Original Paper

A Study on the Construction of Beijing City Image in the Mainstream Media of English-Speaking Countries

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Abstract

Rooted in China's strategic needs to enhance its international communication capacity and cultural soft power, this study focuses on the construction logic of Beijing's city image in mainstream media of English-speaking countries. Adopting a combined research method of content analysis and discourse analysis, it constructs a corpus using Beijing-related reports (2020-2024) from five mainstream newspapers—The New York Times (U.S.), The Guardian (U.K.), The Globe and Mail (Canada), The Australian (Australia), and The New Zealand Herald (New Zealand), to systematically explore the characteristics of how Beijing's city image is constructed in these media outlets. The Three features are: (1) Media exposure demonstrates the characteristics of "generally low coverage, heterogeneity across countries, and event-driven dynamics"; (2) There is a structural imbalance in the mapping of Beijing's city image; (3) Significant national differences exist in theme selection. Essentially, such differences are the media reflection of the five countries' identity perceptions of China. Based on these findings, an optimization path featuring "differentiated and targeted communication+ multi-dimensional narrative upgrading + dynamic adjustment mechanism" should be adopted, so as to provide strategic support for Beijing to break free from the "othering" narrative of Western media and construct a three-dimensional and comprehensive international image.

Keywords

Beijing City Image, Mainstream media of English-speaking countries, three features, an optimization path

1. Introduction

With the enhancement of China's comprehensive national strength and the deepening of globalization, the international communication of national image has become a core issue for China to participate in global governance and boost its cultural soft power. As China's political center, cultural center, center

for international exchanges, and center for scientific and technological innovation, Beijing carries the symbolic significance of a "national window" in the external communication of its city image.

Nevertheless, the "West-strong, East-weak" pattern in the international public opinion arena has not been fundamentally reversed. In the process of shaping Beijing's image, foreign media are plagued by multiple problems, such as a one-dimensional perspective, a tendency toward negative reporting, cultural misunderstandings, a single source of information, and interference from political factors. Leveraging their advantage in global discourse power, mainstream media in English-speaking countries exert a profound impact on how the international public perceives China through their construction of Beijing's image.

Against this backdrop, accurately grasping the international public opinion's perception of Beijing—especially how mainstream English-speaking media construct Beijing's city image—is of great significance for enhancing China's international communication capacity and national cultural soft power. Furthermore, the Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly states the need to "strengthen the development of international communication capacity and comprehensively improve the effectiveness of international communication," while the 14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Development also emphasizes "telling China's stories well and presenting a credible, lovable, and respectable image of China." Therefore, conducting a systematic study on Beijing's city image in mainstream English-speaking media is not only an urgent task to respond to national strategic needs, but also a key entry point for breaking through the game of international public opinion.

2. Literature Review

As cities develop and communication environments evolve, research on mainstream media's construction of Beijing's city image has become a critical topic. Among existing studies, a subset focuses on communication theory and practice. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of embodied communication and empathic communication, Kong and Qu (2022) conducted an in-depth analysis of the "China-Foreign Media Beijing Tour"—a typical case—to identify the embodied turn in practical city image communication. Against the 2022 Winter Olympics backdrop, Zhao (2019) explored Beijing-Zhangjiakou's city image communication strategies, offering new insights for leveraging media events to advance city image dissemination.

Social media's role in shaping Beijing's image also constitutes a research hotspot. Shao (2020) examined the official Facebook account of the Beijing Municipal Government to explore how social media can enhance the city's international image. Chen & Hu (2024) investigated the construction and dissemination of Beijing's cultural image on TikTok, detailing its communication characteristics, extant issues, and corresponding countermeasures. Zhang et al. (2022) scraped 130,000 Beijing-related tweets from Twitter over four years, summarizing the traits of Beijing's international image. Ma & Zheng (2021) analyzed Beijing's portrayal across three major overseas social media platforms—Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram—revealing imbalances in the city's image across different dimensions.

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Another key research direction focuses on how diverse media present Beijing's image. Song (2020) employed big data and social network analysis to explore the representation of Beijing's cultural image in Chinese media reports. Other scholars have studied mainstream media's framing of Beijing in specific countries during distinct periods, including the UK (Wang, Zhang & Cao, 2017), Germany (Xu, Dong & Yuan, 2018), and France (Cao, Du & Wang, 2018). Gao & Wang (2017) analyzed Beijing-related coverage from 50 foreign mainstream media outlets, proposing strategies to shape Beijing's identity as a global city.

Overall, existing research advances theoretical construction and paradigm innovation across three distinct dimensions. In terms of subjectivity, a dialectical framework of "self-construction" and "other-construction" has been established to guide analyses of city image formation. From a methodological perspective, the integration of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms has been achieved; this integration encompasses both in-depth case studies that focus on media events and cross-border media corpus analyses that are supported by big data, allowing for more comprehensive and rigorous research outcomes. Regarding the research path, a closed loop of "problem diagnosis-strategy provision" has been developed: scholars not only identify structural issues present in mainstream media's portrayal of cities but also propose targeted solutions such as algorithmic governance and narrative innovation to address these challenges.

Notwithstanding these contributions, current research still has two critical gaps to address. First, it lacks a systematic examination of mainstream media in English-speaking countries treated as an integrated group. Second, there is a shortage of cross-national comparative studies that explore how mainstream media outlets in different English-speaking countries report on and construct Beijing's city image.

Against this backdrop, this study primarily adopts content analysis and discourse analysis methods. It constructs a corpus using Beijing-related reports from mainstream media outlets in five English-speaking countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. From the dual perspectives of quantitative statistics and qualitative interpretation, the study systematically deconstructs the mechanism through which mainstream English-speaking media construct Beijing's city image, with a specific focus on similarities and differences in media exposure and thematic characteristics across these five countries.

Three specific research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What characteristics did media exposure of Beijing-related reports exhibit in the mainstream media of the five countries from 2020 to 2024?

RQ2: Through which key themes have the five countries' mainstream media constructed Beijing's city image over the past five years?

RQ3: Are there national differences in media exposure and theme selection among these countries, and if so, what are the underlying reasons for such differences?

3. Method

3.1 Sample Selection

This study selects Beijing-related discourses from five mainstream English-speaking media outlets: *The New York Times* (U.S.), *The Guardian* (U.K.), *The Australian* (Australia), *The Globe and Mail* (Canada), and *The New Zealand Herald* (New Zealand), covering the period from January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2024. Data collection is conducted using the LexisNexis and Factiva news databases, which are widely recognized in academic research for their comprehensive coverage of global mainstream media content.

Given the large potential sample size, this study adopts the Constructed-Week Sampling method (Zhou, 2014). This choice is informed by Riffe et al.'s (1993) research, which demonstrates that constructed-week sampling outperforms consecutive-date sampling and simple random sampling in terms of timeliness and representativeness when processing newspaper data. The annual sampling framework is set as two weeks, with one constructed week developed every six months. Ultimately, 1,190 news reports containing the keywords "Beijing" or "Peking" are extracted from 70 calendar days.

Table 1. The Chosen Dates

Year	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
2020	13 Jan.	28 Jan.	12 Feb.	16 Apr.	24 Apr.	9 May	31 May
	6 Jul.	14 Jul.	29 Jul.	22 Oct.	30 Oct.	19 Dec.	27 Dec.
2021	4 Jan.	16 Feb.	24 Feb.	6 May	21 May	29 May	20 Jun.
	19 Jul.	3 Aug.	8 Sep.	14 Oct.	12 Nov.	20 Nov.	26 Dec.
2022	2022	3 Jan.	8 Feb.	2 Mar.	10 Mar.	29 Apr.	7 May
	27 Jun.	2 Aug.	14 Sep.	13 Oct.	11 Nov.	3 Dec.	25 Dec.
2023	2023	16 Jan.	24 Jan.	1 Feb.	9 Feb.	24 Feb.	6 May
	3 Jul.	25 Jul.	27 Sep.	5 Oct.	18 Nov.	9 Dec.	17 Dec.
2024	2024	8 Jan.	16 Jan.	31 Jan.	8 Feb.	19 Apr.	11 May
	1 Jul.	23 Jul.	25 Sep.	7 Nov.	13 Dec.	21 Dec.	29 Dec.

3.2 Coding and Analysis

First, all sentences containing "Beijing" or "Peking" are extracted from the selected news reports of the five mainstream media outlets within the specified timeframe, totaling 3,019 sentences, which are then subjected to coding analysis. Two postgraduate students from the English Department of the School of Foreign Languages, Renmin University of China, are recruited as English coders and receive one month of training prior to coding. To ensure coding validity, approximately 10% of the total sample (301 sentences) is selected for double coding. The results show a consistency coefficient of 0.774, indicating a high level of inter-coder reliability. The remaining 2,718 sentences are then assigned to the

two coders for independent coding. Analysis reveals that only 941 sentences (31.2%) are truly related to Beijing's urban attributes, while nearly 70% of the sentences use "Beijing" to refer to China or the Chinese government.

3.3 Corpus Analysis

Only sentences related to Beijing's urban attributes were retained to establish six corpora (see Table 2). The AntConc software was used to conduct keyword and cluster analysis on the total corpus and the five sub-corpora, so as to identify the common focus perspectives, themes and national differences of news about Beijing in mainstream media of English-speaking countries.

Table 2. Information of Self-built Corpora

Country	Number of Sentences	Percent (%)	Token Count	Number of Texts
United States	470	38.44	13019	37
United Kingdom	205	36.80	5775	9
Canada	145	24.45	4127	7
Australia	78	13.45	2286	3
New Zealand	43	62.32	1253	0
Total	941	31.17	26460	56

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Beijing's Urban Exposure: Generally Low, with National Differences and Influences from Global Issues

Table 3. Information of Beijing-Related Samples in Mainstream Media of English-Speaking Countries

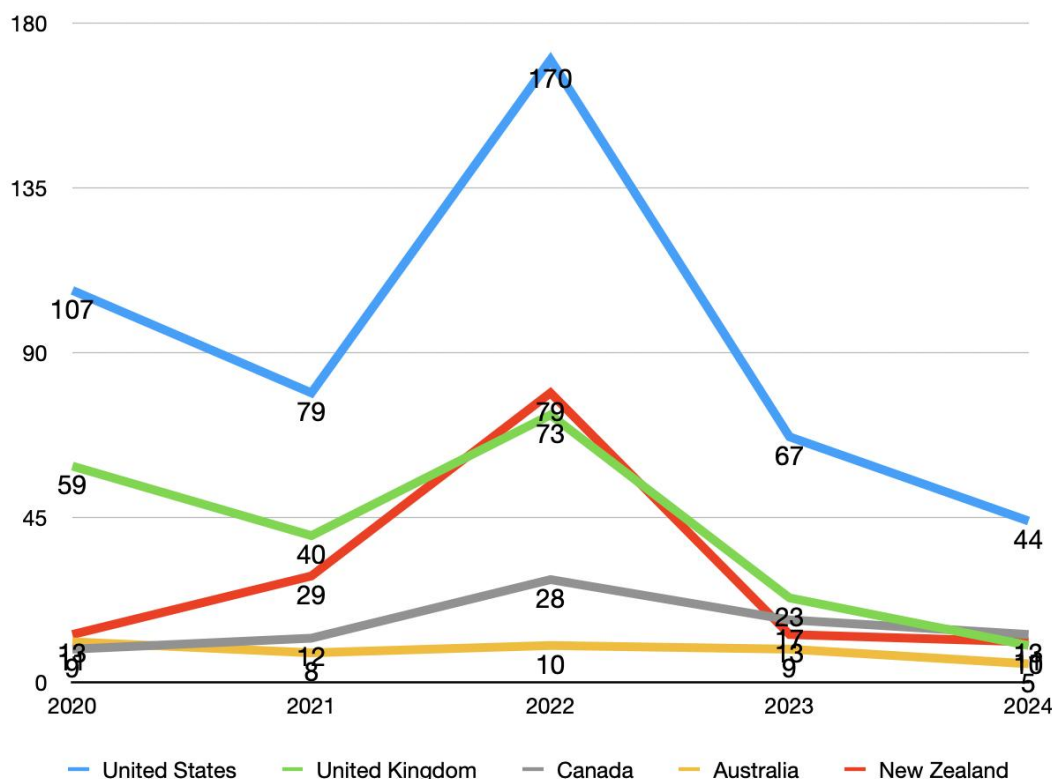| Mainstream Media	Total Number of Sentences	Number of Sentences Referring to the City	Percent (%)	Number of Texts	Number of Texts Referring to the City	Percent (%)
The New York Times	1,220	467	38.3	456	37	8.1
The Guardian	557	205	36.8	266	9	3.4
The Globe and Mail	593	145	24.5	217	7	3.2
The Australian	580	79	13.6	209	3	1.4
The New Zealand Herald	69	43	62.3	42	0	0
Total	3,019	939	31.1	1190	56	4.7

Figure 1. Number of Sentences Referring to Beijing (Annual Change)

As indicated in Table 3, among the 3,019 Beijing-related sentences, only 939 (31.1%) use "Beijing" to refer to the city itself; the rest employ "Beijing" as a metonym for China or the Chinese government. For instance, in the sentence "Apple and its Chinese rival, Huawei, are on the front lines of a battle over technology between Beijing and Washington that has seen both countries restrict access to foreign technology," "Beijing" and "Washington" respectively stand for China and the United States, with their meanings extending beyond the scope of mere city names. Among the 1,190 news reports containing the keywords "Beijing" or "Peking," only 56 have a keyword frequency exceeding 3 times. Moreover, most discourses mention Beijing in just a few sentences and fail to conduct in-depth exploration of Beijing's urban attributes. This reveals that the mainstream media of English countries focus heavily on Beijing's role as a national capital while neglecting its intrinsic urban attributes.

Overall, the number of sentences and discourses referring to Beijing as a city follows the order of *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Australian*, *and The New Zealand Herald* (see Table 3). Statistical analysis shows that there are significant differences in the exposure rate of Beijing's urban attributes among the mainstream media of the five countries ($p<0.05$), with The New York Times having significantly higher figures than the media of the other four countries. Notably,

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although The New Zealand Herald has a relatively small total number of sentences containing the keywords "Beijing" or "Peking," the proportion of sentences using these keywords to refer to Beijing's urban attributes reaches 62.32%, ranking first among the five countries. This forms a stark contrast to the tendency of the other four countries to overshadow Beijing's urban image with the national image.

A further analysis of the annual changes in the number of sentences related to Beijing's urban attributes reveals that over the five-year period, the relevant data from New Zealand remained stable, while the data from the other four countries generally show a trend of first increasing and then decreasing, with all reaching their peaks in 2022. This phenomenon strongly indicates that the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics significantly increased the exposure of Beijing as a city in international media. In addition, "Beijing" appeared relatively frequently in the 2020 news reports of the United States and the United Kingdom, which may be related to the high attention paid by the mainstream media of these two countries to the COVID-19 pandemic during that period. This situation demonstrates that specific international events and global issues largely influence the frequency and focus of media coverage on Beijing-related content.

4.2 Unbalanced Presentation of Beijing's Urban Image Map: Prominent Image as an International Sports Center, Dominant Image as a National Political Center, and Underdeveloped Image as a Cultural Center

The study found that mainstream media in the five English-speaking countries all regard politics (32.1%) and sports (29.0%) as core reporting themes. This data indicates that the international public opinion arena is highly sensitive to and inherently focused on Beijing's political role. Meanwhile, sports events such as the Winter Olympics have become important windows for shaping Beijing's image as an international sports center, fully reflecting Beijing city image as a political center and an international exchange center.

However, the proportions of reports on culture (3.5%) and technology (1.4%) are relatively small, which means Beijing's cultural soft power and scientific and technological innovation capabilities have not been fully demonstrated. To further understand the thematic focus of Beijing-related news reports in the mainstream media of the five English-speaking countries, this study used the keyword cloud map and cluster functions of AntConc to generate Figure 2 and Table 4.
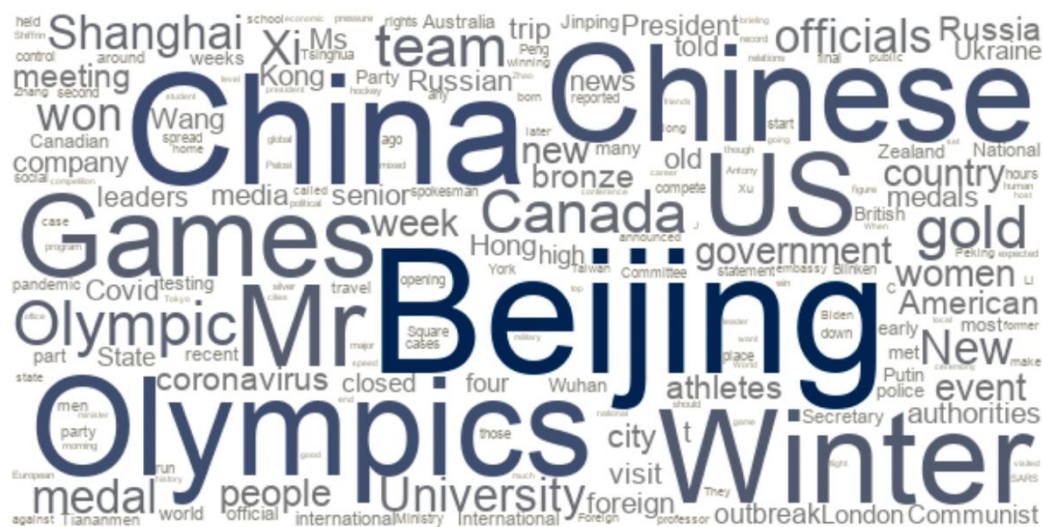
Figure 2. Keyword Cloud Map of Beijing-Related Reports from the Five Countries

Table 4. Clusters of Beijing-Related Reports from the Five Countries

No.	Clusters	Frequency	Clusters	Frequency
1	Winter Olympics	65	Peking duck	8
2	United States/US	55	Secretary of State	7
3	Beijing Olympics	51	Antony J. Blinken	7
4	Clusters related to China's president	33	Renmin University	7
5	Beijing Winter Olympics	31	San Francisco	7
6	Beijing Games	30	bronze medal	7
7	Hong Kong	22	state media	7
8	New Zealand	17	Cultural Revolution	7
9	gold medal	17	Beijing Shuangxiong	7
10	Communist Party	16	Mr. Pelosi	7
11	New York	14	New Year	6
12	Tiananmen Square	14	Olympic team	6
13	Winter Games	14	Olympic Games	6
14	Tsinghua University	13	coronavirus outbreak	6
15	opening ceremony	11	hockey team	6
16	Chinese Foreign Ministry	10	World Cup	6

17	President Vladimir V. Putin/Mr. Putin	10	Chinese authorities	5
18	Xu Zhangrun/Professor Xu	10	Eileen Gu	5
19	Olympic Committee	10	Kamila Valieva	5
20	Chinese government	9	Max Parrot	5
21	human rights	9	news conference	5
22	social media	9	Beijing office	5
23	team event	9		
24	Chinese officials	8		
25	Zhao Lijian	8		

(1) International Sports Center: A Prominent Image

Beijing not only undertakes political and cultural functions but also has become one of the world's renowned international exchange centers. In relevant reports from mainstream media of English-speaking countries, frequently appearing keywords such as "Olympics", "Olympic", "Games", "Winter", "medal", "athletes", and "won", as well as the use of clusters related to the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, 2008 Beijing Olympic Games (e.g., Beijing Games), and 2022 Beijing Paralympic Winter Games (e.g., Beijing 2022 Paralympic Winter Games, the Paralympic Winter Games, the 2022 Paralympic Games), indicate that foreign media have objectively recognized Beijing's important status on the international sports stage. By focusing on the Olympic Games and sports events, these reports have effectively constructed Beijing's image as an international sports center, thereby contributing to the brand building of its title as the "Dual-Olympic City".

Furthermore, foreign media generally pay attention to the performance of their own athletes in competitions and highly praise the outstanding achievements of elite athletes, including Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva, Canadian snowboarder Max Parrot, and Chinese freestyle skier Eileen Gu. However, despite Eileen Gu's remarkable performance at the Winter Olympics, which cannot be ignored, foreign media often obscure her nationality by using expressions such as "San Francisco-born" or "US-born". This reflects a deliberate avoidance of her national identity.

At the same time, mainstream media of the five countries tend to link Olympic events to human rights issues and international relations. This reporting strategy aims to trigger unfavorable public opinion against China before the launch of major international sports events. It not only attempts to exert pressure on China from the international community but also to a certain extent "discredit" and "politicizes" Beijing's image as the host city of the Olympic Games, thereby undermining the positive shaping of its image as an international sports center.

(2) National Political Center: A Uniquely Highlighted Image

In research on how major English-language media construct Beijing's city image, the "political center" dimension is of critical importance. In relevant reports, Beijing is frequently portrayed as the host city for head-of-state summits, a destination for foreign dignitaries, the seat of government agencies, and

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the venue for major national events—all of which underscore its pivotal role as China's national political center. However, a notable trend is that these media often closely conflate Beijing's city image with China's national image, even "overshadowing" the former with the latter. This, to some degree, distorts the public's accurate understanding of Beijing itself and its political status.

Political and diplomatic coverage primarily focuses on two areas: international relations and the global political order, and domestic governance and administration.

Regarding international relations and the global political order, major English-language media closely track developments in China-U.S. relations, China-Russia relations, the Taiwan Strait situation, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Key events—such as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to China, U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's provocative trip to China's Taiwan region, and meetings between Chinese President and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Beijing—have all been focal points of their coverage. Additionally, responses from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its spokespersons to international issues are regularly featured in these reports.

On domestic governance and administration, major English-language media display intense interest in the governance approaches of the Chinese government and the Communist Party of China (CPC), as well as the work of national leaders. This is particularly evident in their coverage of COVID-19 prevention and control, economic stimulus policies, and—notably—their hype around so-called "dissident" events. For instance, in reporting on the case of Xu Zhangrun, a former professor at Tsinghua University's Law School, foreign media exploited the incident to claim "restrictions on freedom of speech" in China. Moreover, their repeated, groundless references to "persecution" during China's Cultural Revolution not only reflect their genuine "concern" for human rights in China, but reveal their malicious intent: to manipulate international public opinion through fabricated human rights issues, smear China's image, and undermine Beijing's standing as a political center.

(3) Cultural Center: An Underdeveloped Image

In the mainstream media of English-speaking countries, the construction of Beijing image as a city appears remarkably underdeveloped, particularly in the portrayal of its identity as a cultural center. When covering cultural topics, the high-frequency use of keywords such as "Tiananmen Square," "Peking Duck," and "New Year" reveals a lack of lexical diversity, which initially reflects the limitations of the content covered.

Negative Framing of Tiananmen Square. As a crucial symbol of the Chinese nation's history, culture, and national spirit, Tiananmen Square occupies an irreplaceable position in shaping Beijing's cultural image. However, mainstream media in English-speaking countries often describe Tiananmen Square using negative terms like "bloody," "crackdown," "massacre," "killing," and "protest," or associate the square with such vocabulary. This practice deliberately narrows the square's significance to negative political events, smears its image through public opinion manipulation, and severely undermines its positive standing in international discourse. As a result, Tiananmen Square has been reduced to an

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object of politicized interpretation, completely deviating from the cultural values it embodies.

Peking Duck as a Social Symbol. Peking Duck frequently appears in diverse social settings, including dinners with political figures, high-end business banquets, and casual dates. This undoubtedly demonstrates its strong function as a cultural symbol serving as a social medium, indicating that it has gained widespread international recognition and become a typical representative of Beijing's culinary culture. Nevertheless, foreign media reports only focus on the social scenarios where Peking Duck is served, while ignoring the profound culinary and cultural connotations behind it. This reflects that foreign media's understanding of Beijing's food culture remains superficial and one-dimensional, failing to fully showcase the breadth and depth of this cultural domain.

Limited Coverage of the Spring Festival. In relevant reports, "New Year" refers to China's Spring Festival. The attention paid to this traditional festival by mainstream media in English-speaking countries could have provided an opportunity for the international community to understand Chinese culture. However, among numerous reports, only a few mention specific traditional customs of the Spring Festival, such as setting off firecrackers, eating dumplings, and watching the Spring Festival Gala. While these contents allow international audiences to gain a basic intuitive understanding of Beijing's cultural and recreational activities during the Spring Festival, most other reports focus on describing the work status of diplomatic institutions and economic activities during the holiday. This reporting tendency leads to a lack of in-depth exploration of the cultural values inherent in the Spring Festival—such as traditional concepts of family reunion and praying for blessings—and the core content related to the inheritance of folk culture associated with the festival.

In conclusion, mainstream media in English-speaking countries exhibit one-sidedness and over-simplification in shaping Beijing's image as a cultural center, with a lack of in-depth coverage. This greatly limits international audiences' understanding of Beijing's cultural identity, making it difficult for the city's rich and diverse culture to be fully represented in the international public opinion arena. Beijing thus finds itself in a state of partial "discourse inadequacy," unable to establish a three-dimensional and vivid image as a cultural center.

4.3 Differences among Countries in the Thematic Selection for Shaping Beijing City Image

Table 5. Thematic Distribution of Beijing-Related Reports Across Five Countries (%)

Country Theme	United States	United Kingdom	Canada	Australia	New Zealand
Politics	32.3	29.3	26.2	50.6	27.9
Economy	6.2	3.4	6.9	6.3	7.0
Society	22.1	33.7	5.5	10.1	0
Culture	4.3	2.4	0	7.6	4.7
Sports	21.4	25.4	59.3	20.3	41.9

Technology	1.5	1.0	0	1.3	7.0
Education	5.6	1.5	0	0.0	9.3
Others	6.6	3.4	2.1	3.8	2.3

Research on the thematic distribution of Beijing-related reports by mainstream media in five countries reveals notable disparities. In Australia, political topics account for over 50% of coverage—far more than in the other four nations. This highlights Australia's role as a frontline in geopolitical competition with China; amid geopolitical pressures, its media tend to center political narratives in their reporting. In Canada and New Zealand, sports dominate, making up 59.3% and 41.9% of reports respectively—a trend closely tied to their involvement in Winter Olympics cooperation and the growth of their ice and snow sports industries. The UK leads the five countries in social issue coverage at 33.7%, focusing on areas like the COVID-19 pandemic, social governance, and minority rights, reflecting British media's traditional penchant for acting as a "human rights watchdog."

Mainstream US media present a more diverse landscape: politics (32.3%), social issues (22.1%), and sports (21.4%) form a "three-way split" as key themes. New Zealand, meanwhile, stands out for covering education and technology, whereas Canada and Australia show almost no attention to these fields. Economic topics remain marginal across all five countries, ranging from 3.4% to 7.0% of reports—signaling fading interest in China's economic narratives among Western media.

As elite outlets, US mainstream media use a multi-faceted narrative strategy while clinging to a core stance of political criticism. On one hand, they analyze traditional political topics: international relations, the global political order, national governance, and internal controls. On the other, they twist Beijing's COVID-19 policies as "threats to democracy and human rights" through granular public health coverage and frame the Winter Olympics as an "authoritarian aesthetic spectacle" to push politicized readings. This approach lets them retain their status as "authoritative voices on China" while avoiding audience fatigue from over-reliance on a single theme. Unlike Australia's obsessive politicization or Canada's deliberate avoidance of politics, the diversified themes of outlets like The New York Times neatly mirror the contradictions in how US intellectual elites view China—preserving limited engagement space amid a narrative of strategic competition.

UK mainstream media's focus on social issues stems from a colonial history-fueled sense of moral superiority. Using the "global human rights defender" framework, they fixate on Beijing's COVID-19 measures and their impacts on society and the public. This coverage not only caters to domestic audiences' nostalgia for "post-imperial responsibility" but also aligns with the UK's post-Brexit goal of reshaping its "Global Britain" identity and boosting international influence.

The dominance of political topics in Australia's China-related reports comes down to its geopolitical choices. As a core pillar of the US-led "Indo-Pacific Strategy," the Australian government has stepped up efforts to counter China in recent years—including via policies like the Foreign Influence

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Transparency Scheme. Its media have echoed this by hyping the "China infiltration myth" and arbitrarily politicizing events like the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and Confucius Institutes. Compounded by direct disputes over the South China Sea and human rights, Australian media now routinely portray Beijing as a "systemic rival."

Canada's heavy focus on sports stems from both event-driven factors and diplomatic strategy. The Meng Wanzhou incident froze China-Canada relations, leading Canadian media to shift to "safe" topics like sports to avoid political risks. During the Beijing Winter Olympics, they heavily covered Canadian athletes' performances and China-Canada ice hockey cooperation—catering to public enthusiasm for winter sports while aligning with Prime Minister Trudeau's "separate politics from economy" approach to China. Notably, The Globe and Mail went further, using Winter Olympics legacy coverage to build an image of sports as a "diplomatic buffer."

New Zealand, leveraging its flexibility as a small nation and longstanding pragmatic approach to China, has created a reporting space in education and technology with "high political and security tolerance." Through "de-ideologized" storytelling—such as breaking down technical parameters and sharing industry-academia-research cases—it has maintained the uniqueness of China-New Zealand relations amid broader Western tech containment of China. At its core, this thematic choice reflects the survival smarts of a "middle power" in the global order, as seen in media, and underscores New Zealand's balancing act in complex international public opinion.

Ultimately, the thematic differences in these five countries' Beijing-related reports mirror their respective perceptions of China. Australia, driven by geopolitics, sees China as a "threat" and uses political topics to hype confrontation. The UK, clinging to colonial-era moral superiority, casts China as an "other" and focuses on social issues to pass judgment. The US, amid global strategic goals, frames China as a "competitor," with diverse themes masking underlying rivalry. Canada and New Zealand, guided by diplomacy and self-interest, aim to position China as a "limited partner"—one using sports to ease tensions, the other pursuing practical cooperation in education and technology. These perceptions, filtered through media theme choices, shape how discourse about China is reproduced in global public opinion.

5. Suggestions

Against the backdrop of the global communication landscape, the international dissemination of Beijing's urban image faces the challenge of breaking free from the "othering" narrative framework dominated by Western media. The key to enhancing Beijing's international image lies in shifting from passive response-based communication to active constructive dialogue—a goal achievable through the core strategies of "differentiated and targeted communication + multidimensional narrative upgrading + dynamic adjustment mechanism."

(1) Targeted Agenda-Setting Based on Differences across Countries

For the United States, efforts should focus on using "state-city cooperation" to counter political

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confrontation, such as promoting the joint release of green technology cooperation reports between Beijing and its sister cities, analyzing social innovation solutions on elite platforms, and infusing cultural and technological elements into sports-related initiatives. For the United Kingdom, the focus is on dialogue around social governance, including conducting joint research, compiling case handbooks, and funding scholars to study distinctive mechanisms. For Australia, non-politicized cooperation is leveraged to counter stigmatization, through climate technology collaboration, agricultural short videos, and fact-checking reports. For Canada, the value of ice hockey diplomacy is further explored, involving the establishment of cultural exhibition areas and the development of a "winter sports technology-ecological protection" narrative chain. For New Zealand, "Rugby Diplomacy 2.0" is used to promote cultural exchanges, while the "Educational Partner City" program facilitates dialogue and cooperation in education and technology. These differentiated measures are tailored to the characteristics of each country to achieve targeted communication.

(2) Innovation in Narrative Frameworks for Cultural and Technological Image

In terms of cultural communication, a shift from "display of cultural symbols" to "civilization interaction experiments" is required. The "Metaverse Central Axis" global co-creation initiative can be launched, inviting digital artists worldwide to reconstruct Beijing's historical buildings using blockchain technology, with the resulting works traded in Christie's virtual auction hall. Simultaneously, the #BeijingAlgorithmChallenge campaign can be initiated on TikTok, encouraging users to generate short videos that integrate Peking Opera facial makeup with local pop music elements through AI technology.

In the field of technological communication, efforts should be made to promote the "de-securitization" and "solution-oriented framing" of technological topics. Tsinghua University and Renmin University of China can be invited to collaborate with the University of Cambridge and Stanford University to release the Global AI Ethics Benchmark City Index, highlighting Beijing's institutional innovation achievements in areas such as autonomous driving legislation and AI medical ethics review.

(3) Establishing a Dynamic Adjustment Mechanism

First, a dual-cycle system of "public opinion early warning and effect evaluation" needs to be built. On one hand, an emotional analysis model for Beijing-related reports should be developed to monitor the topic popularity in the media of the five countries in real time; when the proportion of political topics exceeds a preset threshold, the release of "cultural and technological topic packages" will be automatically triggered. On the other hand, blockchain technology should be introduced to conduct traceability audits of overseas communication effects, so as to accurately identify high-influence media nodes.

Second, efforts should be made to cultivate a "Gen Z International Communication Task Force". On one hand, overseas students and cross-border YouTubers (content creators) can be recruited to form a "Beijing Experience Officer" team, and participatory empowerment such as the right to design CityWalk routes and a direct channel for proposing municipal facility renovation suggestions should be

provided to them. On the other hand, the "Beijing Future City" game can be built on the Roblox platform; players can accumulate "governance points" by completing simulated tasks such as solving traffic congestion and protecting cultural heritage, and these points can be exchanged for rewards such as offline visa facilitation.

6. Conclusion

In the global communication landscape, mainstream media of English-speaking countries exert a significant influence on shaping Beijing's urban image. This study focuses on 2020–2024, conducting an in-depth analysis of Beijing-related reports from mainstream media across five English-speaking nations: the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Overall, the five countries' mainstream media maintain relatively low exposure of Beijing, with marked national disparities. Among them, The New York Times provides relatively higher coverage of Beijing; while The New Zealand Herald has a smaller total number of articles, it features a higher proportion of sentences that explicitly reference Beijing's urban attributes. Notably, the Beijing Winter Olympics—a major international sports event—significantly boosted Beijing's visibility in international media. This indicates that specific international events and global issues play a key role in influencing the frequency and focus of media coverage.

Politics and sports dominate Beijing-related reports, whereas coverage of culture and technology remains relatively scarce. Furthermore, the five countries show striking differences in thematic selection. Mainstream U.S. media present a "three-pillar" pattern, with politics, sports, and social issues as core themes, resulting in diverse coverage. Australia devotes the highest proportion of reports to political topics; Canada and New Zealand prioritize sports; and British media focus more on social issues. These disparities in thematic distribution profoundly reflect the five countries' differing perceptions of China's identity.

Based on the above findings, the following strategies are proposed to effectively improve the communication of Beijing's image in international media. (1) Differentiated and Targeted Communication: Develop tailored communication plans that address the reporting tendencies and perceptual differences of each country, enabling precise messaging. (2) Multidimensional Narrative Upgrade: Innovate narrative frameworks for showcasing Beijing's cultural and technological image to enrich its multidimensional portrayal in international media, thereby enhancing its global communication impact. (3) Dynamic Adjustment Mechanism: Utilize a dual-cycle system of "public opinion early warning and effect evaluation" to timely adjust communication strategies in response to shifts in public opinion, ensuring maximum communication effectiveness.

However, this study has certain limitations. On one hand, the research sample only includes mainstream media from five countries, with a relatively narrow scope that cannot fully represent media landscapes across all English-speaking nations. On the other hand, the analysis of report content focuses primarily on two dimensions, exposure and thematic characteristics, resulting in insufficient

analytical depth. Future research could expand the sample scope to include media from more English-speaking countries and diverse media types. Additionally, it could incorporate more analytical dimensions, such as the emotional tone of reports and discourse structure, to achieve a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding of how mainstream English-speaking media construct Beijing's urban image.

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