Study on the Image Construction of Shenzhen in Foreign Media

Xi Guo

Guangdong Nanhua Vocational College of Industry and Commerce,Guangzhou, China

Abstract: As China's special economic zone and technological innovation center, Shenzhen enjoys a high reputation at home and abroad. This study aims to observe overseas media reports on Shenzhen in recent years and explore its image construction through the method of combining corpus and critical discourse analysis. Based on the NOW corpus created by Brigham Young University in the United States, we find that the discourse construction of overseas media around Shenzhen stems from the image of its special economic zone and technological innovation. As a microcosm of China's reform and opening up, Shenzhen is portrayed as a modern, innovative and dynamic city. By analyzing the reports in the corpus, we find that overseas media mainly focus on Shenzhen's technology industry, innovation and entrepreneurship environment, and economic development mode. Shenzhen's status as China's technological innovation hub and its importance in global value chains are frequently mentioned in the reports. In addition, overseas media have also paid attention to Shenzhen's urban planning, environmental protection and international cooperation. Overall, overseas media coverage of Shenzhen presents a positive, modern image, emphasizing its importance and influence on the global stage. As a successful model of China's reform and opening up, Shenzhen is gradually becoming the focus of international attention, showing its charm and vitality as a modern city.

Keywords: Shenzhen, Overseas Media, International Image, NOW Corpus, Discourse Research

1. Introduction

In 2023, the Globalization and World-class Cities Research Group (GaWC) released the latest World City System ranking, and Shenzhen's ranking has risen by nine places, ranking 46th out of 707 cities. Since it first ranked among the world's first-tier cities in 2018, Shenzhen has maintained this status. In the same year, the "City Image" series of research reports released by the People's Daily Online Research Institute also listed Shenzhen as one of the key cities. The report pointed out that Shenzhen is known as the "consumption city that never sleeps" because of its huge business scale and strength. Shenzhen's business districts are particularly notable for their image, characterized by features such as "numerous shopping centers,""youthful and trendy,""magnet for flagship stores," and "direct subway access." The city's night economy is also thriving, gradually forming the image of a "youthful city that never sleeps." In addition, the China (Shenzhen) International Cultural Industry Expo held in Shenzhen and other activities such as "Shenzhen Shopping Season" and "End-of-Year Festive Shopping" have further enhanced its reputation in the consumer field.Shenzhen's transportation, accommodation facilities and consumption environment have also been highly praised by netizens, Known as "the least congested first-tier city" and "a hub of five-star hotels." However, the report also points out that Shenzhen's service ratings in the areas of tourist attractions and cultural and sports consumption are relatively average.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, President Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized the importance of telling China's story well, disseminating China's voice, and presenting a true, multidimensional, and comprehensive image of China to the world.As an important part of China's international image, the international image construction of cities has been gradually paid attention to in recent years. As one of China's first-tier cities, Shenzhen plays an important role in the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" and the "Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area" strategies. Therefore, to clarify the

current international image characteristics of Shenzhen is one of the important tasks of urban construction and development. This study utilizes the large English online news corpus NOW (News on the Web), which covers 20 countries and regions, to observe more comprehensively how foreign media describe the city of "Shenzhen" and their areas of focus, thereby gaining insights into Shenzhen's international image.

2. Corpus Methodology

News on the Web Corpus ("NOW" for short), created by American scholar Mark Davis, is a dynamic online news corpus covering the data of English online newspapers and magazines from 20 countries and regions from 2010 to present, with a total vocabulary of about 9 billion. It is growing at a rate of 140-160 million words per month (about 300,000 new articles), adding about 1.8 billion words per year. Through the online platform of this corpus, the word frequency distribution trend of node words can be examined, and each news item can be traced back to its web page, the publication time, country and region, and the source media, so as to investigate the language phenomenon more accurately.

Corpus provides a bottom-up approach to language research, which makes up for the shortcomings of intuition and subjective inference alone (Qian Yufang 2010a). Language forms that appear repeatedly in large-scale texts are often representative and contain specific discourses (Qian Yufang 2010b). With the help of corpus analysis software, researchers can gain a new understanding of common language phenomena through new language analysis concepts. Corpus tools can help researchers analyze linguistic data in various ways and clarify linguistic forms. Most importantly, by looking at large-scale texts, researchers can more clearly distinguish linguistic forms and avoid the bias brought about by fragmented information, making the findings more convincing.

To sum up, the large-scale online diachronic news corpus gathers relevant reports from different countries together, enabling us to analyze the image of Shenzhen constructed by overseas media discourse more comprehensively and objectively.

3. Corpus Analysis

3.1 Country Distribution

In the NOW corpus, 19 countries have reported on Shenzhen from 2013 to 2023. In terms of number of reports, the rankings are the United States, Singapore, India, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, Malaysia, Ireland, Philippines, South Africa, Pakistan, New Zealand, Nigeria, Kenya, the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Jamaica (see Figure 1). These 19 countries have different levels of economic development, cultural and religious backgrounds, which fully reflects the popularity of Shenzhen in the world.
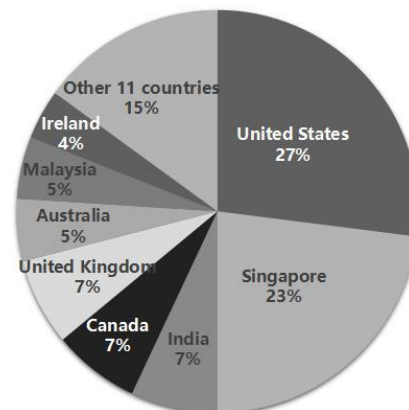

Figure1.Trends in the Distribution of Countries Covered in Shenzhen Reports, 2013-2023

3.2 Distribution Trend of Reports

Word frequency statistics is the most direct method that corpus analysis can provide. This study observes the distribution of the word "Shenzhen" in the corpus, which helps us to understand the nodeof discourse generation (Qian Yufang 2016) and the trend of media attention to Shenzhen. From 2013 to 2023, the search terms "Shenzhen"/"Shen zhen"appeared for a total of 47,999 times, as shown in Figure 2 for the specific distribution.
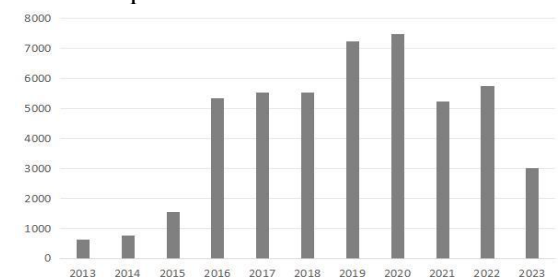

Figure2. The Annual Trend of Reports Involving Shenzhen from 2013 to 2023

The word frequency distribution map allows us to intuitively grasp the vertical distribution of Shenzhen in overseas media reports in the past 10 years. On the whole, the number of overseas media reports on Shenzhen shows an overall upward trend. After 2015, the attention has increased significantly and reached a peak in 2020. Through careful observation of the text, it is not difficult to see that the media attention is closely related to certain events, such as: the renovation plan of the old house in Baishizhou, Shenzhen in 2016, the hot discussion about the Guangzhou-Shenzhen Coastal Highway in 2017, the opening of Huawei's first global flagship store in Shenzhen's Wanxiang Tiandi in 2019, the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone in 2020, and so on.

To sum up, the number of overseas media reports on Shenzhen is increasing. The content mainly focuses on the important milestone events in the process of its economic development, especially focusing on the trade exchanges between Shenzhen and its own country, focusing on the technology industry as the core, focusing on Shenzhen products and other business supporting services, and closely insight into the development trend of Shenzhen's economy. The regional development trend of Shenzhen has received international attention, indicating that Shenzhen has a large influence in the world economy, and the development trend of science and technology industry is in a leading position.

3.3 Distribution of News Focus

Liu Pei (2013) took the New York Times' 30 years of reports on Shenzhen (from 1980 to 2010) as an example to explain the ideology and the construction of "Shenzhen image" in reports involving Shenzhen. According to the research, the main topicsframeworkof Shenzhen reports can be divided into the following eight categories: economic and trade activities, financial markets, political pilot reforms, corruption issues and anti-corruption reports, human rights issues, social issues, labor reports, and disaster reports.Unlike Liu's research on the construction of Shenzhen's image using only a single data source from The New York Times and early data spanning 30 years from 1980 to 2010, this study draws on

data sources from 19 countries and focuses on reports involving Shenzhen in international online media over the past decade, from 2013 to 2023.

Through data analysis, the topics of Shenzhen reports can be divided into the following seven categories: science and technology industry, innovation and entrepreneurship environment, economic development mode, urban planning, environmental protection, international cooperation, and financial market.

3.3.1 Science and Technology Industry

In related reports, Overseas media primarily focus on aspects such as the technological upgrades and product iterations of Shenzhen's tech companies, the research areas of its scientific institutions, and the technological applications within the city of Shenzhen. For example, Shenzhen's efforts in integrating environmental protection and technology; Shenzhen's leading position in 5G technology and smart terminal devices manufacturing; its ambition and commitment in the field of life sciences and biotechnology; highlighting the status of Shenzhen as a research and innovation center. Overseas media reports tend to be neutral and objective by applying professional terms, citing new vocabulary, using comparison, and describing in positive tones. Such as:

(1) If you walk around Shenzhen, one of China's big technology hubs, you'll notice all of the taxis are electric. (2019-06-19 United States*CNBC*)

(2) Yesterday, Chinese manufacturer, Huawei, officially unveiled the Mate 20X 5G in Shenzhen, China. This is the company's first 5G phone and the first 5G device in China. However, since the commercialization of 5G is still at its infancy, many users wondered if the Chinese version of the Mate 20X 5G can be used outside China.(2019-07-27 United States*GizChina*)

(3) Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech, based in Shenzhen/China) has just celebrated the establishment of the School of Life Science. There will be a major expansion in the School based on the existing Department of Biology. The School plans to recruit 80 tenure-track faculty members at all ranks in the coming years. ... The School strives to become a leading life science research institute in the nation and a major intellectual engine for the health science and biotechnology industry in

Shenzhen and the Greater Bay Area.(2020-10-27 United States*GreenBiz*)

(4) Huawei is regarded as far stronger commercially than ZTE. Based in Shenzhen, near Hong Kong, Huawei has the biggest research and development budget of any Chinese company and a vast portfolio of patents, making it less dependent on American suppliers. (2018-12-06India*Business Today*)

(5) The Chairman of SMIC, Dr. Zixue Zhou, said, " Shenzhen has the largest electronic information industrial base in China, comprising hundreds of IC design, system and equipment companies. Thanks to the attention given to the IC industry from the Shenzhen Municipal Government, SMIC Shenzhen steadily operates an 8-inch production line. By launching the new 12-inch production line, SMIC will further improve our capacity, better serve our customers, and facilitate the development of Shenzhen's IC ecosystem. " (2016-11-02Canada*Stockhouse*)

3.3.2 Innovation and Entrepreneurship Environment

The media focused on Shenzhen's important position as a gathering place for high-tech enterprises, Shenzhen-Hong Kong regional collaboration, the establishment of the country's first national innovation center for medical devices, and the construction of a global technology exchange platform, showcasing the various advantages of Shenzhen as a global hub for innovation and entrepreneurship. The language of overseas media is characterized by positive evaluation, concrete examples, global perspective, focus on cooperation and communication, as well as professionalism and authority. These features effectively demonstrate Shenzhen's various advantages as a highland for innovation and entrepreneurship. Such as:

(1) Some of China's biggest global companies like Huawei, Tencent, DJI and BYD, already call Shenzhen and the Greater Bay Area home. (2019-02-26Singapore*Marketing Interactive*)

(2) Shenzhen is currently building the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Cooperation Zone. The favorable climate of innovation and entrepreneurship in Shenzhen's Qianhai area is also expected to attract more young people from Hong Kong. (2020-10-22United States*PR Newswire*)

(3) ..., in May this year, Shenzhen established the country's first national innovation centre for medical devices. This kind of initiative gives students at SUSTech the chance to collaborate with Chinese medical-equipment companies such as Mindray in Shenzhen, ... There are also other funding schemes, such as the Guangdong -- Shenzhen joint fund, that offer grants to encourage advanced research, and the Shenzhen -- Hong Kong Youth Innovation Entrepreneurship Base that helps to incubate start-ups.(2020-11-04United States*nature.com*)

(4) Global technology-solutions provider Arrow Electronics today hosted its annual " Arrow Technology Solutions Forum and Showcase " event in Shenzhen, China. The event connects Hong Kong and Shenzhen innovation startups and makers powered by Arrow's design, engineering expertise and service capabilities with a network of key and emerging technology companies in the Greater Bay Area in China, as well as from around the world. (2018-03-14Singapore*AsiaOne*)

3.3.3 Economic Development Mode

The media reported Shenzhen's economic development model as follows: Shenzhen started from the manufacturing center, then attracted foreign investmentthrough opening up, and has achieved rapid economic rise; meanwhile its economy is outward-oriented, and its modernization process is remarkable;its diversified consumer market is thriving;it has shifted from manufacturing to technological innovation, and relies on e-commerce to gain development; it is driven by regional collaboration and innovation, and is committed to becoming aglobal scientific and technological innovation center. The language feature of the report is to show the achievements of Shenzhen's rapid development through historical comparison and specific data, emphasizing the characteristics of outward-oriented and globalization, adopting a dynamic and developing tone, paying attention to international perspectives and regional collaboration, and comprehensively showcasing Shenzhen's unique position and sustained developmental potential as an economic and technological innovation hub. Such as:

(1) In 1979, Shenzhen, the manufacturing hub just across the border from Hong Kong, had less than half a million people. In 1980, it became China's first special economic zone, allowing foreign investment into the city. It is now one of the world's biggest cities, with

more skyscrapers built there in 2016 than the US and Australia combined. The city is emblematic of the rise of China's coastal metropolises. The economy turned outward. (2019-10-17United States*qz.com*)

(2) Situated in the Guangdong province of southern China, Shenzhen sits by the Pearl River Delta with Hong Kong lying to its south. The city is filled with numerous shopping options; from giant malls to bustling market streets and stalls, shopaholics can find offerings from international luxury fashion labels to local brands to satiate their every urge. (2019-12-05Singapore*augustman.com*)

(3) Shenzhen is something the US doesn't have—it's built on factories the way Silicon Valley and Haidian are built on universities. The Chinese tech boom has built on this factory hub not only with more advanced products and manufacturing techniques but also, more importantly, e-commerce. By making the Chinese consumer the end point for most products, rather than container ships, e-commerce helped Shenzhen to outgrow its low-value export hub origins. (2019-11-24Singapore*technode.com*)

(4) Under Chinese President Xi Jinping's bay area plans, Shenzhen will be turned into an innovation and technology powerhouse.Under Chinese President Xi Jinping's bay area plans, Shenzhen is one of nine cities in Guangdong province that will be turned into an innovation and technology powerhouse, together with Hong Kong and Macau, to rival Silicon Valley in the US. (2018-12-19 Singapore *channelnewsasia.com*)

3.3.4 Urban Planning

Related reports emphasize the role of policy and strategy driving on urban development, mentioning that Shenzhen, as the first special economic zone, attracted foreign investment through opening up policies, showcasing the key impact of policy driving on urban development. Those reports emphasize the role of Shenzhen in coordinated regional development and comprehensive urban planning, with a particular focus on Shenzhen's role within the Pearl River Delta and the Greater Bay Area, and highlight the planning for Shenzhen-Hong Kong cooperation, and the collaborative development with other cities in Guangdong and Macau. Innovation and technology as the driving force of urban development has also been highlighted.In

reports, it is often mentioned that Shenzhen aims to become an "Innovative and Technology Powerhouse," striving for modernization standards and a global city image. The actual urban planning process is demonstrated through concrete projects and cases. Such as:

(1) In response to the work plan of the municipal Party committee and the municipal government, based on the functional positioning and future development demands of Shenzhen Working People's Cultural Palace, the International Bidding of Architectural SD for Overall Renovation of Shenzhen Working People's Cultural Palace is officially launched.(2019-12-18 United States *PLANetizen*)

(2) The mega project is one of six identified " Urban Living Room " projects undertaken by the Shenzhen Municipal Government to transform the city into a green and smart city for the future. The sea-fronting Shenzhen Bay Super Headquarters Base spans 290 acres (1.174 million sq m) with a proposed total built-up area of 4.5 million sq m to 5.5 million sq m. The parcel of land adjoins Shenzhen Bay in the south, the inner lake wetlands of the Overseas Chinese Town (OCT) in the north, the Sand River golf course in the west and the OCT Harbour in the east.(2019-11-17Malaysia*edgeprop.my*)

(3) Along with big plots came generous subsidies. Always keen to lure tech firms, Shenzhen mandated that corporate tax rates at the Qianhai free trade zone be lower than Hong Kong's. To weather the coronavirus-induced slowdown, the local government is offering to reimburse up to 70% of tech startups' bank-loan interest repayments.(2020-05-31United States*YAHOO!*)

3.3.5 Environmental Protection

Overseas media reports highlight Shenzhen's specific environmental measures and achievements and provide examples to support them. Those reportsfocus on government policy orientation and specific actions to show the leading role of the government. For example, the report mention the introduction of special environmental protection policies and regulations of the national and municipal governments, as well as the implementation and results achieved.They also emphasize the application of scientific and technological innovation and green technology in environmental protection, such as the research

and development of new energy technologies, the promotion of electric vehicles, intelligent environmental monitoring systems, etc. They showcase Shenzhen's environmental achievements with international comparison and a global perspective,focus on the concept and actions of sustainable development and ecological civilization construction,focus on residents' participation and the enhancement of social awareness of environmental protection, and discuss environmental governance challenges and future planning. The language of the reports is characterized by facts and figures, using anactive and positive tone, citing authoritative and professional opinions, highlighting changes and progress through comparison and contrast, using dynamically developing vocabulary, to reflect motivation and continuous improvement. Such as:

(1) In the last year, a number of Chinese cities have rolled out rules that ban new registrations for ride-sharing with gasoline cars. Shenzhen, the headquarters of China's largest EV maker BYD (Quartz member exclusive), for instance, said it would no longer give new ride-hailing licenses to vehicles that aren't pure electric starting last August. （2019-09-20 United States *qz.com*）

(2) The Shenzhen Compulsory Environmental Pollution Liability Insurance Pilot Business Catalog specifically names 1,066 Shenzhen-based companies across ten industries including electroplating, oil depots, dangerous chemicals and printed circuit boards that will be required to purchase environmental pollution liability insurance. （2020-01-27 India *orfonline.org*）

(3) The first batch of 35 pure electric vans - BYD's all new T3 commercial vehicle model - has been delivered to DHL International Air Express Co. to provide daily logistics in the Central Business District of the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen and surrounding areas. （2016-01-13 Ireland i*rishtrucker.com*）

3.3.6 International Cooperation

The reports usually cover a wide range of cooperation areas, including scientific and technological innovation, economic and trade, cultural exchanges, and educational cooperation. They also describe major projects and concrete examples of cooperation, such as the holding of international sports events, international conferences. Theyemphasize high-level exchanges and interactions,highlight innovation-driven and technological cooperation, pay attention to the supporting role of policies and strategies, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Strategy and other national and regional policies to investigate how those policies promote Shenzhen's international cooperation and development,emphasize two-way interaction and mutual benefit with partners, and demonstrate efforts to promote cultural exchanges and enhance soft power. Language features of relevant reports: formal terms such as "agreement signing" and "memorandum of cooperation" are used to show the formality and importance of cooperation, positive and optimistic terms are used to describe the results and prospects of international cooperation, such as "actively promote" and "fruitful results", specific data, facts, and quotes from government officials, business executives or experts are used to make the report more convincing; verbs and action-oriented vocabulary areused to demonstrate positive action, the interactivity of cooperation is highlighted toemphasize bilateral relations and interactions, and a forward-lookingtone is used to demonstrate long-term planning. Such as:

(1) Wimbledon champions Hsieh Su-Wei and Barbora Strycova are the first players to book their spots in the prestigious year-ending championships, which will take place for the first time in Shenzhen, China. （2019-09-01 United States *WTA*）

(2) And this momentum is showing no signs of slowing: Indeed, Shenzhen Airport is the only airport in China participating in the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) " Future Airport " pilot program. To realize the program, a large number of future-oriented upgrade and reconstruction projects are being implemented. （2020-10-27 United States*PR Newswire*）

(3) Among the agreements signed was one between Singapore's Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) and the Shenzhen government on a smart city initiative that will connect business ecosystems and promote links between people and businesses between the Republic and the Chinese tech capital. （2019-10-15 Singapore *businesstimes.com.sg*）

(4) Sci Innovation Centre is sponsored by the Shenzhen Municipal Government and has established cooperation with world-famous innovation organizations, including University of Toronto, University of Western Ontario, OCE, etc. Sci Innovation Centre has set up innovation centers in both Shenzhen and Toronto, in order to collaborate all the intellectual resources and governmental resources, help innovators, inventors and entrepreneurs transform their ideas into market success and facilitate the communication between China and Canada in the field of innovation and technology. （2018-01-10 Canada *Canada NewsWir*）

(5) HTC Corporation has signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the Shenzhen Municipal Government. Under the agreement, the Shenzhen Municipal Government in China will support HTC in setting up the China VR Research Institute and the two parties will work together to establish the 10 billion RMB Shenzhen VR Investment Fund. （2016-12-04 Singapore*Networks Asia*）

3.3.7 Financial Market

Related media coverage focuses on the Shenzhen Stock Exchange, fintech innovation, status as an international financial center, reform and opening up and policy impact, capital market development, economic development and financial stability, international cooperation and cross-border finance, green finance and sustainable investment, advanced regulatory and compliance systems, etc. Linguistic features of the coverage: the media use professional and technical terms,cite specific data and statistical analysis,cite authoritative opinions and expert analysis,make international comparisons and references, for example, "Shenzhen is known as China's 'Silicon Valley'", explain the development history and background to help readers understand the context of the market,use positive and forward-looking words to demonstrate the vitality and future potential of the market, such as "in the coming years, Shenzhen is expected to continue to...", analyze policy impact and interpretation to help readers understand policy background and market impact,focus on market dynamics and trends, provide real-time status and development direction, emphasize regional and global influence to enhance readers' awareness of the importance of the market. In a word, the reports by foreign media have constructed a comprehensive, professional, and internationally-minded image of Shenzhen's financial market. Such as:

(1) In August, China included the research and promotion of virtual money and the country's digital fiat currency in the newly released guideline for the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone. (2019-12-10 Singapore*technode.com*)

(2) The new index was jointly released on Tuesday by SZSE and its subsidiary Shenzhen Securities Information. The index samples Shenzhen-listed companies that are involved in the upper, middle, and lower streams of the blockchain industry including hardware equipment, technology and services, and other applications. (2019-12-24 Singapore *technode.com*)

(3) The stock has gained a mere 1.5 per cent since its US$1.07 billion equity raise, the 10th largest IPO of 2018. But most of Wall Street still figures prospects are bright for Shenzhen, China-based Tencent Music. In its first financial report since going public, Tencent topped analysts' estimates. Half the 14 analysts covering the stock rate it a buy and the average price target of US$18 is 35 per cent above Thursday's close. (2019-06-07 Singapore *The Business Times*)

(4) State-linked venture capital firm Shenzhen Capital Group has partnered US-based multi-stage venture fund SOSV to establish and manage angel and growth funds, it said in a statement last Thursday. (2019-02-24 Singapore *DEALSTREETASIA)*

(5) The Shenzhen Stock Exchange has called for stronger information disclosure and a strengthening of real-time monitoring of abnormal transactions to guard against speculation after two troubled firms saw their share prices surge. (2018-11-13 India *Reuters*)

4. Discussion and Conclusion

According to the analysis of this study, overseas media coverage of Shenzhen presents Shenzhen a positive, modern image, emphasizing its important position in the global economy and scientific and technological innovation. As a microcosm of China's reform and opening up, Shenzhen has demonstrated its unique advantages in the technology industry, innovation and entrepreneurship environment and economic development mode. Through the

analysis of NOW corpus, we find that media's focus is not limited to Shenzhen's economic achievements, but also includes multi-dimensional issues such as urban planning, environmental protection and international cooperation.

In the context of globalization, the international image of Shenzhen has gradually become the focus of the international community, reflecting its importance in the global value chain. As Shenzhen continues to make progress in scientific and technological innovation and economic development, overseas media coverage is also increasing, showing optimistic expectations for its future development. In general, Shenzhen's image construction is not only the result of urban development, but also the embodiment of national strategy and policy orientation, and Shenzhen is expected to continue to play a greater influence on the international stage in the future.

At the same time, we also observe that foreign media have negatively reported on issues such as the protection of industrial workers in Shenzhen, the application of genetic technology, and copyright and patent disputes.Comments, whether positive or negative, help us understand the attitudes and positions of other countries and reflect on our shortcomings. Such reflection can help us deconstruct and reshape Shenzhen's image in international public opinion, creating a favorable international opinion environment. This, in turn, provides valuable references for the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, promoting more efficient cooperation in the future.

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