

A Study of China's Image in Vietnam's Nhan Dan (People's Daily): A Case Study of China-Related Coverage

Fang Lv¹, Qiang Bao^{2*}

¹International Culture and Education College, Guangxi Normal University, Guilin 541004, Guangxi, China

²School of Marxism, Guilin University, Guilin 541004, Guangxi, China

*Corresponding author: Qiang Bao, 896802994@qq.com

Copyright: © 2025 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: This article takes all the China-related reports in Vietnam's Nhan Dan from 2016 to 2020 as the research object, and discusses the national image of China constructed by Vietnam's mainstream media from the aspects of the number of reports and the content of reports around the news theme. The study found that Nhan Dan gave China all-round attention, and reported extensively on key issues and social life related to China's politics, economy, and military affairs. The positive and negative images of China's national image presented in the reports coexist. The reports reflect the attitude of Nhan Dan as a mainstream media in Vietnam. The reports not only emphasize China's important position in international affairs, but also hold an attitude of risk awareness and threat vigilance.

Keywords: Vietnam; Nhan Dan newspaper; China's image; China-related reports

Online publication: May 22, 2025

1. Introduction

Vietnam and China, sharing contiguous territories and a long history of interactions, have maintained complex bilateral relations characterized by dramatic transformations. Their historical trajectory evolved from ancient times marked by alternating reverence and resistance toward the "Celestial Empire to the north," through the modern era of "comrades and brothers" revolutionary camaraderie, to abrupt transitions as "most immediate adversaries," before realigning as "exemplars of socialist reform and opening-up." This relationship has witnessed profound oscillations and intricate detours. Currently, the two nations are advancing their Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership, actively exploring synergies between China's Belt and Road Initiative and Vietnam's Two Corridors and One Circle development framework, ushering in new collaborative opportunities. However, challenges persist due to sensitive issues like the South China Sea disputes, with political mutual trust remaining a critical impediment to deeper cooperation.

As a major Asian power, China's national image constitutes a pivotal element in Asian international

relations. Foreign media narratives directly shape domestic Vietnamese perceptions and attitudes toward China. Therefore, analyzing China's national image construction in Vietnamese mainstream media holds significant practical value for enhancing political trust, cultivating a favorable international discourse environment, and propelling collaborative development between the two nations.

2. Data source and research methodology

2.1. Data source

Established on March 11, 1951, Nhan Dan (The People) newspaper, the official organ of the Communist Party of Vietnam, serves as a paradigmatic representation of mainstream Vietnamese media with significant representativeness, authority, and influence. Selecting it as a research object allows for an accurate understanding of the construction of China's national image through its editorial stance and value orientation. Due to difficulties in obtaining print editions, this study focuses on the website (<https://cn.nhandan.vn/>) reports related to China from January 2016 to December 2020, conducting both quantitative and qualitative analyses to examine the patterns and trends in how China's national image is constructed in Vietnamese media discourse.

2.2. Research methodology

First, utilizing web-based literature collection tools with configured parameters, all China-related reports published on the Nhan Dan (People's Daily) website between January 2016 and December 2020 were downloaded. Subsequently, the collected articles were categorized based on quantitative metrics (e.g., publication frequency) and qualitative dimensions (e.g., thematic content, tone, and key topics). Corresponding classification tables adhering to academic tabulation standards were constructed, including components such as table numbering, concise titles, aligned numerical data, and explanatory footnotes. Finally, systematic data analysis was performed using methodologies such as descriptive statistics, content analysis, and temporal trend evaluation, culminating in empirically supported conclusions.

3. Statistics and analysis

A total of 1,268 China-related articles were retrieved from the Nhan Dan (People's Daily) website between 2016 and 2020. After removing 32 duplicate entries, the final sample comprised 1,236 articles. These articles were categorized into five thematic groups based on content analysis: (1) Politics/Diplomacy, (2) Economy, (3) Science, Education, Culture, Sports, and Public Health, (4) National Defense/Military Affairs, and (5) Other. Due to the sensitivity and geopolitical significance of South China Sea issues, articles addressing this topic were extracted from the broader "Politics/Diplomacy" category for independent statistical analysis. Quantitative analysis of annual and thematic distributions (see **Table 1** and **Figure 1**) revealed that the sampled articles reflect Nhan Dan's institutional role as Vietnam's state-run newspaper in propagating the Party's theoretical frameworks, policy directives, and strategic decisions, while disseminating critical information across domestic and international domains. The thematic emphasis further highlighted the Vietnamese mainstream media's focused attention on China's engagements in international affairs and its political-economic developments.

Table 1. Distribution of China-related articles by thematic category in Nhan Dan (People’s Daily) website, 2016–2020

Year	Politics /diplomacy	South China Sea issues	Economy	Science, education, culture, sports & public health	National defense /military affairs	Other	Annual total/ percentage
2016	90	55	27	13	30	4	219/17.72%
2017	120	24	48	15	25	0	232/18.77%
2018	90	13	96	26	18	6	249/20.14%
2019	84	7	149	17	18	0	275/22.25%
2020	35	1	202	12	11	0	261/21.12%
Total /percentage	419 /33.91%	100 /8.09%	522 /42.23%	83 /6.72%	102 /8.25%	10 /0.80%	1,236/100%

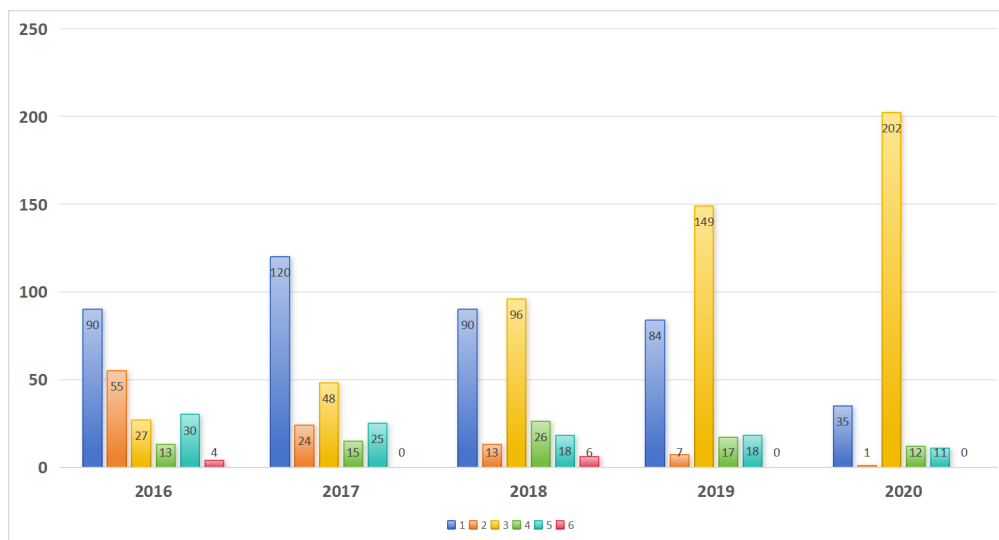


Figure 1. Distribution of China-related articles by thematic category in Nhan Dan (People’s Daily) website, 2016–2020 (Explanation: Politics/Diplomacy_1; South China Sea Issues_2; Economy_3; Science, Education, Culture, Sports & Public Health_4; National Defense/Military Affairs_5; Other_6)

3.1. Political/diplomatic news reporting

In the coverage related to China on the Nhan Dan (People’s Daily) website from 2016 to 2020, political/diplomatic news constituted 419 articles, accounting for 33.91% of the total China-related reporting over the five-year period. This category ranked second in terms of total coverage volume. Based on content, these reports can be classified into four subcategories: “Exchanges between National Leaders,” “Interactions among Central Ministries and Commissions,” “Engagements between Provincial/Municipal Governments,” and “Non-Governmental Exchanges.” The article counts and percentage distributions of these subcategories within the political/diplomatic news category are detailed in **Table 2**.

For annual article counts, from 2016 to 2020, annual reporting volumes exceeded 80 articles, while the 2020 count dropped to 35 articles, attributable to reduced bilateral engagements due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of thematic distribution, from 2016 to 2020, official-level interactions between China and Vietnam significantly outpaced non-governmental exchanges, with 91.88% of articles focusing on official engagements. Among official interactions, those involving central ministries and commissions dominated

political/diplomatic coverage, accounting for 52.5% of such reports.

Regarding content focus, bilateral relations between China and Vietnam emerged as a central theme, with cooperation and development constituting primary reporting priorities. Frequent high-level leadership exchanges guided bilateral relations, driving close consultations at the apex.

Notably, the 220 articles on Interactions among Central Ministries and Commissions highlighted concerted efforts to implement consensus from leadership meetings and advance cross-sectoral collaboration; the 91 articles on Engagements between Provincial/Municipal Governments documented project-specific negotiations between Vietnamese localities and Chinese counterparts, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, Zhejiang, Hunan, Jiangsu, Guangxi, Guizhou, Yunnan, Jiangxi, Sichuan, Chongqing, Hebei, Tibet, and Hong Kong; the 34 articles on Non-Governmental Exchanges reflected robust growth in grassroots interactions.

Overall observations show that the reporting consistently emphasized consolidating traditional Sino-Vietnamese friendship, enhancing political mutual trust, and aligning development strategies. Core narratives prioritized synergy between the Belt and Road Initiative and Vietnam’s “Two Corridors and One Economic Circle” framework to upgrade practical cooperation, fostering a mutually beneficial comprehensive partnership. The high reporting density underscores Vietnamese mainstream media’s acute focus on political-diplomatic dynamics, mirroring the positive trajectory of bilateral relations and tangible progress in the China-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership.

Table 2. Distribution of political/diplomatic news articles in China-related reporting on Vietnam’s Nhan Dan website (2016–2020)

Year	Exchanges between National Leaders	Interactions among Central Ministries and Commissions	Engagements between Provincial/Municipal Governments	Non-Governmental Exchanges	Annual total/ percentage
2016	14	46	24	6	90/21.48%
2017	26	64	21	9	120/28.64%
2018	10	53	18	9	90/21.48%
2019	17	43	16	8	84/20.05%
2020	7	14	12	2	35/8.35%
Total/percentage	74/17.66%	220/52.5%	91/21.72%	34/8.12%	419/100%

3.2. South China Sea issues in news reports

From 2016 to 2020, the Vietnamese People’s Daily website published 100 articles related to the South China Sea (referred to by Vietnam as the “East Sea”), accounting for 8.09% of its total China-related coverage during this five-year period. This category ranked fourth in overall news volume. These articles can be classified into five thematic categories based on content: (1) Propaganda to Vietnamese citizens regarding sovereignty claims over the South China Sea (termed the “East Sea” by Vietnam). (2) Vietnam’s opposition to China’s actions in the South China Sea. (3) International conference discussions on South China Sea issues. (4) Perspectives from other organizations on South China Sea disputes. (5) Sino-Vietnamese maritime cooperation consultations for joint development. The distribution of article counts and percentage representation within this category is detailed in **Table 3**.

From the Annual Report Count Perspective, the year 2016 witnessed the highest number of reports,

totaling 55 articles, accounting for 55% of the total coverage of this category. However, from 2016 to 2020, the volume of reports exhibited a year-on-year exponential decline. This trend reflects the shifting media focus driven by geopolitical hotspots. The Sino-Vietnamese “Haiyang Shiyou 981” oil rig standoff in May 2014 and the Philippines v. China South China Sea Arbitration Case (2013–2016) elevated the South China Sea issue to a high-priority political concern among China, Vietnam, the Philippines, and other regional stakeholders. Nhan Dan (People’s Daily) demonstrated intense scrutiny of the South China Sea issue through its frequent reporting in 2016, which also underscored Vietnam’s political stance and attitude. Between 2017 and 2018, Chinese and Vietnamese national leaders conducted three reciprocal visits, further shaping bilateral dynamics.

In 2019, Vietnamese national leaders visited China twice. In 2020, Chinese and Vietnamese leaders engaged in three telephonic exchanges. Over these four years, frequent high-level reciprocal visits emphasized enhancing political mutual trust, managing disputes, and deepening mutually beneficial cooperation across diverse fields. Bilateral cooperation and development became the focal point of Nhan Dan (People’s Daily) coverage, while attention to the South China Sea issue relatively diminished—a shift clearly reflected in the year-on-year decline in related news reports during this period.

From thematic coverage analysis, 95% of news reports focused on Vietnam’s propaganda regarding territorial sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea. 39%: Public education campaigns targeting Vietnamese citizens on Vietnam’s sovereignty claims over the South China Sea. 33%: Coverage of international conferences and perspectives from organizations discussing the South China Sea issue. 20%: Reports opposing China’s actions in the South China Sea. 5% of news reports detailed specific progress in China-Vietnam maritime cooperation and joint development consultations.

From content analysis: The South China Sea issue has transitioned from confrontation to cooperation, with media narratives shifting from large-scale sovereignty-related propaganda to constructive interactions based on bilateral negotiations.

Key strategies include:

Domestically, Vietnam organized exhibitions such as “Paracel and Spratly Islands Belong to Vietnam: Historical and Legal Evidence” to strengthen public education on national territorial sovereignty awareness.

Internationally, Vietnam’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs publicly opposed China’s maritime actions, endorsed the 2016 South China Sea arbitration ruling, amplified negative portrayals of China, and highlighted international support for the arbitration tribunal’s decision to cultivate global solidarity and shape international opinion.

In “China-Vietnam Maritime Cooperation and Joint Development Consultations”:

Reports primarily covered working-group negotiations, emphasizing commitments to implement consensus reached by leaders, avoid actions complicating the situation, and safeguard regional peace and stability.

Analytical conclusions: Despite historical tensions over the South China Sea, both sides are actively addressing maritime disputes through dialogue and consultations, demonstrating a positive trajectory in regional dynamics. The South China Sea remains a sensitive issue impacting bilateral relations and political trust. Upholding the principle of “good-neighborliness and comprehensive strategic partnership,” continued advocacy for “shelving disputes and pursuing joint development” aligns with the shared interests of China, Vietnam, and regional stakeholders. Resolving disputes amicably and maintaining peace in the South China Sea will foster a favorable environment for advancing bilateral cooperation and meeting regional expectations.

Table 3. Thematic distribution of South China Sea-related coverage in China-focused reports on Vietnam's People's Daily website (2016–2020)

Year	Propaganda to Vietnamese citizens on sovereignty claims over the South China Sea	Vietnam's opposition to China's actions in the South China Sea	International conference discussions on South China Sea issues	Perspectives from other organizations on South China Sea disputes	Sino-Vietnamese maritime cooperation consultations for joint development	Annual total/percentage
2016	20	12	5	18	0	55/55%
2017	15	5	4	0	0	24/24%
2018	3	2	2	4	2	13/13%
2019	1	1	2	1	2	7/7%
2020	0	0	0	0	1	1/1%
Total/percentage	39/39%	20/20%	13/13%	23/23%	5/5%	100/100%

3.3. Economic news coverage

From 2016 to 2020, Nhan Dan (People's Daily) published 522 articles on China-related economic affairs, accounting for 42.23% of its total China-focused coverage during this five-year period and ranking first in thematic prevalence. These articles were categorized into three sub-themes: National-Level Economic Cooperation, Provincial/Municipal-Level Economic Cooperation, and VND/RMB Exchange Rate. The annual distribution of articles and their percentage representation within the economic category are detailed in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Distribution of China-related economic news on Nhan Dan (2016–2020)

Year	National-level economic cooperation	Provincial/municipal-level economic cooperation	VND/RMB exchange rate	Annual total/percentage
2016	16	11	0	27/5.17%
2017	28	20	0	48/9.2%
2018	39	13	44	96/18.39%
2019	31	14	104	149/28.54%
2020	27	6	169	202/38.7%
Total/percentage	141/27.01%	64/12.26%	317/60.73%	522/100%

Annual coverage analysis shows that from 2016 to 2020, the volume of economic news increased annually. Despite reduced coverage of bilateral economic cooperation in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall trend reflects growing economic engagement between China and Vietnam. Combined with other thematic coverage, this indicates that favorable political conditions have fostered expansive economic development opportunities.

Thematic coverage analysis shows that China-Vietnam economic cooperation (39.27%): National-level cooperation dominated provincial/municipal-level exchanges; VND/RMB exchange rate (60.73%): Focused on real-time exchange rates and trend analyses.

Content analysis:

National-level economic cooperation: Articles highlighted progress and prospects in bilateral trade,

emphasizing forums, expos, and policy frameworks to enhance economic complementarity, facilitate corporate investment, and advance sustainable development.

Provincial/municipal-level economic cooperation: Coverage detailed partnerships between Vietnamese localities and Chinese regions, including Guangxi, Hunan, Yunnan, Guizhou, Ningxia, Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Shandong, Guangdong, Sichuan, Chongqing, Liaoning, and China's Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan regions. Notable examples include Guangxi: Vietnam's largest trade partner for consecutive years, with robust cooperation in border cities (e.g., Nanning, Dongxing, Baise, Guilin) and Vietnamese provinces (Lang Son, Lao Cai, Cao Bang). Shandong: Collaborated with Vietnam on high-tech agriculture and machinery manufacturing. Hebei: Expanded cooperation in infrastructure and transportation connectivity. Chongqing: Strengthened trade and logistics ties. Hunan, Yunnan, Guizhou, Liaoning: Advanced tourism collaboration. Hong Kong: Explored cooperation in finance, shipping, electronics, and auxiliary industries.

VND/RMB exchange rate: Nhan Dan began reporting VND/RMB rates in 2018, with 317 articles (60.73% of economic coverage). This shift aligns with China's rising global influence, the RMB's growing role in international finance, and deepening Vietnam-China economic integration. Vietnam's heightened focus on RMB exchange dynamics signals recognition of China's economic weight and the currency's systemic importance.

In short, as the world's second-largest economy and top manufacturing/export hub, China's economic trajectory remains globally significant. Currently, China is Vietnam's largest trade partner and second-largest export market, while Vietnam ranks as China's top trade partner in ASEAN and sixth-largest globally. Nhan Dan's 2016–2020 coverage underscores a robust upward trend in bilateral economic cooperation. Despite COVID-19's global disruptions, China-Vietnam trade reached a historic USD 192.2 billion in 2020, marking an 18.7% annual increase. Vietnam's exports to China grew by 22.4%, reflecting resilient and mutually reinforcing economic ties. It has sustained a positive trajectory of growth. Bilateral economic and trade cooperation continues to expand in scale, elevate in structure, and diversify in scope, demonstrating expansive prospects and substantial potential. Robust economic collaboration remains a cornerstone and highlight of bilateral relations.

3.4. Science, education, culture, sports, and health news coverage

From 2016 to 2020, Nhan Dan (People's Daily) published 83 articles on China-related science, education, culture, sports, and health affairs, accounting for 6.72% of its total China-focused coverage during this period and ranking fifth in thematic prevalence. These articles were categorized into five sub-themes: Cultural affairs, Sports, Health, Education, Science and technology. The annual distribution of articles and their percentage representation within this category are detailed in **Table 5**.

Annual coverage analysis: 2018 saw the highest coverage volume (31.33%), while other years remained relatively balanced, averaging approximately 20% of the category's total. Thematic coverage analysis: Cultural affairs (59.04%): Focused on art exhibitions, literary exchanges, and youth cultural festivals, notably the China-Vietnam Youth Gala. Sports (18.07%): Highlighted bilateral sports competitions and friendly matches. Health (14.46%): Covered medical cooperation, with increased attention in 2020 to COVID-19 pandemic prevention and mutual aid in medical supplies. Education (6.02%): Reported collaborations in Marxist ideological education and professional training. Science and technology (2.41%): Detailed joint research in medicine and meteorology.

China-Vietnam exchanges in science, education, culture, sports, and health have diversified significantly,

fostering mutual understanding and strengthening the social foundation for bilateral relations.

Table 5. Distribution of China-related science, education, culture, sports, and health news on Nhan Dan (2016–2020)

Year	Cultural affairs	Sports	Health	Education	Science & tech	Annual total/percentage
2016	12	1	0	0	0	13 / 15.66%
2017	10	0	1	2	2	15/18.07%
2018	16	7	2	1	0	26/31.33%
2019	10	6	1	0	0	17/20.48%
2020	1	1	8	2	0	12/14.46%
Total/percentage	49/59.04%	15/18.07%	12/14.46%	5/6.02%	2/2.41%	83/100%

3.5. Defense and military news coverage

From 2016 to 2020, Nhan Dan published 102 articles on China-related defense and military affairs, accounting for 8.25% of total coverage and ranking third thematically. These articles were categorized into two sub-themes: Enhanced China-Vietnam Defense Cooperation, China-Vietnam Defense-Related Friendship Activities. The annual distribution is detailed in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Distribution of China-related defense and military news on Nhan Dan (2016–2020)

Year	Enhanced defense cooperation	Defense friendship activities	Annual total/percentage
2016	14	16	30/29.41%
2017	7	18	25/24.51%
2018	7	11	18/17.65%
2019	10	8	18/17.65%
2020	2	9	11/10.78%
Total/percentage	40/39.22%	62/60.78%	102/100%

Annual coverage analysis: 2016 had the highest coverage (29.41%), while 2020 saw a decline (10.78%) due to COVID-19 impacts. Thematic coverage analysis: Enhanced defense cooperation (39.22%): Included joint efforts in combating cross-border crime, drug control, border/maritime patrols, counter-terrorism drills, search-and-rescue operations, and pandemic response. Defense friendship activities (60.78%): Featured strategic security dialogues, naval visits, coast guard exchanges, and officer interactions. In summary, China and Vietnam share a commitment to regional peace and stability. Strengthening defense cooperation deepens mutual trust, preserves traditional friendship, and aligns with the long-term interests of both nations.

3.6. Miscellaneous news coverage

From 2016 to 2020, Nhan Dan published 10 articles classified as miscellaneous, accounting for 0.8% of total coverage and ranking sixth thematically. 2016 (4 articles): Covered the Red Cross Society of China's donations to Vietnamese flood victims, Vietnamese rescue of Chinese fishing boats, and China's water discharge to the Mekong River. 2018 (6 articles): Reported earthquakes in Yunnan and Hualian (China's Taiwan region) and flood disasters in both countries. Other years: No coverage.

4. Conclusion and prospects

This study analyzed the thematic distribution of China-related articles published on Nhan Dan (People's Daily) website from 2016 to 2020. Data illustrate the annual article counts, percentage representation, and overarching trends across thematic categories. The research spans 2016–2020, with a total corpus of 1,236 articles. Key findings include: Economic coverage dominated. Economic articles accounted for 42.23% of total coverage over five years, the highest among all categories, indicating the centrality of economic issues in Nhan Dan's China-related discourse. Political-diplomatic coverage remained stable. Political-diplomatic articles constituted 33.91% of total coverage, reflecting sustained attention to China's political and diplomatic affairs. South China Sea coverage declined sharply. Articles on the South China Sea decreased from 55 in 2016 to 1 in 2020, signaling diminished editorial focus on this issue. Defense-military coverage stabilized. Defense-related articles maintained an 8.25% share, demonstrating consistent reporting on military affairs.

4.1. China's national image in Nhan Dan's coverage

From 2016 to 2020, Nhan Dan portrayed China through both positive and negative lenses.

4.1.1. Positive image

The newspaper constructed China as a politically robust powerhouse with efficient governance, lauding achievements in national governance, socialist institutional reforms, and the Communist Party's leadership capabilities. A dynamic economic powerhouse, emphasizing rapid GDP growth, structural optimization, technological innovation, and advancements in infrastructure, logistics, renewable energy, and high-tech industries. Articles highlighted China's role as Vietnam's largest trade partner for 13 consecutive years and its contributions to Vietnam's socio-economic development. A benevolent neighbor, frequently reporting China's assistance to Vietnam in disaster relief (e.g., floods) and COVID-19 pandemic response (e.g., medical aid).

4.1.2. Negative image

Critical portrayals focused on two dimensions: (1) Economic concerns: Articles criticized environmental degradation linked to rapid industrialization, trade imbalances due to cheap Chinese imports crowding out Vietnamese products, and delays/safety issues in Chinese-funded infrastructure projects. (2) South China Sea disputes: Coverage accused China of “disregarding historical facts, infringing on Vietnamese sovereignty, and destabilizing regional peace” through its maritime actions, framing China as “uncompromising and irresponsible.”

4.2. Analysis of factors shaping China's image in Nhan Dan

National image is a subjective construct shaped by historical context, value systems, and cognitive biases. As Vietnam's neighbor and a regional power, China's influence has long been intertwined with Vietnam's sovereignty concerns and developmental dependencies. Vietnam's media narratives reflect this duality: (1) Positive drivers: China's global ascendancy and pragmatic cooperation (e.g., trade, aid) necessitate recognition of its achievements. (2) Negative drivers: Historical grievances (e.g., territorial disputes, asymmetric power dynamics) and anxieties over China's rise fuel skepticism. Vietnam's vigilance against perceived threats to sovereignty and autonomy amplifies critical coverage, particularly on sensitive issues like the South China Sea ^[1].

Realistic factors in negative image construction: The inherent challenges in China's domestic development process serve as foundational realities contributing to the negative shaping of its national

image. Direct factors include conflicts of interest with Vietnam in areas such as maritime territorial claims and economic-trade relations, which exacerbate the negative portrayal of China's international standing.

Sino-Vietnamese relations:

Dynamics and divergences: While China and Vietnam maintain a broad alignment in governmental stances, disparities in socioeconomic development levels persist, with China's regional influence remaining pivotal. Case studies of media coverage reveal a focus on China's political restructuring, real economic development, and international affairs management. Initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (B&R) and Two Corridors and One Economic Circle serve as platforms for China to advance mutual development within the globalized economy. As fellow socialist states, Vietnamese mainstream media amplify political narratives to reinforce socialist governance paradigms, drawing upon China's developmental paradigms to advance socialist agendas. Concurrently, Vietnam leverages Chinese media frameworks to stabilize ASEAN's regional economic and social governance. Geopolitical proximity facilitates bilateral exchanges but intensifies sensitivities over territorial sovereignty and economic interests. The South China Sea disputes epitomize irreconcilable tensions between safeguarding national sovereignty and pursuing diplomatic strategies.

Vietnam's strategic narratives: Vietnam actively promotes the ASEANization and internationalization of South China Sea disputes, seeking to consolidate regional and global consensus discourse to constrain China's maritime diplomacy. By sustaining public and international attention on these issues, Vietnam aims to counterbalance China's strategic maneuvers while reinforcing its own claims through multilateral frameworks ^[2].

The current ecosystem of international discourse is marked by exceptional complexity, with Western media dominating its trajectory. Western outlets habitually frame their coverage of other nations through preconceived ideological lenses, while the protracted ideological oppositions between East and West have cemented a dominant tone in Western media narratives ^[3].

"Westernization," "fragmentation," "splittism," and the "China Threat Theory" constitute its defining characteristics ^[4].

The image of China depicted in media coverage across various platforms is inevitably subject to certain degrees of influence. Additionally, "collisions of diverse interests, shifts in the political landscape, and the triggering of hotspot issues or events" collectively constitute factors driving changes in media attitudes toward China ^[4].

For Vietnamese media, the benchmark of interpretative deviation does not lie in ideological infiltration but in their subjective presumption of the "China Threat Theory" and external incentive interference. Conflicts of interest, value orientations, and localized hotspot issues have intensified contradictions between China and Vietnam. Media cannot escape their inherent perspectives, stances, and ideologies, inevitably resulting in deliberate or inadvertent misinterpretations and inductions. Through the lens of Agenda-Setting Theory, Nhan Dan (People's Daily) strategically selects and arranges news themes to manipulate public attention in Vietnam, thereby shaping the public's preliminary perception of China's national image and laying the cognitive foundation for mass understanding.

4.3. Implications of Nhan Dan's research on China's national image

It can be argued that the construction of China's national image is inevitably influenced by Vietnamese media's subjective framing while simultaneously depending on China's proactive developmental strategies and actions. Despite historical complexities between China and Vietnam, a robust cooperative foundation

conducive to bilateral development persists. In the contemporary era (as of April 20, 2025), marked by profound and intricate shifts in regional and global dynamics, China and Vietnam share pragmatic imperatives for mutual development. Therefore, consolidating and strengthening the good-neighborly friendship and comprehensive cooperation aligns with the fundamental and enduring interests of both peoples, while also contributing to regional and global peace and stability.

Currently, China is actively advancing the Belt and Road Initiative and the Two Corridors and One Economic Belt, enhancing political trust through high-level exchanges. It promotes Sino-Vietnamese economic and trade activities in diversified formats, constructs new frameworks of interest convergence, and achieves reciprocal development. By addressing the South China Sea disputes judiciously, fostering an atmosphere of amicable cooperation, and steering bilateral relations toward positive trajectories, China gradually ameliorates Vietnam's negative perceptions.

The rise of China's political and economic stature, coupled with its amplified international discourse power, constitutes an inescapable theme in foreign media's portrayal of China. Vietnamese media perceives China as both a pivotal economic and trade partner and a latent competitor entangled in international disputes. China's proposed concepts, such as the "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" and "Global Governance," serve as compelling evidence of its commitment to national equality and universal human values ^[5].

Seeking common ground while shelving differences, co-consultation, co-construction, and shared development among nations, alongside the fulfillment of concrete national responsibilities and obligations, will serve as an effective pathway to resolving conflicts and contradictions.

The efficacy of international communication hinges, to a certain extent, on the audience's recognition of news content. Telling China's stories well, safeguarding China's image in service of the people, promoting cultural mutual learning, and fostering global harmony have emerged as universally accepted entry points. In contrast, Vietnamese media's "Othering" lens—which facilitates self-understanding through mirroring, focuses on the deconstruction and reconstruction processes among the Vietnamese populace—will enrich the connotations of China's image, enhance the effectiveness of news media in international communication, and thereby cultivate a more inclusive and amicable international public opinion environment. This approach facilitates the multidimensional construction of a national image imbued with ethnic distinctiveness and epochal characteristics.

Funding

- (1) 2024 Innovation Project of Guangxi Graduate Education, Guangxi Normal University (XYCBZ2024005)
- (2) 2024 Innovation Project of Guangxi Graduate Education, Guangxi Normal University (JGY2024066)
- (3) Research on Path Innovation for Guangxi's Publishing Power in Promoting the Construction of the China-ASEAN Community of Shared Future (24XWF011), 2024 Annual Project of Philosophy and Social Sciences Research in Guangxi
- (4) Teaching Practice Research on the Cultivation Model of Outstanding Talents in Second Language Communication in the Context of Globalization (2024JGZ14), 2024 Key Educational and Teaching Reform Project of Guangxi Normal University
- (5) Practice Research on the Knowledge Convergence of Guilin's Regional Cultural Resources in International Chinese Language Teaching Based on CiteSpace (2024JGXW08), 2024 New Engineering

- and New Liberal Arts Research and Practice Project of Guangxi Normal University
- (6) Research Project of International Chinese Education (22YH49C), the Center for Language Exchange and Cooperation of the Ministry of Education of PRC
 - (7) 2024–2025 International Chinese Education Collaboration Mechanism Grant Project (24YHXZ014), the Center for Language Exchange and Cooperation of the Ministry of Education of PRC
 - (8) 2024–2025 International Chinese Education Collaboration Mechanism Grant Project (24YHXZ013), the Center for Language Exchange and Cooperation of the Ministry of Education of PRC
 - (9) 2020 Guangxi Center for Clean Governance Research Project (LZ2020001), “Research on the Construction of the Vietnamese Communist Party’s Clean Governance Image by Mainstream Vietnamese Media”
 - (10) 2019 Guangxi Center for Clean Governance Research Project (LZ2019002), “A Study on Conceptual Metaphor Models of Corruption in Vietnamese-Chinese Political Discourse”
 - (11) 2024 Guangxi Higher Education Undergraduate Teaching Reform Project (General Project Category A) (2024JGA121), “Research and Practice on the Construction of the China Overview Course for International Students Based on the Integrated Teaching Philosophy”

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Li CX, 2012, An Analysis of Changing Perceptions of China in the Official Vietnamese Media: The Case of the Nhan Dan Newspaper, 2000–2011. *Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies*, (05): 97–120 + 159.
- [2] Li CX, 2017, ASEANization and Internationalization: Adjustments of Vietnam’s Strategy on South China Sea in the Context of Big-Power Politics. *Pacific Journal*, (02): 88–97.
- [3] Liu ZF, Zhao HW, 2013, The Struggle for International Public Opinion as a Critical Front in Comprehensive National Power Competition. *Qiushi Journal*, (03): 58–59.
- [4] Yang R, 2015, Media Dissemination of “China’s Image” and Reflections from the “Other” Perspective. *Media*, (04).
- [5] Xi JL, Wang A, 2017, The Construction of the New Era Diplomatic Discourse System from the Perspective of a Community of Shared Future for Mankind. *Social Scientist*, (11): 58–62.

Publisher’s note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.