

THE SHAPING AND COMMUNICATION OF GUANGZHOU CITY IMAGE: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF CHINESE MAIN MEDIA

YongQi An, XinMing Cai, Fei Deng*

School of Foreign Studies, South China Agricultural University, Guangzhou 510642, Guangdong, China.

Corresponding Author: Fei Deng, Email: faydra@126.com

Abstract: In the contemporary context characterized by the in-depth advancement of globalization and the accelerated iteration of urbanization, urban image serves as a concrete carrier of national cultural confidence. Its construction logic and communication efficiency have become one of the core indicators for measuring a country's cultural soft power. As a core engine city in China's Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, a millennium-old commercial capital, and an international gateway hub linking domestic and foreign markets, the strategic shaping and systematic communication of Guangzhou's urban image are not only related to the city's own global competitiveness, but also of irreplaceable value for demonstrating China's concept of open development and enhancing the country's cultural discourse power. This study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its theoretical framework, integrates the quantitative analysis method of corpus linguistics, and constructs a corpus by selecting news texts mentioning "Guangzhou" (from 2019 to 2024) from representative platforms of domestic mainstream media: People's Daily (print edition and official website) and the overseas website of China Daily (the English news section targeting international audiences). It analyzes the international urban image of Guangzhou shaped and communicated from the perspective of "self-construction" by Chinese mainstream media, focusing on high-frequency words, keywords and their collocations. By using corpus tools such as AntConc for word frequency statistics, keyword clustering, and collocation co-occurrence analysis, this study systematically deconstructs the construction path and communication focus of mainstream media on Guangzhou's international urban image from the "self-construction" perspective. The results show that the image of Guangzhou presented by Chinese mainstream media exhibits distinct characteristics: in the economic dimension, it focuses on being a "commercial and trade hub" and an "innovation highland"; in the cultural dimension, it emphasizes "openness and inclusiveness" and "integration of the ancient and the modern"; and in the livelihood dimension, it highlights "livable city construction" and "people's well-being". Relevant research further puts forward specific suggestions for improving the communication effect of Guangzhou's international image, aiming to further enhance the city's global influence. This study can provide a theoretical reference and practical paradigm for the image construction of similar domestic international gateway cities, and contribute to promoting the upgrading of urban image communication from "self-construction" to "benign interaction between self-construction and other-construction".

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis; City image; Corpus; People's daily; China daily

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Background of the Research

It has emphasized that enhancing the effectiveness of international communication is a pivotal task in China's modernization process. What it needs is establishing an international discourse system commensurate with the country's comprehensive national strength, refining the narrative framework with Chinese characteristics, and achieving precise international expression of Chinese stories and the dissemination of national image. At the present time of deep integration of globalization and cityization, city image has become one of the core dimensions to measure the comprehensive competitiveness of a city. The international communication of city image, as both a subsystem of national image construction and a critical strategic initiative for cities to enhance global visibility and resource allocation capabilities, plays an indispensable role in this context.

News reporting, serving as a vital bridge between cities and public perception, transcends passive "mirroring" of city realities. Through strategic discourse choices, it transforms cities' multifaceted characteristics into structured and symbolic perceptions. From economic development to cultural heritage, from social governance case studies to livelihood welfare pictures, mainstream media's news narratives largely shape the public's core impressions of any city. Notably, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic's structural impact on the global economy, Guangzhou—as a strategic pivot city in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area—has demonstrated remarkable economic resilience, cultural vitality, and scientific innovation capabilities. Through the successful organization of global platforms like the Canton Fair and international sporting events, the city has consistently garnered heightened attention from the international community. The profound adjustments in the globalization process have further induced systematic transformations in Guangzhou's functional positioning within the global city network. Given its unique role as a national gateway city and maritime center, the international dissemination of Guangzhou's image holds exemplary value and strategic significance for enhancing China's international discourse power.

1.2 The Significance of the Research

As pivotal nodes in transnational information dissemination, China's mainstream media (exemplified by People's Daily and China Daily overseas editions) serve dual functions as "image intermediaries" and "cultural translators" in constructing Guangzhou's international city image[1]. Through systematic analysis of the narrative frameworks employed by representative media outlets from 2019 to 2024, this study aims to elucidate the characteristics of state-media-led self-representation mechanisms and paradigm shifts in city image construction within globalized contexts[2]. Grounded in critical discourse analysis (CDA), the empirical research will propose strategic optimizations for Guangzhou's city image within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area framework, including: differentiated positioning recommendations, cultural symbol transformation strategies, and a cross-cultural communication efficacy evaluation system—ultimately advancing strategic objectives to enhance city soft power and global governance participation. From an innovation perspective, this study addresses the timeliness gap in current city image research. The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted global city development, and news coverage from this period reflects Guangzhou's image transformation and response strategies under unique circumstances. By focusing on mainstream media reports to build a corpus, it provides rich primary data for studying city image construction through the lens of "self-presentation", enabling deeper exploration of how Guangzhou shapes its identity via mainstream media. In terms of significance, analyzing authoritative media coverage allows precise identification of national-level mainstream media's key presentation focuses and communication strategies regarding Guangzhou's city image. This provides valuable references for optimizing Guangzhou's self-presentation and communication pathways, helping the city better showcase its charm and capabilities on both domestic and international stages while enhancing its competitiveness.

1.3 Research Questions

This dissertation is to conduct a corpus based critical discourse analysis on the People's Daily and China Daily news reports about Guangzhou the research questions include:

- (1) Through corpus analysis, this study examines the characteristics of Guangzhou's city image as portrayed by People's Daily and China Daily overseas platforms from the perspective of high-frequency words[3].
- (2) Using the pre-pandemic year (2019) as the reference corpus, the research divides the timeline into two periods: the pandemic period (2020-2022) and the post-pandemic era (2023-2024). By analyzing the keywords in both corpora, the study investigates how Guangzhou's response to the COVID-19 pandemic shaped its city image.
- (3) Based on the research findings, feasible recommendations are proposed for future international communication strategies to enhance Guangzhou's city image.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Domestic Studies

In the era of globalization, city image serves as a hybrid of material and social value, as well as a branding tool through which cities strive to identify and establish their unique identities as competitive advantages. Numerous scholars, from the perspectives of journalism and linguistics, have conducted comprehensive and multimodal studies on the self-construction and dissemination of images of different countries, cities, or regions, based on various types of news reports. Huang Lina (2016) investigated city cultural communication and image construction within the context of ecological civilization. Hu Kaibao and Tian Xujun (2018) analyzed China's diplomatic discourse image from the theoretical angle of Critical Discourse Analysis[4]. Li Zhiying, Li Weibing, and Deng Fei (2021) employed a corpus-based approach to conduct an in-depth analysis of Guangzhou's international city image within Chinese and American media discourses[5]. The research indicated that domestic media bear significant responsibility for enhancing Guangzhou's international influence and should focus on reporting positively significant events related to the city[6]. Huang Yajun (2022), based on the News on the Web (NOW) corpus and applying Critical Discourse Analysis, examined the external image of Quanzhou as presented in overseas English-language media reports and proposed corresponding recommendations for city image communication[7]. Li Yi (2024) explored the portrayal of Chinese cities or regions by domestic and international media under specific historical period backgrounds. Within the field of city image research, many scholars have conducted rich and in-depth explorations. Tian Chi and Fu Tao (2024) focused on the external dissemination of city images by mainstream media, using China Daily as a case study to deeply explore the value and specific operational methods of domestic mainstream media in promoting city images internationally[8]. Adopting content analysis and discourse analysis, they concentrated on the construction of Beijing's city image in mainstream English-speaking countries' media, investigating the characteristics of Beijing's city image based on corpus analysis[9].

2.2 Foreign Studies

International scholars have approached the study of city image from multidisciplinary perspectives, employing diverse research methodologies. Among these, studies grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) have yielded substantial results, offering new insights for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind city image formation and

dissemination. In 1960, Kevin Lynch first introduced the concept of “city image” in *The Image of the City*, defining it as the impressions and perceptions people hold of a city[10]. He proposed that this image is composed of elements such as paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks, and possesses “imageability.” This theory laid a solid foundation for subsequent research on city image. Ting Y... applied Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework for analyzing communicative data (“what,” “how,” and “why”) to conduct an in-depth analysis of 744 reports related to South Korea published in *People’s Daily* between 2009 and 2019. The study not only revealed the logic behind the construction of South Korea’s national image but also provided a fresh perspective on understanding the role of media in national image building[11].

2.3 Comments

However, a comprehensive review of domestic and international academic research on national and city image studies reveals several areas requiring refinement. While previous studies have accumulated vast linguistic corpora, the timeliness of research materials in city image studies—particularly given the unique context of the global COVID-19 pandemic and its recovery—remains a critical concern. Moreover, current research on national or city image construction predominantly employs a comparative analysis model combining “self-shaping” and “other-shaping” approaches, while studies focusing solely on “self-shaping” perspectives remain relatively scarce. As scholars have noted, image construction is a complex process involving both self-and external shaping mechanisms that reflect distinct power dynamics, cultural factors, and psychological influences. Yet current exploration of self-shaping perspectives remains inadequate. Regarding city image communication, studies demonstrate the significant role of media industries in shaping and disseminating city images, though their communication pathways and effectiveness still require optimization. Against this research backdrop, compiling news reports about Guangzhou from 2019 to 2024 from the *People’s Daily* and *China Daily* to build a linguistic corpus presents important innovative value.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), also referred to as Critical Linguistics, originated in the late 1970s. Its initial theoretical foundation was marked by the publication of two seminal works in 1979: *Language and Control* co-authored by Fowler et al., and *Language as Ideology* by Kress and Hodge. Subsequently, numerous scholars have continuously enriched and developed this theory, establishing it as a significant research methodology within the fields of linguistics and social sciences.

The core principle of CDA emphasizes the close and complex interrelationship between language, power, and ideology. Language is not merely an instrument for expressing thoughts and exchanging information; it is fundamentally a form of social practice that actively participates in the constitution of social phenomena and social relations[12]. In social life, different social groups possess varying degrees of power and status, and language becomes a crucial vehicle for the exercise of power and the dissemination of ideology. The ruling class or dominant groups often utilize language to implement ideological control and maintain their position of power. Through specific lexical choices, modes of expression, and discursive structures, they embed their own values, interests, and conceptions of social order into everyday discourse, subtly shaping people’s cognitions and behaviors, thereby leading social members to unconsciously accept and internalize these perspectives.

For instance, in news reporting, media outlets may convey specific ideologies and stances through their selection of vocabulary, framing of reporting angles, and manner of describing events. When covering social conflicts, using negatively charged terms like “mob” or “riot” to describe one party, while employing relatively milder, more neutral language for the other, can guide the audience towards forming particular views and attitudes. Behind such linguistic usage lies the ideology and power dynamics of the interest groups represented by the media[13]. Applying critical discourse analysis theory to examine the city image of Guangzhou portrayed in mainstream media reports in China holds significant meaning and value. As an important form of discourse, news reporting serves as one of the primary channels for disseminating Guangzhou’s city image, profoundly influencing public perception and impressions of the city. Critical discourse analysis can help us discern the ideologies hidden behind these linguistic strategies. When mainstream media report on Guangzhou’s city image, they are often influenced by various ideological factors such as national development strategies, local government policies, and mainstream social values. Media outlets may closely align Guangzhou’s development with the nation’s overall strategic goals, emphasizing its crucial role in promoting regional economic cooperation and participating in the “Belt and Road” initiative, thereby reflecting the country’s developmental expectations and strategic layout for Guangzhou. They also disseminate policy orientations and achievements of local governments in city construction, livelihood improvement, and cultural heritage preservation, along with mainstream social values like the development concepts of innovation, coordination, green development, openness, and sharing, as well as socialist core values. These ideological elements are reflected in news reports and shaped and disseminated through linguistic strategies to construct Guangzhou’s city image.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Data Collection

The corpus for this study primarily originates from China's mainstream media with extensive influence, including *People's Daily* and *China Daily*. The selection of these media outlets is due to their high authority, credibility, and broad audience base, as their news reports can largely represent the mainstream views and positions of society, significantly influencing public opinion and social perceptions. The corpus was selected from all news articles mentioning the keyword "Guangzhou" published on *People's Daily* and *China Daily* between January 2019 and June 2024. The corpus comprises a total of 280,000 words. AntConc software was employed to conduct data analysis on this corpus.

4.2 Data Analysis

First, a corpus was established by extracting all foreign-language news reports related to Guangzhou from 2019 to 2024 via the overseas editions of *People's Daily* and *China Daily*. A word list was generated based on the top 20 high-frequency content words—primarily nouns, verbs, and adjectives—to analyze their frequency of occurrence and relevant collocations.

Subsequently, the usage characteristics of the top 20 high-frequency content words were examined by investigating their collocations and associated topics. This approach aims to explore the perspectives and attitudes of mainstream Chinese media toward Guangzhou's city construction and development, thereby revealing the city image of Guangzhou shaped by these media outlets.

Furthermore, two sub-corpora were compiled: one comprising reports from the overseas editions of *People's Daily* and *China Daily* during the pandemic period (2020–2022), and another from the post-pandemic period (2023–2024). The pre-pandemic year (2019) serves as a reference corpus. Keyword lists for both the pandemic and post-pandemic sub-corpora were generated, and the top 20 keywords were selected for analysis. Based on these keywords, the study shows Guangzhou's response strategies and attitudes toward the COVID-19 pandemic as depicted by mainstream Chinese mainstream media, while also elucidating the corresponding city image of Guangzhou constructed through such coverage.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, those news discourses on Guangzhou collected from *People's Daily* and *China Daily* will be analyzed based on CDA. In this chapter, the data are presented and analyzed. Different example sentences are extracted from corpus to illustrate the results.

5.1 High frequency Words

The top 20 content words in the corpus can be obtained, which is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Top 20 High Frequency Words		
Number	Words	Frequency
1	Guangzhou	6927
2	China	2750
3	said	2623
4	province	1911
5	city	1741
6	will	1257
7	is	1126
8	has	1033
9	covid	974
10	people	924
11	district	821
12	Chinese	774
13	were	671
14	it	664
15	new	652
16	update	553
17	area	486
18	development	420
19	Hong Kong	290
20	international	281

An analysis of the high-frequency content words listed in Table 1 reveals that these terms can be broadly categorized into three types:

The first type points to the agentive subject. In the coverage of Guangzhou by domestic mainstream media, references such as "Guangzhou," "capital of Guangdong province," and "southern Chinese city" are predominantly used, forming a dual "province-city" referential system. Through compound designations like "south China's Guangdong province," the city's image is embedded within the national regional development strategy framework. Particularly noteworthy is

“Hong Kong” (290 instances) as a high-frequency external referent, whose co-occurrence rate with “Macao” reaches 73%. Through content involving enhanced cooperation, connectivity, and economic ties—exemplified by phrases like “cooperate with” and “improve connectivity”—a transitional identity for Guangzhou as a hub within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area is constructed. This identity is neither that of an international financial center like Hong Kong nor that of an ordinary inland city, but rather an institutional buffer zone characterized by the “one country, two systems” principle, showcasing Guangzhou’s open, inclusive, and international city image. Simultaneously, in reports on Guangzhou, “people” is used to refer to Guangzhou’s citizens. “People” also forms semantic resonance with “Chinese,” as seen in typical structures like “people benefited from” (87%) and “Chinese enterprises” (92%). This indicates that Guangzhou transforms demographic factors into tangible proof of developmental achievements, demonstrating that the city, both during and beyond the pandemic period, has consistently centered its work on the people, and leveraged its own development to drive progress in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the entire Guangdong Province.

The second category of high-frequency words comprises verbs. Overall, “will,” “has,” “is,” and “are” are the most frequently occurring verbs, predominantly used in the present tense. This suggests that domestic mainstream media tend to focus on the present in their coverage of Guangzhou. The static predicate network formed by “has” and “is” solidifies the declarative pattern of “Guangzhou is...”. The prevalent use of the present tense creates a “perpetual present” effect, as seen in expressions like “has high-tech industries,” thereby transforming phased achievements into inherent city attributes. The most frequent verbs show little variation across the two time periods examined, consistently consisting of auxiliaries or forms of “be” such as “has,” “have,” and “are.” This indicates a primary use of the present tense by domestic mainstream media, alongside various modal verbs to convey the determination and resolve of the Guangzhou government. Analysis of the usage and collocations of “will” reveals that it frequently co-occurs with verbs denoting event hosting, provision of assistance, and advancement or expansion—all reflective of Guangzhou’s city image. Collocations like “will hold” and “will build” constitute a “future perfect” discourse, where the implied subject is often a government agency. Through events such as the “expo” and “Asian Para Games” (frequency increased by 210% compared to the previous period), an image of unquestionable administrative efficacy is constructed. This reflects a textual characteristic wherein specific uses of the present and future tenses serve to depict both the city’s current state and highlight the government’s planning capabilities. Verbs also include positive action-oriented terms like “hold,” “build,” “established,” and “provide,” showcasing an image—as portrayed in Chinese mainstream media—of Guangzhou focusing on city development, public welfare construction, and trade exchanges. This portrayal demonstrates the Guangzhou government’s forward-looking approach and active engagement in city construction planning over the past two years, expressing the city’s willingness and determination to host events and activities, thereby revealing its dynamic nature.

The third category of high-frequency content words consists of adjectives. “New,” “development,” and “international” rank 15th, 18th, and 20th, respectively, on the high-frequency word list. These terms indicate that domestic media, in their coverage and promotion of Guangzhou, place greater emphasis on issues such as internationalization. The use of “development” (420 instances), predominantly in combinations like “high-tech” (58%) and “high-speed” (32%), essentially functions as a local metonymy for the “national science and technology strategy.” Particularly notable is “New” (652 instances), which has a co-occurrence rate of 91% with “development,” constituting a local discursive practice related to the policy of “transforming old and new growth drivers.”

Through a statistical frequency analysis of texts from domestic mainstream media reports (selecting a sample of the top 50 high-frequency content words), the study finds that words such as “development,” “update,” “area,” “work,” and “global” exhibit significant clustering characteristics. Corpus analysis indicates that the co-occurrence contexts of these words are primarily concentrated on international economic and trade events hosted by Guangzhou, such as the China Import and Export Fair (Canton Fair) and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Trade in Services Expo, as well as construction progress in industrial functional zones like the Nansha Pilot Free Trade Zone and the Sino-Singapore Guangzhou Knowledge City. In media coverage, the systematic use of these high-frequency terms constructs Guangzhou’s prominent positioning as an “international trade and commerce center,” with particular emphasis on achievements in institutional openness such as cross-border e-commerce pilots and innovations in trade in services. Notably, 72% of economic report headlines explicitly reflect this positioning, with the annual growth rate of related reports reaching 23%.

5.2 Keywords and Guangzhou City Images

Using the pre-COVID-19 period (2019) as a reference corpus, two sub-corpora were established based on distinct phases of the pandemic: the during-pandemic period (2020-2022) and the post-pandemic period (2023-2024). The top 20 keywords were extracted from each sub-corpus. The specific details are shown in Table 2. A comparative analysis of the keywords from these two periods in Table 2 was conducted.

Table 2 Comparative Analysis of the Keywords From Two Different Periods

Number	Amid the epidemic			Post-epidemic period		
	Key word	Frequency	Keyness	Key word	Frequency	Keyness
1	Province	560	198.956	China	298	176.653

2	Covid	325	93.172	Province	120	153.676
3	District	291	92.188	Fair	107	97.685
4	Cases	176	89.292	Photo	83	93.911
5	Health	165	87.656	Canton	61	92.741
6	Acid	155	85.341	Games	53	81.571
7	Testing	151	82.028	Session	37	80.753
8	Residents	135	79.573	April	35	80.088
9	Nucleic	129	78.591	Import	32	74.552
10	Medical	121	67.147	Export	30	73.684
11	Control	111	62.541	Hangzhou	29	73.415
12	Epidemic	100	59.827	Oct	28	63.376
13	Coronavirus	96	59.434	Heritage	28	61.653
14	Quarantine	88	57.646	Cultural	27	56.303
15	Hospital	87	51.297	Intangible	27	54.795
16	Asymptomatic	87	51.297	Vessel	21	49.874
17	Dalian	85	49.908	Visitors	20	49.249
18	Measures	83	47.351	Para	18	48.290
19	league	79	37.510	Dance	16	38.704
20	Hai zhu	78	37.162	Product	15	38.613

From Table 2, there are significant differences in the keywords found in reports from during the COVID-19 pandemic and those from the post-pandemic period.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the keyword with the highest keyness was “covid.” Frequently occurring keywords such as “covid,” “cases,” “epidemic,” “nucleic acid testing,” and “medical” highlighted the joint efforts and actions of the Guangzhou municipal government and its citizens in responding to the pandemic. It is evident that the primary focus for Guangzhou from 2020 to 2022 was combating the COVID-19 pandemic and safeguarding People’s lives and health. Concurrently, words related to regions, people, and their allied organizations (e.g., “people,” “league,” “mainland,” “Haizhu,” “resident”) also ranked highly, indicating that in the face of the pandemic, the people of Guangzhou united closely, with different districts cooperating to fight the outbreak. This reflects Guangzhou’s adherence to a people-centered, life-above-all else philosophy in its pandemic prevention and control approach.

These keywords demonstrate that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Guangzhou proactively implemented a series of measures to control the spread of the virus, including large-scale nucleic acid testing and enhancing medical resource allocation. The discourse centered around the COVID-19 pandemic, news reporting, and regional pandemic control, reflecting a pandemic resistance effort characterized by wholly-society participation and comprehensive societal mobilization. These media reports showcased the sense of responsibility, and social solidarity fully demonstrated by Guangzhou in tackling COVID-19, projecting the image of a modern city actively confronting challenges and prioritizing public health.

When analyzing keywords from the post-pandemic sub-corpus, a stark contrast from the 2020-2022 period becomes apparent. Pandemic-related terms are absent from the top 50 keywords, indicating that Guangzhou had gradually moved beyond the pandemic’s impact and resumed comprehensive city construction and development. The presented keywords lack a specific dominant thematic focus, putting more emphasis on coverage of daily activities. The presence of “fair,” “import,” and “export” within the keyword list underscores Guangzhou’s role as a vital gateway for China’s imports and exports, highlighting its position as a major economic center in Southern China and an international trade hub. Topics span public welfare, port trade, law, cuisine, transportation, as well as culture, history, and livelihood issues. By this stage, Guangzhou had returned to normalcy, shifting its city development focus towards people’s wellbeing and historical and cultural preservation.

Furthermore, extraction and analysis of high-frequency content words from the post-pandemic sub-corpus reveal that frequently used terms include “will,” “games,” “international,” “cultural,” “global,” etc., which leans towards themes of event hosting and international exchange. This signifies a return to emphasizing Guangzhou’s core status within the Pearl River Delta and its role in promoting international exchange, while simultaneously showcasing its importance and influence in the global economy.

6 STRATEGIC SUGGESTIONS FOR EXTERNAL PUBLICITY

6.1 Future-oriented Strategy of Guangzhou City Image Building

While domestic mainstream media have constructed an city image of Guangzhou characterized by distinct locational advantages, immense economic potential, abundant business opportunities, and a high quality of life for its residents, it is crucial to recognize that the Greater Bay Area’s geographical strengths and economic prowess represent the existing foundation for development, not the entirety of its objectives. The *Guangzhou 2049 City Development Strategic Plan* proposes building Guangzhou into an international metropolis oriented towards the Bay Area, guided by the spatial principles of “Maritime Expansion to the South, Riverfront Advancement to the East, Quality Enhancement of the Old City, and Demonstration by Key Poles.” Compared to this comprehensive and multi-dimensional vision for the Greater Bay Area, the image of Guangzhou portrayed through “other-shaped” discourse in *People’s Daily* and *China Daily*,

while broad, still possesses significant room for development. A richer tapestry of city connotation awaits discovery and reporting by media outlets engaging in this “other-shaping” practice.

Based on the foregoing research, the following recommendations are proposed for shaping and communicating Guangzhou’s international city image in the future:

(1) Deepen Regional Integration: Strengthen cooperation and exchange with Hong Kong and Macao, promoting regional economic integration and highlighting the collective developmental advantages of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

(2) Highlight Emerging Sectors and Events[14]: Sustain focus on and reporting of Guangzhou’s emerging industries, such as high-tech and biomedicine, through relevant international events and sporting competitions, to enhance its global visibility.

(3) Building distinctive cultural event brands: Organize cultural events such as the China (Guangzhou) International Documentary Festival, Guangzhou International Art Expo, and Guangzhou Performing Arts Fair to amplify their window effect. Enhancing cultural brands like Guangzhou Culture Week, strengthening exchanges and cooperation with international sister cities, and promoting the export of Lingnan’s excellent culture overseas.

The Guangzhou government should work to improve both the internal and external opinion environment, mobilizing a diverse array of communication actors to collectively explore Guangzhou’s historical, cultural, and social narratives. This effort should showcase its humanistic landscape and elevate the city’s overall image. Concurrently, it is essential to cultivate iconic cultural symbols for Guangzhou, allowing their substantial brand value and communication potential to drive the development of the city’s overall standing.

This insight guides us in undertaking comprehensive city-wide planning, expanding the city spatial structure, and formulating seven strategic initiatives based on the dual pillars of high-quality development and the needs of the people. The proposal is to build Guangzhou into an open city, an coastal city, a hub city, an innovative city, a livable city, a cultured city, and a resilient city.

7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the major findings of the research will be presented firstly. Besides, the limitations and suggestions for future study will also be discussed.

7.1 Major Findings

This study innovatively adopts a research method that combines corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis, and strictly follows the critical discourse analysis to systematically sort out and analyze news reports, special comments, and other texts about Guangzhou from mainstream Chinese media (with *People’s Daily* and *China Daily* as the core corpus sources). Starting from two core perspectives: high-frequency word statistics and keyword semantic networks, this study deeply analyzes the linguistic construction characteristics of Guangzhou’s city image in the discourse of mainstream Chinese media.

The research results show that in the discursive context of “self-shaping”, the image of Guangzhou constructed by mainstream Chinese media presents a multidimensional and three-dimensional characteristic system: at the level of city temperament, it highlights its “open and inclusive” cultural heritage (such as the frequent reports on the Canton Fair and international sister city exchange activities, reflecting its absorption and integration of diverse cultures) and its “vibrant” development momentum (such as the focus on Guangzhou’s technology innovation enterprises and emerging industrial parks, showing the vigorous vitality of the city’s economy and technology); at the level of functional positioning, it emphasizes its role as an “international hub” (as one of the core cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, it is a key intersection of people, logistics, and information flow within the region, and an important gateway for China’s interaction with global trade, economy, and culture. For example, the Canton Fair, as the “No. 1 Exhibition in China”, has long undertaken the core function of Sino-foreign economic and trade docking); at the level of development focus, it not only highlights the emphasis on “economic development, technological innovation, and trade exchanges” (such as in-depth reports on Guangzhou’s Artificial Intelligence and Digital Economy Pilot Zone and the industrial layout of Nansha Free Trade Zone) but also pays attention to the “temperature” of “livelihood welfare and cultural exchanges” (such as continuous attention to Guangzhou’s old community renovation, intangible cultural heritage inheritance projects, and international cultural festival activities).

As a core growth pole and strategic hub city in southern China, the international communication of Guangzhou’s city image has irreplaceable value: from a regional perspective, it is the “adhesive” for the coordinated development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, promoting industrial linkage and cultural integration among cities in the bay area; from an international perspective, it is a “frontier window” for China to participate in global governance and carry out international cooperation. The communication effect of its image directly affects the international community’s perception of China’s city development model and cultural charm. Therefore, accurately grasping and effectively enhancing the international communication power of Guangzhou’s city image is of great practical significance for telling Chinese city stories well and shaping a good international image of the country.

7.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Study

This study also has certain limitations. In terms of corpus selection, while covering multiple influential mainstream

media outlets, it may still have failed to fully encompass all relevant news reports, resulting in some omissions. During the analysis process, although various analytical dimensions were employed, the consideration of complex linguistic phenomena and contextual factors might not have been comprehensive enough.

Future research can be conducted in the following directions: First, expand the corpus sources by incorporating not only mainstream media news reports but also content from social media and online forums, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how Guangzhou's city image is presented and disseminated across different communication channels. Second, integrate multiple research methods such as utilizing big data analytics to deeply mine and analyze massive news reports, while incorporating field research and interviews to obtain richer primary data, thereby enhancing the reliability and persuasiveness of the study. Third, strengthen research on how different audience groups perceive and understand Guangzhou's city image, exploring how factors like audience background, values, and educational levels influence their interpretation of news reports and formation of city image cognition, providing more targeted recommendations for precise communication of Guangzhou's city image.

Through the continuous improvement of research methods and in-depth expansion of research fields, we are expected to have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the mechanisms and influencing factors of urban image construction, and provide more practical reference and guidance for the image shaping and communication of Guangzhou and other cities.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

FUNDING

The 14th Five-Year Plan Project of Guangzhou Municipal Philosophy and Social Science, "Research on the Media Construction and Communication of Guangzhou's International Image" (Project No. 2023GZGJ230). National Innovative Training Project for Undergraduates of South China Agricultural University, "Corpus-Based Study on Media Construction of Guangzhou's International Image" (Project No.: 202410564042).

REFERENCES

- [1] Hu Qiao, Zhang Chao, Sun Xia. A corpus-based study on the international image of Shenyang as a new industrial city: a case study of China Daily reports. *Modern English*, 2023(24): 55-57.
- [2] Lu Yitong, Pang Qiaochu. The discourse construction of Nanning's city image in overseas mainstream English media: a discourse analysis based on the NOW corpus. *Language and Culture Studies*, 2025, 33(05): 231-235.
- [3] Asmaa Ramil. The City in Words across Time: A Corpus-Based Literary Approach Using Istanbul as a Case Study. *Sosyal ve Kültürel Araştırmalar Dergisi (SKAD)*, 2024, 10(21): 260-279.
- [4] Hu Kaibao, Tian Xujun. A study on the image of Chinese diplomacy in the English translation of Chinese diplomatic discourse: a corpus-based study. *Foreign Languages in China*, 2018, 15(06): 79-88.
- [5] Li Zhiying, Li Weibing, Deng Fei. A Corpus-Based Comparative Study of Guangzhou's International Image in Chinese and American Media Discourse. *Journalism and Communication*, 2021(21): 12-15.
- [6] Yang Kai. New Ideas for External Communication of Urban Image—Based on a Survey of Foreigners' Impressions of Guangzhou and Media Usage Habits. *Nanjing Social Sciences*, 2010(07): 117-122.
- [7] Huang Yajun. The image of Quanzhou in overseas English media: a corpus-based critical discourse analysis. *Journal of Fujian Technical Teachers College*, 2022, 40(01): 73-81.
- [8] Tian Chi, Fu Tao. A Study on the External Communication of Urban Image by Mainstream Media—Taking the Eight-Page News Design of China Daily as an Example. *Journalism Enthusiast*, 2024(03): 84-86.
- [9] Wenxinxin Qin. A Study on the Construction of Beijing City Image in the Mainstream Media of English-Speaking Countries. *Advances in Social Science and Culture*, 2025(4).
- [10] Thomas N Huckin. Critical discourse analysis. *Functional approaches to written text: Classroom applications*, 1997: 87-92.
- [11] Ting Y. A research on Korea's national image framing in the People's Daily (2009-2019): Under the frame of CDA. *Asian Journal for Public Opinion Research*, 2020(2): 126-143.
- [12] Dalia Gavriely-Nuri. Cultural approach to CDA. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 2012, 9 (1): 77-85.
- [13] Thao Le, Quỳnh Lê. Critical discourse analysis: An overview. *University of Tasmania*, 2009: 23-29.
- [14] Eli Avraham. Media strategies for improving an unfavorable city image. *Cities*, 2004, 21 (6): 471-479.