image of cities is mainly carried out from two aspects: one is combined with marketing theory, which is represented by the "positive and negative city image" theory proposed by Hall (2005), mainly involving the root causes and solutions of the positive and negative international image of cities; the second is tocombinewith communication theories, represented by the idea of "media agenda" proposed by Gorham (2009), which believes that media agenda can influence audience agenda through news reports. However, in terms of specific research objects, foreign scholars have rarely studied the international image of Chinese cities, and their research value has not yet attracted the attention of foreign scholars.

Domestic studies on the international image of cities started in the 1990s. Only 78 related papers were found after the search on CNKI, and most of them were research results in recent years. After studying,it is found that the relevant domestic research is mainly carried out from three aspects: one is to study the city's international image design and communication strategies from a theoretical perspective, such as Dai Shanshan (2021), and Xu Jie (2020); the second is to study the construction of city international image in various social networks, such as Bai Jingyuan (2020), and Liu Xi (2020);the third is to study the "self-shaping" of the city's international image from the perspectives of food, or cultural tourism, such as Wu Yidi (2021), Zhang Qingbo (2021).

To sum up, it can be seen that the current research on the international image of a city shows the characteristics of continuous attention and diverse perspectives, but there still exist some limitations:

1) The research objects were mostly limited to first-tier cities, and almost no second or third-tier cities were involved;

2) The research content mainly focused on the "self-shaping" research of the city's international image, while the "other shaping" research was relatively rare;

3) Single qualitative or quantitative research method was adopted in most studies, resulting in the lack of depth or objectivity of theresearch results.

In this regard, the present study, with the help of NOW corpus, conducts quantitative and qualitative "other-shaping" research on Shaoxing's international image, providing directional guidance and practical reference for the construction of a good international image of Shaoxing.

3. Methodology

With the development of Internet technology and mobile terminals, more and more people begin to obtain information from mobile terminals. Therefore, many news outlets have also shifted from traditional paper editions to the online ones. In this context, NOW, which is the acronym for "News on the Web", came into being. Developed by Mark Davis'team at Brigham Young University, the NOW corpus contains reports from major English-language online newspapers and magazines from 20 countries and regions since 2010 and now contains 14.5 billion words. The rapid growth rate of about 180 million to 200 million words per month, and the rich data volume of the NOW corpus provide strong support for this research. In addition, the NOW corpus is user-friendly, easy to operate, powerful, and can quickly classify the retrieved results by year and country, providing a reliable platform for studying public opinion in English-speaking countries and regions, making it the most popular corpus in the world. Based on the NOW corpus, this paper retrieves and analyzes the reports about Shaoxing from 2010 to 2021, so as to interpret the perception of Shaoxing's international image in English-speaking countries and put forward some strategies to improve Shaoxing's international image.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Reporting Frequency

Reporting frequency is a direct reflection of media attention and is often closely related to the popularity of the region being covered. A search of English online news from 2010 to 2021 using the keyword "Shaoxing", while omitting repeated use by the same media in the same article and not excluding reprints by different media, yielded a total of 366 articles. As shown in Figure 1, the frequency of occurrence has increased from 8 in 2010 to 78 in 2021, showing a rapid growth trend.
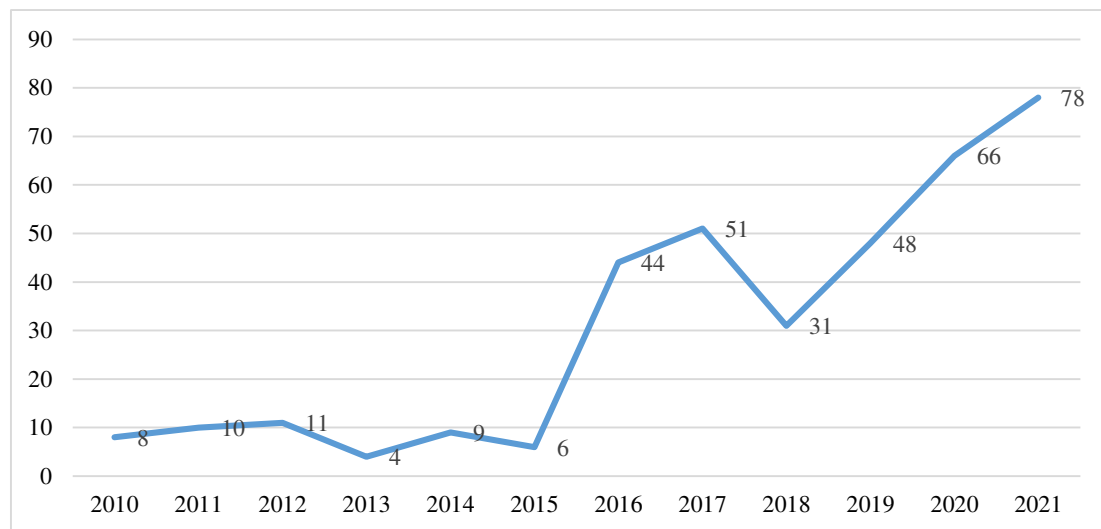
Figure 1. Changes in the number of Shaoxing-related news reports

The increased frequency of news coverage shows that people and media in English-speaking countries are paying more and more attention to Shaoxing, which is not only related to the improvement of China's comprehensive national strength, but also the rapid economic development of Shaoxing in recent years, and the increasing frequency of Shaoxing's foreign economic and trade exchanges. This shows that Shaoxing is attracting more and more attention from the world, more and more foreign friends come to visit Shaoxing, and more and more local enterprises in Shaoxing are "going global", which fully proves the rapid increase of Shaoxing's international influence in recent years.

4.2. Reporting Countries

According to statistics, news related to Shaoxing in the NOW corpus comes from 17 countries and regions where English is the official language. They were United States (US), Canada (CA), Great Britain (GB), Ireland (IE), Australia (AU), New Zealand (NZ), India (IN),Pakistan (PK),Malaysia (MY), Singapore (SG), Philippines (PH),Hong Kong (HK), South Africa (ZA), Nigeria (NG),Ghana (GH),Kenya (KE)and Jamaica (JM).
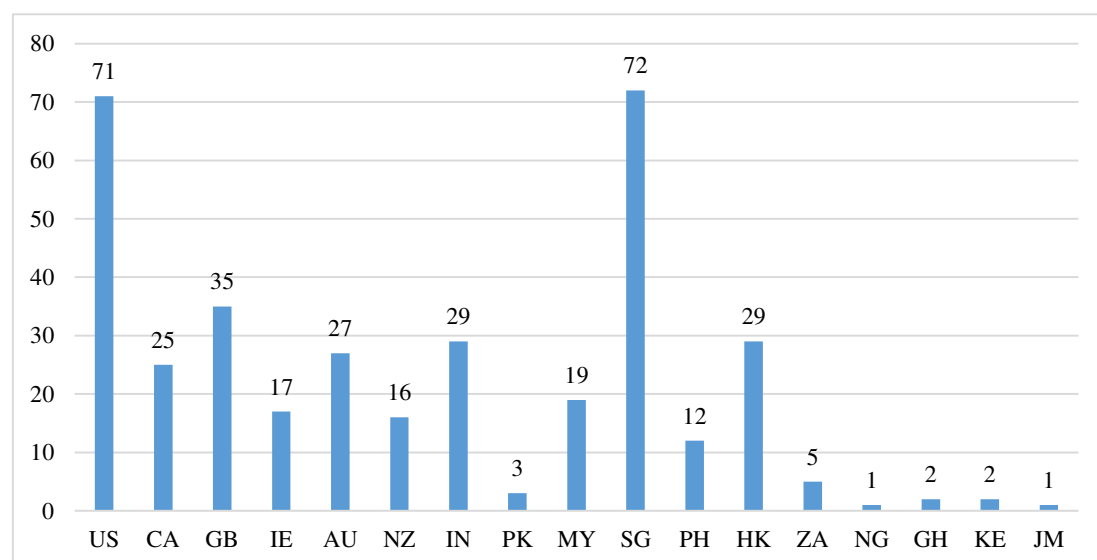

Figure 2: distribution of Shaoxing-related news reports

As shown in Figure 2, except for Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Tanzania, the remaining 17 countries and regions covered by the NOW corpus have paid varying degrees of attention to Shaoxing. Among them, the top five countries and regions with the highest frequency of reporting on Shaoxing were Singapore, the United States, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, and India. This is in line with the comprehensive influence and strength of these countries and regions in the international arena and is also related to their close economic ties with China. Singapore and Hong Kong, as Chinese-dominated societies, have an inherent interest in mainland China. Meanwhile, as financial centers and information ports in Asia, these two places also have far more information sources than other regions, so there are relatively more reports on Shaoxing. India was a close second,

Shaoxing has always enjoyed the reputation of the country's textile capital, and India has been one of the most important partners of Shaoxing's textile industry, therefore, India's close attention to Shaoxing is also easy to understand.

4.3. Reporting Tendencies

Although the news media has always claimed to be adhering to a neutral and objective third-party position, media personnel are inevitably affected by their political background, ideology, value orientation, and inherent knowledge structure, so they often differ in the topics they choose to cover and the angles they focus on. Such trade-offs make it difficult for China-related reports to hold the same standards as those for Western society, which also creates a bias in news reporting. Due to the characteristics of new media, online news focuses more on timeliness, but at the same time, it is more likely to lose accuracy, comprehensiveness, and objectivity in reporting, often resulting in one-sided or inaccurate reporting.
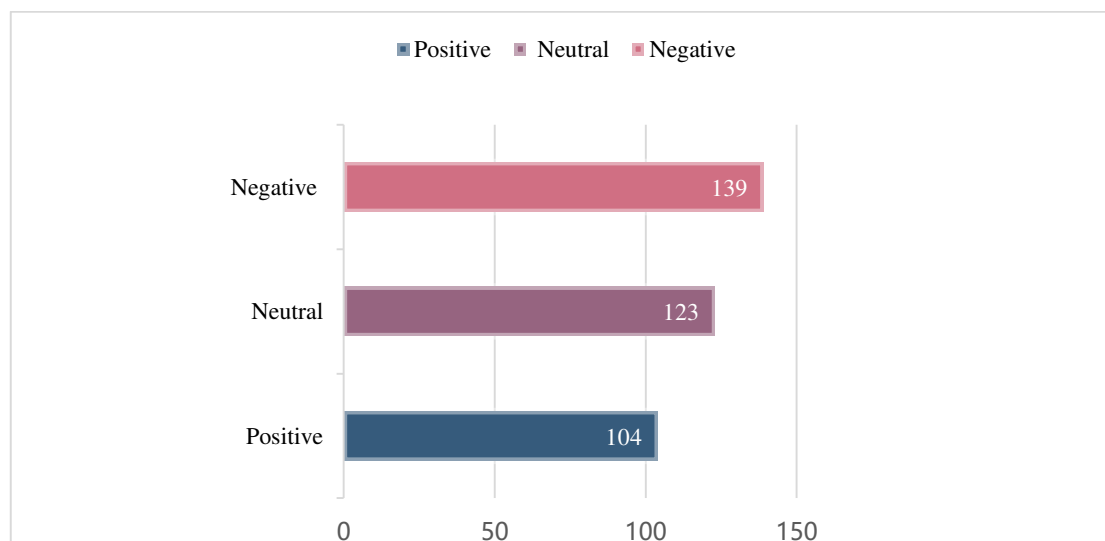

Figure 3: Comparison of Discourse Tendencies in Shaoxing-related News

After analyzing the content of the 366 news articles and the authors' views one by one, it was found that there were 123 reports with a neutral position, accounting for 33.6 % of the total coverage; 104werepositive reports, accounting for 28.4%; and the remaining 139 were negative stories, accounting for 38.0% of the total.By analyzing the correlation between the content of the reports and the sources of the reports, it was found that most of the reports showing negative tendencies came from western international news agencies, indicating that western media tend to view China's development with colored glasses, paying less attention to the reality of China's social progress, focusing more on the dark side of Chinese society, and exaggerating some of the problems in the process of China's development.

4.4. Reporting Topics

Foreign media's attention to Shaoxing has permeated into every aspect of social life. News reports on Shaoxing in NOW corpus could be classified into five major categories: politics, economy, society, sports, and culture. The proportion of news about each topicis is shown in Figure 4.
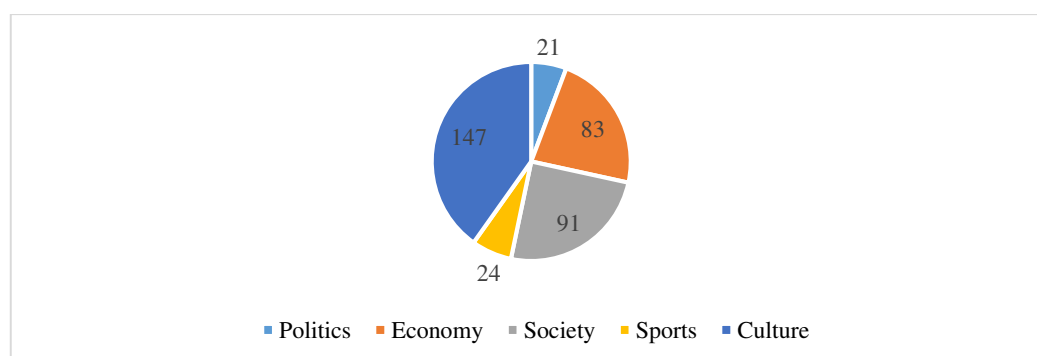

Figure 4: Distribution of Shaoxing-related news topics

Among all the 366 news reports about Shaoxing, 21 were about politics, accounting for 5.7% of the total; 83 were about economy, accounting for 22.7%; 91 were about society, accounting for 24.9%; 24 were about sports, accounting for 6.6%; and 147 were about culture, accounting for 40.1%. It can be seen that among all Shaoxing-related reports, there were more economic,

social, and cultural reports, which shows that Shaoxing, as a core city in the Yangtze River Delta, is more easily accessible to foreign media about its economic and social development.

Cultural news accounted for the largest proportion. Shaoxing rice wine enjoys a worldwide reputation, so it can be seen in a large number of news reports, which constituted a large proportion of cultural reports. In addition, with more and more traditional operas in Shaoxingsuch as Yue Opera and Shaoxing Opera going abroad, reports on traditional Shaoxing operas also constituted a large part of the cultural news. Besides, the emergence of Shaoxing celebrities was also a common theme in the cultural news. For example, Lu Xun was mentioned in three news articles.

In economic-related reports, foreign media mainly focused on Shaoxing's building industry, textile industry, medical industry, film and television industry, and tourism industry. There were also many reports criticizing Shaoxing for its lack of economic development potential, serious brain drain and high dependence on land revenue for government finances.

In the social category, mainstream English-language media reports mainly dealt with issues such asthe shortage of rural labor brought about by urbanization, aging problems, environmental pollution, and the spread of Shaoxing dialect.

Political news accounted for the least proportion, mainly related to the government's epidemic prevention measures during the COVID-19 epidemic and the series of measures taken by the government to promote Shaoxing's social and economic development.

Although the proportion of sports news was also not high, the theme was relatively focused, mainly related to the preparations for the 2022 Hangzhou Asian Games, the huge promotion of the Beijing Winter Olympics on the Shaoxing ski industry, and Shaoxing's Canoe Marathon.

5. Shaoxing's International Image and its Causes

By analyzing the retrieval results of English online news in Now corpus from several angles, we can get the international image of Shaoxing in the mainstream English media:

First of all, from the perspective of diachronic comparison, the frequency of news reports about Shaoxing has increased significantly, and Shaoxing's international influence has shown an obvious rapid growth trend in recent years. Especially in the past 6 years, Shaoxing's exposure in mainstream English media has increased significantly, which also shows Shaoxing's growing international influence.

Second, in terms of the distribution of news by country and region, the frequency of reports involving Shaoxing is not only geopolitical, but also related to Shaoxing's own industrial and economic structure and the "going out" strategy of its enterprises. In some countries, the frequency of Shaoxing-related news coverage is low. In order to expand its external influence, Shaoxing enterprises should be continuously encouraged to "go global", non-governmental organizations should be promoted to carry out foreign economic, trade, and cultural activities, and overseas promotional activities such as tourism in Shaoxing should be organized, and international large-scale exhibitions and forums should be held to increase exchanges, thus exerting a positive influence on international media.

Third, in terms of the tendency of media coverage, the international news agencies from western countries have a large proportion of negative coverage of Shaoxing, with many of the reports relating to Shaoxing focusing on negative issues such as air and water pollution, while deliberately ignoring the fact that the environment has been significantly improved through vigorous government efforts. English-language media from third-world countries reported mostly positive reports, and Shaoxing's unique culture, tourism resources, and foreign trade products were well showcased. The foreign propaganda department still has a lot of work to do in terms of how to deal with one-sided reports from western countries, how to take the initiative to invite foreign media to report on Shaoxing objectively, how to coordinate and unite media from third world countries, etc. Not only should an international public opinion monitoring mechanism be established, but also an international public opinion analysis and response mechanism should be set up in conjunction with relevant government agencies, NGOs and overseas Chinese media, so as to build a positive image of Shaoxing.

Fourth, in terms of the content of the coverage, Shaoxing's economic, social and cultural spheres received a high level of attention, which is inseparable from the highly developed economy of Shaoxing, the rapid development of various social undertakings, and the long history of Shaoxing culture. At the same time, it is also found that the mainstream English media pay less attention to Shaoxing's politics and sports, which may give people an illusion that Shaoxing is weak in these two areas. However, in fact, Shaoxing, as an eastern coastal city, has always been known for its efficient political administration, and it is also a city with strong sports. Therefore, the next step is for the government to properly guide foreign media to enhance their coverage of Shaoxing's politics and sports, so as to let the world see a comprehensive and more real Shaoxing.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, the internationalization of Shaoxing is deepening day by day, and foreign media coverage of Shaoxing is increasing year by year. This is the best time to build Shaoxing's international image, which means more opportunities and a higher platform. We need to seize the opportunity, integrate various resources, so as to build a modern city image that is civilized, harmonious, prosperous, and democratic. At the same time, we should also see our own problems, strive to change the negative perception of Shaoxing in foreign media, so that the world can see a real and comprehensive Shaoxing.

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