



Construction of Taiwan's Social Media Image in Chinese Mainland from the Perspectives of "Other-construction" and "Self-construction" Research

Chao-Chun Shen

School of Humanities and Education, Guangzhou Institute of Science and Technology, Associate Professor, Guangzhou 510540, China.

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Abstract— *With the widespread popularity of social media platforms in Taiwan, the methods, actors, and pathways of disseminating the image of mainland China in Taiwanese society have undergone profound changes. The traditional one-way communication model dominated by mainstream media has gradually shifted to a multi-actor interactive communication model involving official accounts, opinion leaders, and ordinary users. This study focuses on three major platforms—Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok—and employs theories such as framing theory, national image construction theory, and the "other-shaping vs. self-shaping" perspective. Through methods like content analysis, framing analysis, sentiment analysis, and discourse analysis, it examines content related to mainland China on Taiwanese social media over the past three years. The findings reveal that the image of mainland China on Taiwanese social media is co-constructed by multiple actors, with significant differences in framing strategies among them. Official accounts emphasize frameworks of political unification and developmental achievements; opinion leaders favor cultural resonance and emotional engagement, while ordinary users tend toward lifestyle and entertainment-oriented expressions. The cultural resonance framework is most likely to generate positive interactions, whereas the political unification framework is more prone to spark controversy and polarization. Platform algorithms, user interactions, and short-video mechanisms collectively influence the visibility and acceptance of mainland China's image. This study proposes communication strategies such as actor coordination, framing optimization, pathway innovation, and algorithm adaptation.*



Keywords— *Mainland China's image, Taiwanese social media, national image, framing theory, other-construction and self-construction.*

I. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In recent years, with the rapid development of mobile internet and social media platforms, the information dissemination ecosystem in Taiwan has undergone profound changes. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Threads have become crucial channels for Taiwanese people to access news, express opinions, and engage in public discussions. According to the DataReportal report "Digital 2025: Taiwan," by 2025, Taiwan's social media users had reached 18.4 million, accounting for approximately 79.4% of the total population. Among these platforms, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok wield particularly significant influence among younger demographics.

Against this backdrop, the way mainland China's image is communicated within Taiwanese society has also evolved. In the past, the image of mainland China was largely "other-construction" by traditional Taiwanese media or Western outlets—that is, defined and framed by external actors. However, in the social media era, mainland China's official institutions, cross-strait opinion leaders, and ordinary users can now directly participate in information dissemination, granting the mainland stronger "self-construction" capabilities.

The term "other-construction" refers to the construction of a nation or region's image primarily by external actors, characterized by its reliance on external discourse systems. Conversely, "self-construction" emphasizes a nation's proactive efforts to build its own image through active communication and autonomous expression. Against the long-standing backdrop of political opposition and ideological divisions in Taiwanese media, the dissemination of mainland China's image has long been influenced by negative framing, including narratives such as the "China threat theory," "political oppression," and "military expansion." However, with the rise of short-video platforms and the spread of lifestyle content, mainland tourism, cuisine, technological advancements,

and pop culture have gradually become key channels through which Taiwanese youth engage with mainland China.

Thus, this study raises the following core research questions: Who are the primary actors constructing mainland China's image on Taiwanese social media? How do different actors shape this image through framing narratives? How do platform algorithms and interaction mechanisms influence the dissemination and reception of mainland China's image? And can mainland China achieve a transition from "other-construction" to "self-construction" in its communication strategy?

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Significance

This study integrates national image research with social media communication studies, expanding the traditional focus on state-led communication in national image theory. It highlights the new feature of "multi-actor collaborative communication" in the social media era [1].

The research enriches the application of framing theory in cross-strait communication studies. Framing theory posits that media shape public perception through "selection," "emphasis," and "exclusion." In the context of social media, framing becomes more fragmented, emotional, and algorithm-driven, a phenomenon systematically analyzed in this study. By introducing the "other-construction vs. self-construction" analytical framework, it explores mainland China's capacity and limitations in actively shaping its image within Taiwan's public discourse, offering a new dimension to national image research.

2.2 Core Definitions

"Other-construction" refers to the construction of a nation's image by external actors, reflecting an inherent imbalance in discursive power. Historically, mainland

China's image in international communication has often been framed by Western and Taiwanese media. "Self-construction," on the other hand, emphasizes a nation's autonomous efforts to construct its image through proactive communication and narrative control. In the social media era, official accounts, grassroots creators, and ordinary users can all participate in the "self-construction" process [2]. National image encompasses the public's comprehensive cognitive and affective evaluation of a nation, including cognitive, emotional, and value-assessment dimensions.

This study categorizes communication actors into three groups: official accounts, opinion leaders, and ordinary users. These actors differ significantly in their communication objectives, expressive styles, and audience influence.

2.3 Framing Theory

Framing theory was first proposed by Goffman and later further developed by Robert M. Entman. He argued that framing is a process through which the media influences public understanding and perception by "selecting" and "highlighting" certain information. From the perspective of image construction theory, Boulding posited that national image is not a simple reflection of objective reality but rather a subjective perception formed by the public during the communication process [3].

Analyzed through postcolonial theory, the dominance of Western discourse in global communication is emphasized, with China's image long influenced by the "Orientalism" narrative. Taiwanese media are also indirectly affected by Western news framing. This paper constructs a three-dimensional analytical model of "subject—frame—path." The subject dimension addresses "who communicates"; the frame dimension examines "how it is communicated"; and the path dimension explores "through what mechanisms it is communicated."

III. THE SOCIAL MEDIA ECOSYSTEM IN TAIWAN AND THE COMMUNICATION CONTEXT OF MAINLAND CHINA'S IMAGE

3.1 Overview of Social Media Usage in Taiwan

With the advancement of smartphones, mobile networks, and digital platforms, Taiwan has evolved into a highly "social-media-driven" society. According to recent statistics from Taiwan's Digital Development Department and Data Reportal, internet penetration in Taiwan has consistently remained above 90%. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Threads have become deeply embedded in the daily lives of Taiwanese citizens. For the 18–35 age groups in particular, social media is not only a crucial channel for obtaining information but also a vital space for expressing opinions, engaging in public discourse, shaping identity, and maintaining social relationships [4].

From a platform usage perspective, Facebook still holds significant influence in Taiwan. Due to its early development, Facebook boasts a broad user demographic, with middle-aged and older groups heavily relying on it for news and political discussions. As a result, many media organizations, politicians, political parties, and public intellectuals in Taiwan regard Facebook as a key platform for disseminating public opinion. During election periods, Facebook often becomes a battleground for political mobilization, policy promotion, and public debate. Discussions about Mainland China on Facebook tend to be highly politicized, frequently linking to cross-strait relations, security issues, and ideological conflicts.

Instagram, on the other hand, exhibits a more pronounced "visual communication" characteristic. Unlike Facebook, which emphasizes text-based news discussions, Instagram focuses on images, short videos, and personal lifestyle showcases, resulting in content that is more lifestyle-oriented, entertaining, and emotionally driven. Many young Taiwanese users encounter content related to

Mainland China's tourism, cuisine, pop culture, and urban landscapes through Instagram. For instance, posts featuring Mainland China's nightscapes, food explorations, Hanfu culture, and city vlogs enjoy high viewership and engagement rates on Instagram. This indicates that the portrayal of Mainland China on Instagram is gradually shifting from traditional political narratives to lifestyle and youth culture narratives [5].

TikTok, along with its Mainland counterpart Douyin, has become one of the most talked-about platforms in recent years due to its content spillover effects. TikTok relies on algorithmic recommendations to rapidly disseminate information through short videos, prioritizing entertainment, emotional appeal, and immediacy. Young Taiwanese users on TikTok gain more direct exposure to the daily lives, online culture, and consumer trends of Mainland Chinese youth. Content such as "City Walk," "night market challenges," "high-speed rail experiences," and "campus life" often transcends traditional political frameworks, allowing Taiwanese youth to form a more grounded and realistic perception of Mainland China.

Additionally, emerging platforms like Threads have gained popularity among young Taiwanese users in recent years. Given Threads' emphasis on real-time interaction and fragmented expression, its content tends to be more emotionally charged and opinion-driven. Topics related to Mainland China can quickly become viral on Threads, accompanied by intense emotional expressions and ideological clashes.

Overall, the social media ecosystem in Taiwan is characterized by: a heavy reliance on social media for information among young people, the gradual transformation of traditional public opinion dissemination by short-video platforms, the growing prominence of emotional, entertainment-driven, and fragmented content, and the increasing influence of algorithms over traditional editorial mechanisms in shaping public perception. In this media environment, the communication of Mainland

China's image is no longer confined to traditional media reports but has entered a phase of multi-subject, multi-platform, and multi-level interactive dissemination.

3.2 The Public Opinion Environment in the Context of Cross-Strait Relations

The social media landscape in Taiwan is highly politicized, with cross-strait issues being one of the most sensitive and contentious topics in Taiwanese society. Due to historical, political, and ideological factors, the image of Mainland China in Taiwan's public discourse is often imbued with significant political meaning.

Taiwanese society has long been divided between the "pan-Blue" and "pan-Green" camps, which hold markedly different views on Mainland China. The pan-Green camp typically emphasizes "Taiwanese sovereignty" and frames discussions around narratives such as the "China threat theory" and "democracy versus authoritarianism." In contrast, the pan-Blue camp tends to highlight cultural ties, economic cooperation, and peaceful exchanges across the strait. This political polarization further influences information dissemination and audience perceptions on social media.

In the era of traditional media, cross-strait issues were primarily dominated by television news and newspapers. However, in the age of social media, ordinary users have become key participants in shaping these discussions [6]. A growing number of political influencers, independent media accounts, and opinion leaders engage in debates about cross-strait issues on social platforms, further complicating Taiwan's public opinion environment. Some opinion leaders employ emotional language, clickbait headlines, and provocative rhetoric to attract attention, exacerbating societal divisions.

The algorithmic mechanisms of social media platforms reinforce the "echo chamber" effect, where users are increasingly exposed to information that aligns with their existing beliefs, leading to closed-off cognitive

structures. On Taiwanese social media, users with differing political views often form isolated information communities. For example, pro-independence users are more likely to encounter negative content about Mainland China, while those favoring cross-strait exchanges are more exposed to content about Mainland China's development, cultural exchanges, and tourism. This algorithmic reinforcement has led to a "segmented" perception of Mainland China in Taiwanese society. Some young users form relatively positive, lifestyle-based impressions of Mainland China through short-video platforms, while others remain highly wary or even hostile due to exposure to political conflicts and negative news.

Moreover, the "spiral of silence" phenomenon is widespread on Taiwanese social media. Given the sensitivity of cross-strait issues, some users may choose to remain silent even if they hold dissenting opinions, fearing online attacks, public pressure, or social ostracism. This results in an "extremization" of voices on social media, where those with strong opinions dominate the discourse while moderates refrain from speaking up.

During major cross-strait events, this polarization becomes even more pronounced. For instance, in discussions about military drills, elections, or diplomatic incidents, social media often erupts with emotionally charged debates, with opposing viewpoints clashing fiercely and even resorting to labeling. This highly adversarial environment poses additional challenges for the communication of Mainland China's image.

3.3 The Existing Dilemmas in the Image Dissemination of Mainland China

For a long time, the image of Mainland China has faced multiple structural challenges in its dissemination across Taiwan. The first is the enduring influence of traditional media frameworks. Historically, mainstream Taiwanese media coverage of Mainland China has disproportionately focused on political conflicts, military issues, and negative events. Topics such as the pandemic,

military exercises, and human rights controversies often dominate headlines, while economic development, social life, and youth culture receive comparatively less attention. This longstanding media framing has led to fixed perceptions of Mainland China among some Taiwanese audiences.

The Western media discourse also significantly shapes public opinion in Taiwan. Due to Taiwan's reliance on international news sources from Europe and the U.S., negative narratives about China from Western media are further amplified locally. Concepts like the "China threat theory," "technological infiltration," and "cognitive warfare" have frequently appeared in Taiwan's public discourse in recent years, gradually influencing public perception.

The spread of misinformation and cognitive interference on social media has further complicated the dissemination of Mainland China's image. Given the rapid speed and low moderation barriers of social media, unverified information, edited clips, and emotionally charged content can quickly go viral. Some politically motivated accounts exploit sensational headlines and one-sided narratives to fuel conflicts, deepening divisions among users.

Additionally, historical memory and identity differences stemming from decades of cross-strait separation play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of Mainland China. Many young Taiwanese lack firsthand experience with Mainland society, relying instead on media reports and online discussions for their understanding. As a result, repeated exposure to negative content on social media can reinforce stereotypes and cognitive biases.

The rise of short-video platforms has introduced new dynamics to the dissemination of Mainland China's image. On one hand, ordinary citizens, travel bloggers, and lifestyle creators have emerged as key contributors to shaping this image. On the other hand, Taiwanese youth

are increasingly exposed to Mainland cities, cuisine, pop culture, and daily life through these platforms, fostering more concrete and relatable perceptions. This shift suggests that the narrative of Mainland China is gradually transitioning from "grand political storytelling" to "everyday life narratives" [7].

Overall, the portrayal of Mainland China in Taiwanese social media is shaped by both traditional political structures and media frameworks, as well as new opportunities in the digital age. Breaking free from entrenched negative narratives and transitioning from "other-shaped" to "self-shaped" communication has become a critical topic in cross-strait communication research.

IV. THE ACTORS IN MAINLAND CHINA'S IMAGE CONSTRUCTION: WHO SHAPES IT?

4.1 Official Accounts: The Strategic Communicators

Mainland China's official communication actors primarily include the Taiwan Affairs Office, the Association for Relations across the Taiwan Straits, Xinhua News Agency, CCTV News, and local cultural tourism accounts. These official accounts wield significant agenda-setting power, with content focusing on cross-strait policies, economic development, and cultural exchanges. In recent years, they have increasingly adopted short-video formats and youth-oriented language, such as vlogs, live streams, and animated storytelling, to soften the tone of political communication. However, their formal language and limited interactivity often lead Taiwanese youth to dismiss such content as "propaganda" [8].

4.2 Opinion Leaders: The Intermediary Force between Official and Civilian Spheres

Opinion leaders include cross-strait influencers, scholars, cultural figures, and political commentators. Compared to official accounts, opinion leaders emphasize

more personalized expression and emotional interaction. For example, some Taiwanese influencers have gained significant attention on YouTube and TikTok by creating videos about mainland China's tourism, cuisine, and urban development. Opinion leaders excel at creating "soft connections" between political and lifestyle topics, making their content more relatable to younger audiences.

4.3 Ordinary Users: Participants in Fragmented Communication

Ordinary users are key participants in shaping the image of mainland China. Through reposts, comments, memes, and short video recreations, they contribute to the reproduction of this image. Research shows that Taiwanese netizens exhibit strong interest in content related to mainland tourism, food, nightscapes, and high-speed rail construction, while political topics tend to spark more controversy.

4.4 Inter-Subject Interaction Dynamics

In social media communication, official accounts set the agenda, opinion leaders act as "bridges," and ordinary users drive dissemination and emotional expression. The three form a complex interactive relationship, characterized by both collaborative dissemination and framing conflicts.

V. FRAMING ANALYSIS OF MAINLAND CHINA'S IMAGE CONSTRUCTION: HOW IS IT NARRATED?

5.1 Framing Extraction Methods and Coding System

Based on Entman's framing theory, the coding system categorizes frames into five types: development achievements, cultural resonance, political unification, humanitarian care, and negative response.

The development achievements frame highlights mainland China's economic growth, technological innovation, and infrastructure (e.g., high-speed rail, drones, AI, and urban development), which enjoy high visibility

on Taiwanese social media. The cultural resonance frame revolves around Chinese culture, cuisine, tourism, films, and traditional festivals, often eliciting the most positive engagement. Many Taiwanese users develop a sense of affinity through short videos featuring mainland night markets, hotpot, ancient towns, and pop culture [9].

While the political unification frame has clear political objectives, it sparks significant controversy on Taiwanese platforms, often leading to polarized debates. The humanitarian care frame emphasizes disaster relief, medical cooperation, and civilian exchanges, such as pandemic-related cross-strait collaborations, which receive positive feedback from some Taiwanese users.

The negative response frame primarily counters misinformation. Direct rebuttals have limited impact, whereas indirect responses using factual presentations and lifestyle content prove more effective.

5.2 Framing Differences among Stakeholders

Official accounts favor development achievements and political unification frames; opinion leaders lean toward cultural resonance and emotional frames; ordinary users predominantly adopt entertainment and lifestyle frames.

Research indicates that the cultural resonance frame generates significantly higher likes, shares, and positive comments compared to the political unification frame. Content about food, travel, and pop culture is more effective in breaking down political biases and fostering emotional connections. Although the political unification frame drives high engagement, it also attracts notably more negative feedback [10].

VI. FROM "OTHER-CONSTRUCTION" TO "SELF-CONSTRUCTION": COMMUNICATION MECHANISMS AND PATH TRANSFORMATION

6.1 Algorithmic Recommendations and Information Visibility

Official accounts remain a key source of Mainland China's image dissemination, but user-generated content (UGC) is becoming a significant force shaping Taiwanese youth perceptions. Particularly on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, ordinary users create decentralized communication through short videos and lifestyle posts.

Platform algorithms determine which content gains visibility. Research shows that emotional, entertaining, and visually engaging content is more likely to be recommended, while politically charged or didactic material is often skipped. This algorithmic mechanism reinforces "information cocoons" to some extent, yet short-video platforms can also break traditional media boundaries, exposing Taiwanese youth to more aspects of Mainland life.

Comment sections serve as crucial spaces for constructing Mainland China's image, where supportive and opposing views clash intensely. Emoticons, Internet memes, and parodic videos have become key modes of expression for young users. This study proposes a communication path model: "information exposure → emotional arousal → cognitive adjustment → attitude shift," highlighting culture's role as an "emotional lubricant." Compared to direct political messaging, everyday content more effectively lowers psychological barriers [11].

6.2 "Other-Construction" vs. "Self-Construction"

Western and mainstream Taiwanese media have long dominated international discourse, often framing Mainland China negatively. During major crises, the "China threat theory" retains strong momentum. While social media has

empowered Mainland China to proactively shape its narrative—with short-video platforms lowering barriers for public participation in national image-building—"self-shaping" still faces challenges: rigid official rhetoric, opaque algorithms, and entrenched political biases [12].

To build a collaborative communication network, official accounts, influencers, and ordinary users should coordinate efforts. Reducing monolithic political messaging while emphasizing cultural resonance, humanitarian appeals, and youth exchanges is vital. Innovating formats—leveraging short videos, livestreams, memes, and interactive challenges—can enhance relatability [13].

On social media, improving algorithmic adaptability by studying platform recommendation systems and optimizing titles, visuals, and engagement methods boosts content reach. Strengthening emotional bonds through shared experiences—food, travel, music, film, and pop culture—fosters common ground between cross-strait youth [14].

VII. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals that the portrayal of mainland China in Taiwanese social media is characterized by multi-agent co-construction. Official accounts, opinion leaders, and ordinary users exhibit significant differences in communication frameworks and styles. The cultural resonance framework yields the most effective dissemination, while the political unification framework, despite its high visibility, is also the most contentious. Platform algorithms and user interaction mechanisms jointly influence the dissemination and reception of mainland China's image.

This paper constructs a "subject-framework-path" analytical model, enriching the research on national image

in the era of social media and providing practical strategic recommendations for cross-strait communication practices.

However, this study has certain limitations: the data collection scope was constrained by platform interfaces, and the psychological mechanisms of the audience require further investigation through in-depth interviews. Future research could further compare communication differences across various platforms.

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