The changing image of China abroad as constructed by the Turkish mainstream media

--Analysis of the Hürriyet coverage in China based on 2019 and 2021

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Abstract. National image is an important part of national "soft power"[1], and studying China's image abroad is of great practical significance to enhance and improve China's image, among which international public opinion is a direct factor affecting China's image abroad [2]. Located at the crossroads of Eurasia, Turkey's unique geopolitical situation has created a special position as a major power wrestling for power and discourse [3], which has a unique and important role in reflecting international public opinion and studying the country's image abroad. At present, most domestic studies focus on Western English-language media, but less on Turkish media. In this context, this paper will study the changes and reasons for China's image abroad from the perspective of the Turkish newspaper Hürriyet through word frequency analysis, and analyze the current situation of the construction of China's image abroad in Turkey.

Keywords: China-related coverage; national image; issue analysis; overseas construction; change

1. Introduction

When the outbreak of the new epidemic hit the global economy in 2020, China built its own system to combat the epidemic [4] and took the lead in resuming work and production. Against the backdrop of the downward pressure on the global economy, China's GDP grew by 2.3% over the previous year, making it the only major economy in the world to achieve positive economic growth in that year [5] and further enhance its national strength. At the same time, however, the Western media, led by the US, has been attacking and eroding China's national image by promoting the "China virus theory" during this period. Under the severe international situation, how to overcome the "deficit" in information flow between China and the West and shorten the "gap" between the Chinese and Western discourse [6] has become a topic that must be faced after the outbreak of the epidemic. stressed the need to strengthen and improve international communication and "strive to build a credible, lovable and respectable image of China" during the 30th collective study of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee [7]. China needs to find out the omissions and deficiencies in international image building abroad by understanding other countries' reports on China, to grasp the initiative of image building and present a true, objective, and vivid image of China to the world.

State image is the image of a country in the international community, which consists of two perspectives: the "self-centered" and the "other-centered" state image, the latter relying on the evaluation and overall impression of the country by the media and the public of other countries [8]. Constructivism sees the image of a country as a manifestation or reflection of the impressions given to a country in its interactions with other countries [9]. The image of a country is not only a one-way linear causal relationship with national strength but is also closely related to the interaction and cooperation between two countries [10]. Especially in the post-epidemic era, international communication relies heavily on online digital platforms [11] and international news flow is a major factor in shaping the image of the state [12]. While the Internet facilitates digital public diplomacy among countries, the othering and self-shaping of the state's image have become more dependent on international news reports mediated by the Internet, and the transmutation of China's international image is directly reflected in the portrayal and shaping of the state's image by overseas media.

However, the focus of domestic research is still on the English-language media, and research on other language media is still lacking. The world power structure is now transforming, with middle-ranking countries having more room for autonomy in foreign affairs and developing countries, including those in the Middle East, seeking to establish a more autonomous diplomatic strategy [13], which has also had an impact on local public opinion, which has been dominated by Western media for many years. The Middle East is an important transportation hub for global geopolitics [14], with Turkey taking on more special status as the main battleground for the major powers' public opinion wrestling [15]. As one of the mainstream newspapers in Turkey, Hürriyet, while reflecting Turkey's own strategic orientation and political positioning, is also influencing its audience's evaluation of China, and a content analysis of the newspaper can provide a reference for the formulation of strategies to enhance China's image abroad under the new situation.

From the period before the outbreak to the joint deepening of cooperation in the context of the epidemic, the changes in China's image abroad constructed by the Turkish media Hürriyet in recent years are studied under a constructivist perspective, and suggestions are made for effective foreign communication and construction of China's image abroad.

2. Word frequency analysis of the content of Hürriyet's reports on China

Hürriyet is one of the leading newspapers in Turkey and one of the major newspapers in the Middle East, Europe, and the Balkans. It was once the highest circulation newspaper in Turkey and has sufficient news traffic and media influence in Turkey. This article uses word frequency analysis to search for the word "Çin" (China) in the web interface of Hürriyet newspaper in a specific time frame, and crawls for stories mentioning China from 1 October to 31 December 2019 and from 1 October to 31 December 2021, with the number of articles The articles were then filtered to remove articles that were not related to China or were mistakenly selected because of the preposition "için", resulting in 761 and 560 reports respectively.

Table 1. 30-bit word frequency table from October 1 to December 31, 2019

Serial number	Reference to words	Word Frequency	Serial number	Reference to words	Word Frequency
1	Ticaret (Trade)	553	16	Eğitim (Education)	188
2	Küresel (worldwide)	364	17	Petrol (oil)	183
3	Hong Kong (Hong Kong)	326	18	Gelecek (future)	182
4	Başkan (Chair)	322	19	Yatırım (Investment)	180
5	Dünya (World)	314	20	Destek (support, support)	169
6	Analistler (analysts)	277	21	Merkez (center, institute, bureau)	165
7	Değer (value)	275	22	Yapay (artificial, artificial)	164
8	Uluslararası (International)	245	23	5G	154
9	Yönelik (aimed at, oriented towards...)	242	24	Uygur (Uyghur, Uighur)	154
10	Ekonomik (economically)	238	25	Teknoloji (Technology)	149
11	Birlikte (together)	234	26	Teknik (Technical)	147
12	Enerji (energy)	232	27	İşaret (indication, sign, symbol)	144
13	İhracat (exit)	210	28	Puan (fractions)	142
14	Büyüme (expansion, growth)	200	29	Huawei	141
15	Para (money)	188	30	Sanayi (Industrial)	138

Table 2. 30-bit word frequency table from 1 October to 31 December 2021

Serial number	Reference to words	Word Frequency	Serial number	Reference to words	Word Frequency
1	Başkan (Chair)	369	16	Kendi (own, own)	164
2	Küresel (worldwide)	346	17	Yol (road)	159
3	Enerji (energy)	313	18	Sosyal (social, socially)	158
4	Uluslararası (International)	286	19	Sanayi (Industrial)	157
5	Kovid-19 (Neocoronavirus pneumonia)	254	20	Vaka (event, phenomenon, case)	154
6	Yönelik (aimed at, oriented towards...)	230	21	İklim (climate)	153
7	Nükleer (nuclear, nuclear weapons)	209	22	Doğal (natural)	150
8	Aşı (vaccines)	192	23	Destek (support, support)	144
9	Devlet (Government)	177	24	Hava (Air, Weather)	144
10	Para (money)	177	25	Tayvan (Taiwan)	142
11	Sağlık (Health)	177	26	Üretim (production, products)	139
12	Değer (value)	177	27	İhracat (exit)	135
13	Ticaret (Trade)	177	28	Gelecek (future, future)	133
14	Askeri (soldier, soldier)	174	29	Uzay (Space)	133
15	Ekonomik (economic, economics)	169	30	Güçlü (strong)	132

The analysis of high-frequency words shows, firstly, that the Turkish mainstream media is focusing on more areas of interest in China, with the top 30 high-frequency words in 2021 being added to the list of epidemic, military and environmental terms. Secondly, the focus of the Turkish media has changed compared to 2019, with a shift in focus from science, technology, and education to epidemics, military, energy, and the environment in 2021, while economics and politics have been the main focus areas. Meanwhile, the internal affairs of China have been a key topic of interest in Turkey, with the high-frequency words "Hong Kong" and "Uighurs" in 2019 and "Taiwan" in 2021. The Turkish mainstream media continues to pay attention to the internal affairs of China. In addition, the word "powerful", which was not used in 2019, appears in the high-frequency words for 2021, mainly in the military, economic and scientific fields, reflecting the Turkish media's recognition of China's national strength.

3. Analysis of the content issues of Hürriyet's coverage of China

3.1 Shift in coverage from a focus on the United States to a focus on China

The decrease in the number of China-related stories between October and December 2019 compared to the number in 2021 is because the US-China trade war became the focus of global attention in 2019 and was frequently mentioned as a backdrop for various economic-related stories. While Turkish media tended to focus more on the US side than the Chinese side at this time when both sides were the main protagonists of coverage, there was a shift in the focus of the country's media

towards China during the same months in 2021, with an increasing focus on developments in China. There were 16 stories, accounting for 57% of the same type of coverage.

Turkey's eastward trend has been growing since the 1990s [16]. Since the CZP came to power, Turkey has become more independent in its foreign policy and is not willing to continue to follow the US [17][16]. In recent years, the US and Turkey have become more conflicted, with disagreements over geopolitical issues in the Middle East [18], successive diplomatic conflicts, escalating economic and trade frictions, and deteriorating security relations [19]. In contrast, Sino-Turkish relations have been warming up in recent years amid a complex international context and political environment [20]. Turkey's policy towards China has been heavily influenced by the international situation, and after realizing its exclusion from the European Economic Community and marginalization by the West, Turkey has been trying to find a new political balance in other parts of the world, with China emerging as a potential partner [21]. Since 2015, China and Turkey have been cooperating more and more closely in various areas such as tourism, economy, and culture: China and Turkey have been actively cooperating in tourism and have organized the "Year of Turkish Tourism" in China in 2018 [22]; by the end of 2020, bilateral trade in goods between China and Turkey reached USD 24.08 billion and Chinese investment in Turkey increased by 338.3% [23]; four Confucius Institutes have been opened in Turkey so far**.** In the face of the epidemic, China and Turkey have provided each other with medical supplies, and China has supplied the new crown vaccine to Turkey [24] and is preparing for joint production [25]. According to Turkish scholars, the cooperation between China and Turkey in different fields since 2002 has created a nested network of cooperation, and the two countries are "interdependent and co-evolving", despite the difference in their market size and economic volume, and "this interdependence is asymmetrical in the economic sphere " [26].

After the outbreak of the new crown epidemic, Turkey's GDP in 2020 has declined by 24.82% compared to 2013, although it has increased compared to 2019 [27]. In 2021, Turkey's economy has been in turmoil even more times. In the same period, China has made successive achievements in the prevention and control of the epidemic and economic development, its comprehensive national power has been increasing, it has taken the lead in the double push to resume production and prevention and control of the epidemic [28], and it has also provided assistance and support to countries around the world, all these initiatives and results have pushed the Turkish media to focus on China even more.

3.2 Concerns about epidemic management, vaccine development in China

The Turkish media focus on the epidemic situation in China, the development of vaccines and drugs, prevention and control measures, and Chinese aid to other countries, as well as on the research of the Chinese scientific community and the mention of China in global epidemic reports.

Amid the epidemic, the Turkish media had a variety of channels to obtain news about China. In addition to the relevant authorities and the Chinese media, they also paid close attention to the information released by ordinary citizens through Chinese social media. However, due to the limitations of the online environment, it sometimes happens that individuals are taken for generalities, rumors are reported as facts, or even exaggerated narratives are reported, which affects the authenticity of China's image-building abroad.

The Turkish media has been continuously concerned about China's epidemic preparedness measures, with both positive and negative comments, recognizing the speed, strength, and effectiveness of the Chinese government's response. However, at the end of 2021, when the epidemic rebounded in China, the Turkish media expressed doubts about whether the "zero transmission" policy would ultimately achieve the expected policy results, reflecting the fact that the Turkish media's perception of China's epidemic control measures is result-oriented, and that the difference in social systems means that they do not fundamentally recognize the superiority of the socialist system. The lack of institutional foresight about the forms and advantages of China's epidemic prevention measures.

At the same time, the Turkish media took note of the "Infodemic" , as reported in the article "Facebook's Covid-19 test", where the social software Facebook irresponsibly spread misinformation

about the epidemic, "containing conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus, dangerous suggestions about inappropriate behavior, and unreliable reports about the vaccine. "It contains conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus, dangerous suggestions about inappropriate behavior, and unreliable reports about the vaccine." Between October and December 2021, the Turkish media maintained a degree of media independence and journalistic objectivity on such topics by referring to the source of the new coronavirus as "the virus that first 'appeared' in Wuhan, China".

On the whole, the attention paid by the Turkish media to topics related to the epidemic in China echoes the social concerns of the country: it expects more effective epidemic prevention measures and the popularisation of more effective medication and has a more objective attitude towards the evaluation of China-related topics. There is still a long way to go.

3.3 Close attention to the internal affairs of China

The deliberate violence caused by the opposition and radical violence in Hong Kong in 2019 [29] and the US smear campaign against China's policy on border control have made both "Hong Kong" and "Uighurs" the focus of attention in the Turkish media. The conflict and friction between the US and China over Taiwan in 2021 has also led to "Taiwan" is mentioned frequently in the Turkish media.

When reporting on the Hong Kong and Taiwan issues, the Turkish media mainly took a third-party view and paid attention, reporting mostly on the objective rather than commentary. For Taiwan issues, the news sources focus on both governmental and domestic news. However, in contrast to the coverage of Hong Kong and Taiwan, Turkish media coverage of the Uyghurs is strongly biased: the coverage extends from a single account of events to the statements made by the leaders of Turkish organizations. In addition, the Turkish media quoted extensively and one-sidedly from the Western media, mentioning the Chinese media only twice and the Chinese Foreign Ministry's response four times, deliberately ignoring the Chinese reports and statements.

The idea that both Uighurs and Turks are descendants of the ancient Turks is the basis of the Turkish media's reporting on such issues, which is a complete distortion of history and a poison of pan-Turkism [30]. After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the illusion of pan-Turkism was explicitly renounced [31], but today pan-Turkism still exists and has even become a social complex, due to the deliberate connivance of the Turkish government [32] and the deliberate ideological and cultural design of the country's politicians [33]. It is against this socio-ideological background that the Turkish media have shown a strong ideological and subjective bias in their coverage of the "Uighurs", unwilling to trust the reports of the official Chinese media and the clarifications of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, preferring to understand China and the "truth" from the perspective of the Western media. "The Turkish media defines its role in the linguistic narrative as that of a "concerned and advocate of the correct position" and the Uighur people as "co-religionists and co-religionists to be rescued " [34], which reinforces the misperceptions of its audience and deepens the rift in friendship between the two countries, while also reflecting Turkey's image of itself as the leader of the Muslim and Turkic world and the center of power in Eurasia [35].

4. The current situation of constructing China's image abroad in Turkey

In the perspective of developing countries like Turkey, which do not fully belong to the Western camp, the trend of the transformation of our national image abroad is developing for the better, the international influence is gradually increasing, the national strength is being recognized and the voice of China is being noticed and heard, but there are currently unfavorably influencing factors in the process of building our image abroad.

1. Cultural differences. Cultural differences create a gap in understanding. Different languages and scripts, histories and cultures, and religious beliefs differ greatly between countries, making it difficult to accurately translate and correctly understand Chinese expressions in the context of traditional Chinese culture. The Confucius Institute can be used to promote humanistic exchanges

and to bridge communities [36] and language talents to achieve a mutual appreciation of civilizations and bridge cultural differences.

2. Ideology and the position of other countries. On the premise of not involving sensitive topics in the country, the Turkish media treats the Chinese and Western media in a more objective perspective, but once sensitive topics are touched on, they will still "take sides" according to their own interests and social ideology, affecting the authenticity of the construction of China's image abroad.

3. Media environment and media landscape. The world media landscape is now undergoing profound changes, with new media gradually becoming the center of international opinion struggles and Chinese social media coming under the spotlight. Internet rumors, inaccurate news, and irrational comments by netizens are having a direct negative impact on the construction of China's image abroad. China, therefore, needs clearer cyberspace, and the official media needs to strengthen its guidance, cultivate media literacy among internet users, and at the same time strengthen its control over cyberspace. In the battle for international public opinion, China also needs to strengthen its own ability to communicate its discourse.

5. Conclusion

This article discusses the changes in China's image abroad from the perspective of the Turkish media. China and Turkey have a deep and lasting relationship [37], but there are still certain misunderstandings and biases in Turkey's understanding of China. China needs to strengthen its comprehensive communication with Turkey and launch multi-level and multi-disciplinary cooperation so that Turkish media will see China squarely in the context of cooperation and communication, and also need to clearly express China's position through economic contacts or political discourse propaganda, weakening the influence of ideology. At the same time, to avoid the unilateral construction of China's image abroad by foreign media, China should also make good use of domestic and foreign social media to strengthen its discursive power and to have the ability to construct itself in the international public opinion arena.

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