

# A Study on the Image of China Based on the Czech National Corpus

Ziyue Lu<sup>1</sup>, Sijia Song<sup>2</sup>

1 Zhejiang International Studies University, Hangzhou, China

2 Zhejiang Financial College, Hangzhou, China

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**Abstract:** This study utilizes the Czech National Corpus to investigate perceptions of China within the Czech context, focusing on cognitive patterns and their influence on public understanding. The findings reveal that Czech perceptions of China are multidimensional and dynamic. While there is recognition of China's developmental achievements and rich cultural heritage, as well as the deepening of bilateral economic, trade, and strategic cooperation, elements of competition and even confrontation persist, particularly in geopolitics and institutional frameworks. Furthermore, China's modernization process and its growing international influence have created certain gaps in Czech comprehension and adaptation. This research provides a novel perspective on the image of China in Central and Eastern Europe and offers both theoretical insights and practical implications for shaping effective international communication strategies.

**Keywords:** Czech Republic, corpus linguistics, image of China

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## 1. Introduction

National image is inherently tied to national interests. From this perspective, "a favorable national image serves as capital for international reputation, enabling a country to secure greater discourse power in global affairs and exert more significant influence in international decision-making processes, thereby enhancing its global standing and appeal"<sup>[1]</sup>. In the current global context, characterized by both opportunities and challenges, China faces a complex domestic and international public opinion environment, necessitating the development of discourse power commensurate with its growing national strength and international prominence. Research on China's image not only provides theoretical insights into the development of international communication strategies but also fosters greater self-awareness within China. Enhancing China's national image requires understanding both its "other-shaping" and "other-acceptance". In the context of the high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative, this study explores China's image in the Czech Republic, aiming to construct a Czech perspective on China's overall image. The study seeks to identify the internal and external factors influencing this image formation and to explore new avenues for improving China's image globally.

## 2. Research Trends

Current domestic research on the construction of China's image predominantly focuses on countries such as UAS, UK, and Japan, with relatively few studies exploring China's image in the Czech Republic or other Central and Eastern European nations. Gu Jie and Zhao Chen pioneered a novel approach to studying China's image through mainstream media in eight non-English-speaking Belt and Road countries<sup>[2]</sup>. Sarka Maskova examined the portrayal of China in Czech media from 2012 to 2017, highlighting the Czech China's focus on political and economic coverage<sup>[3]</sup>. Tian

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Haochen analyzed the image of Beijing through Czech mainstream and new media platforms, noting significant discrepancies between Czech perceptions and those within China [4]. Wang Huisheng, using coverage of China-related topics in The Prague Post as primary source material, found that this English-language weekly generally presented a neutral to positive bias. He framed China's image in Central and Eastern Europe across four dimensions: economic, political, cultural, and environmental [5].

Czech interest in China has deep historical roots. For instance, the 18th-century journey of Czech missionary Jan Švanda exemplifies early Czech engagement with China. More recently, research on the portrayal of China in Czech television media, particularly in the context of Xi Jinping's visit to the Czech Republic, revealed that Barandov TV maintained a neutral and objective stance in its reporting, contrasting with the portrayals in Czech Television (ČT) and Czech NOVA TV [6].

Despite these studies, research on the "othering" of China's image, both domestically and internationally, remains limited. Studies specifically utilizing the Czech National Corpus to examine China's image are notably scarce. Moreover, existing research predominantly favors qualitative analysis, mainly relying on mainstream media texts as primary corpora. There is a gap in research that integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods, and future studies should make greater use of more representative and rigorously annotated corpora.

### **3. Research Design**

#### **3.1 Research Resources and Tools**

The data for this study is drawn from the Czech National Corpus (Český národní korpus), specifically the Czech diachronic corpus SYN\_v12 (version 12). This version represents the most recent release available at the time the study was initiated. The corpus is extensive and broadly representative, with news and publishing texts constituting the dominant category. Texts from this domain, spanning the years 2010 to 2022, form a significant proportion of the corpus, supplemented by scientific and literary texts. The corpus comprises a total of 6,238,142,297 tokens [7]. This resource offers various functionalities, with the author primarily utilizing the Kontext tool and its main features—Frekvence (Frequency) and Kolokace (Collocation)—for analysis.

In addition, the Czech National Corpus provides several widely used association metrics, including Dice, log-likelihood, MI-score, MI3, and T-score. Based on Juyong Bae's comparative analysis of MI, T-score, and logDice, logDice was selected as the association metric for high-frequency collocations in this study [8]. This metric is particularly effective in filtering out high-frequency collocations that lack substantial meaning, while highlighting those with significant semantic associations.

#### **3.2 Research Approach**

This study utilizes the Czech National Corpus SYN\_v12 as the primary data source. The analysis centers around "Čína" (China) as the core search term, supplemented by related vocabulary such as "čínský" (Chinese), "Číňan" (Chinese person), and "Peking" (Beijing). The study systematically examines the discursive construction of "China's image" within the Czech context by analyzing high-frequency collocations and indexical line characteristics. Building on this, the study combines quantitative statistical analysis with qualitative interpretation to further explore the generative logic and driving forces behind the formation of China's image in Czech society. The aim is to provide empirical evidence and strategic insights for optimizing China's national image and enhancing its cross-cultural communication within the context of the Belt and Road Initiative.

### **4. Research Findings and Analysis**

#### **4.1 Core Search Term: Čína**

Using the Kontext tool for a basic query, the term *Čína* (China) was retrieved with case-sensitive matching enabled, and lexical properties set to lemma|sublemma|word (the default setting in SYN\_v12). With a span of 3, high-frequency

collocations of Čína were extracted from the corpus, requiring a frequency exceeding 3 and a collocation strength (logDice) greater than 6. The specific data is presented in Figure 1.

Figure1 High-frequency collocations of Čína in the Czech National Corpus SYN\_v12

	Filtr	lemma	Freq	MI	T-score	logDice	v
1.	p / n	Indie	15 221	10,38	123,28	9,66	
2.	p / n	Rusko	19 225	8,47	138,26	9,04	
3.	p / n	Japonsko	8 658	9,1	92,88	8,72	
4.	p / n	CNY	4 616	13,67	67,94	8,35	
5.	p / n	Tchaj-wan	3 924	10,32	62,59	8	
6.	p / n	Korea	4 314	9,15	65,57	7,97	
7.	p / n	Peking	4 465	8,86	66,68	7,95	
8.	p / n	komunistický	5 651	8,04	74,89	7,94	
9.	p / n	USA	10 785	7,22	103,15	7,94	
10.	p / n	Vietnam	2 670	9,31	51,59	7,4	
11.	p / n	Hongkong	2 595	9,67	50,88	7,4	
12.	p / n	pevninský	2 366	12,38	48,63	7,38	
13.	p / n	Tibet	2 542	9,59	50,35	7,37	
14.	p / n	Čína	4 152	6,94	63,91	7,21	
15.	p / n	čínský	3 502	6,97	58,71	7,1	
16.	p / n	jižní	4 331	6,52	65,09	7,01	
17.	p / n	BGN	1 764	12,94	42	6,96	
18.	p / n	Brazílie	2 183	7,91	46,53	6,94	
19.	p / n	Asie	2 019	7,46	44,68	6,75	
20.	p / n	AUD	1 466	11,52	38,28	6,69	
21.	p / n	dovoz	1 888	7,47	43,21	6,68	
22.	p / n	spojený	3 866	5,99	61,2	6,62	
23.	p / n	Austrálie	1 737	7,25	41,4	6,53	
24.	p / n	vztah	4 440	5,63	65,28	6,44	
25.	p / n	vůči	2 465	6,01	48,88	6,37	
26.	p / n	návštěva	3 118	5,72	54,78	6,34	
27.	p / n	Amerika	2 160	6,11	45,8	6,32	
28.	p / n	pocházet	2 100	6,02	45,12	6,26	
29.	p / n	KS	1 091	10,43	33,01	6,25	
30.	p / n	vývoz	1 349	7,22	36,48	6,25	
31.	p / n	Mongolsko	1 105	9,66	33,2	6,24	
32.	p / n	severní	2 021	5,96	44,23	6,2	
33.	p / n	agentura	2 857	5,56	52,32	6,19	
34.	p / n	obchodní	3 165	5,48	55	6,19	
35.	p / n	Írán	1 256	7,26	35,21	6,17	
36.	p / n	vyzábět	2 064	5,83	44,63	6,15	
37.	p / n	růst	3 809	5,3	60,15	6,14	
38.	p / n	olympiáda	1 635	6,08	39,84	6,09	
39.	p / n	dovážet	1 034	7,86	32,02	6,03	
40.	p / n	Francie	2 007	5,61	43,88	6,01	
41.	p / n	asijský	1 104	7,2	33	6,01	

Firstly, the Figure reveals that a significant proportion of terms frequently paired with Čína are names of countries and regions. These include major European and American nations such as the *USA* (United States) and *Francie* (France), along with Asian countries and territories like *Indie* (India), *Japonsko* (Japan), *Korea* (South Korea), and transcontinental entities such as *Austrálie* (Australia), *Rusko* (Russia), and *Írán* (Iran). This suggests the Czech Republic's keen interest in China's role within global affairs and regional development, while also reflecting China's status as a central player in contemporary globalization.

In recent years, the strengthening of China's comprehensive national power and its rapid economic development have drawn considerable attention from the Czech Republic. Czech society broadly acknowledges China's increasingly prominent position on the global stage. However, corpus analysis reveals frequent occurrences of terms such as *přestihnout* (overtake), *dohnat* (catch up), *nejdůležitější* (most important), *podezření* (suspicions), and *obava* (concerns). These terms indicate a certain ambivalence in Czech perceptions of China: while China is seen as a rapidly developing economic partner, it is also framed as a potential competitive or even threatening force.

Further analysis of co-occurrence data between Čína and country/region names reveals multifaceted dimensions of China's image within the Czech perspective. For instance, China and India are both perceived as populous nations; within Sino-American relations, China is increasingly framed as one pole in a bipolar confrontation; akin to Brazil, China is regarded as an emerging market requiring Czech brands' attention; it maintains a strategic partnership with Russia; at the same time, China is understood as a significant source of Asian history and culture.

Moreover, from a macro perspective, Czech society places significant attention on China's performance in global trade. Corpus analysis indicates that terms frequently co-occurring with Čína—such as *CNY* (renminbi), *dovoz* (imports),

*vývoz* (exports), *obchodní* (commercial), *vyrábět* (produce), *růst* (growth), and *dovážet* (transport)—predominantly belong to the economic domain. Notably, *dovoz* (imports) exhibits significantly higher absolute frequency and logDice values than *vývoz* (exports), suggesting that China serves as a major import destination for certain Czech goods. Concurrently, the term *obchodní* frequently co-occurs with *přebytek* (surplus) in high-frequency contexts with *Čína*, forming the phrase *obchodní přebytek* (trade surplus).

The word *vyrábět* (produce) highlights China's image as a manufacturing powerhouse within the corpus. This term frequently co-occurs with the prepositional phrase *v Číně* (in China), often paired with adverbs such as *levně* (cheaply) and *masově* (massively). This reflects the production model of Chinese manufacturing, characterized by low costs and large-scale operations. This linguistic evidence further corroborates China's pivotal role as the global manufacturing hub within supply chains, alongside its capacity to market mass-produced export goods.

Moreover, this study examines the collocation patterns of the lexeme *růst* (growth). Corpus analysis reveals that *zpomalující* (slowing) and *zpomalení* (deceleration) co-occur significantly more frequently with *růst* than expressions such as *raketově* (rocket-like) or *rapidní* (rapid). The data suggests that Czech discourse tends to emphasize the slowing pace of China's economic growth rather than highlighting its high-speed expansion. However, a deeper examination of relevant index entries reveals that this tendency does not stem from a negative portrayal of China's economy. Rather, it reflects China's status as the world's second-largest economy, whose growth trajectory exerts systemic influence on global demand, consumption patterns, and other factors. As a highly open, small economy, the Czech Republic must continuously monitor such global economic dynamics to formulate timely counter-macroeconomic policies.

On the other hand, Czech discourse demonstrates considerable attention to China's internal affairs. However, the texts often reflect a tendency to align with Western mainstream media perspectives, with positions generally adhering to European and U.S. narrative frameworks. This is particularly evident in high-frequency collocates such as *vztah*, *pevninský*, and *olympiáda*, which display significantly higher logDice values compared to other lexical categories.

## 4.2 Secondary search terms: čínský, Číňan and Peking

For this section, we employed *čínský* (Chinese), *Číňan* (Chinese person), and *Peking* (Beijing) as auxiliary search terms. Using the same methodology as previously described, the author utilized the Kontext tool to conduct a "simple query" search for these three terms. Both *Číňan* (Chinese person) and *Peking* (Beijing) were set to match case-sensitive entries, with lexical properties defined as lemma|sublemma|word. The span was set to 3, extracting high-frequency collocations from the corpus with a frequency exceeding 3 and a collocation strength (logDice) value greater than 7.

The following are the high-frequency collocations of *čínský* (Chinese), *Číňan* (Chinese person), and *Peking* (Beijing) in the Czech National Corpus SYN\_v12, ranked by logDice values from highest to lowest:

*čínský* - medicína, Peking, provincie, lidový, Ťin-pching, Šanghaj, zeli, ekonomika, zeď, tradiční, CEFC, trh, Huawei, Čína, čínský

*Číňan* - Ind, Japonec, Vietnamec, Korejec, etnický, Rus

*Peking* - olympiáda, olympijský, OH, čínský, Šanghaj, 2008, Čína, Peking, Tchaj-wan, Moskva, paralympiáda, ČTK

Among the three secondary search terms, *čínský* (Chinese) and *Peking* (Beijing) convey relatively richer information regarding *China's* image. The term *Číňan* (Chinese person) frequently co-occurs with other ethnic groups in the Czech corpus, reflecting the position of *Chinese* people within the multi-ethnic context of Asia and their relative relationships with other Asian ethnicities. The term *etnický* (ethnic) emphasizes *China's* multi-ethnic composition, highlighting the country's diversity, with 56 ethnic groups coexisting within its borders beyond the Han majority.

Among the high-frequency collocations with *čínský* (Chinese), several terms directly related to *China's* fundamental national conditions emerge. These include administrative divisions such as *provincie* (province), *Peking* (Beijing), *Šanghaj* (Shanghai), the name of the state leader *Ťin-pching* (Xi Jinping), and the frequently occurring *lidový* (people's)

in *Čínská lidová republika* (*People's Republic of China*). Additionally, the corpus covers multiple dimensions, including culture and economics. The corpus collectively portrays *China* as an internationalized nation blending modernity with tradition, possessing both economic strength and profound cultural heritage. For instance, *Čínská medicína* (*traditional Chinese medicine*) and *Čínská zed'* (*the Great Wall*) are frequently cited. The term *tradiční* (*traditional*) often co-occurs with Chinese cultural terms such as *akupunktura* (*acupuncture*), *feng-šuej* (*feng shui*), *léčitelství* (*healing practices*), *kaligrafie* (*calligraphy*), and *astrologie* (*astrology*), reflecting *China's* rich cultural heritage. Meanwhile, terms like *CEFC*, *trh* (*market*), and *Huawei* underscore *China's* active presence in global markets, particularly within the energy and capital sectors.

The term *Peking* (*Beijing*) in the Czech National Corpus is closely associated with the Olympic Games held in *Beijing* in 2008, marking a significant event in *China's* international presence. This association indicates that *Beijing's* image in the Czech Republic is intrinsically linked to the Olympics, symbolizing *China's* rise on the global sporting stage. The year 2008 holds particular significance for *China*, making it a temporal focal point for perceptions of both *China* and *Beijing*. Additionally, *Peking* frequently co-occurs with *Šanghaj* (*Shanghai*) and other city names in Czech discourse. In this context, *Peking* occasionally stands as a metonym for *China* itself, often co-occurring with *Moskva* (*Moscow*), reflecting geopolitical dimensions in Czech perceptions of *China's* global role.

### 4.3 Comprehensive Construction of China's Image

As the world's second-largest economy, *China's* rapid development has significantly impacted global affairs. The Czech Republic, as an open economy within Central and Eastern Europe, holds a complex and multifaceted view of *China*. These perceptions can be analyzed through three key dimensions:

#### (1) Economic Perception: A Coexistence of Cooperation and Competition

The Czech Republic recognizes *China* as an essential trading partner and a burgeoning market, yet it also acknowledges the competitive pressures emanating from *China's* economic presence. Analysis of Czech discourse reveals an understanding of *China's* role as a global manufacturing hub and its significance as an importer of Czech goods. However, there remains a sense of caution regarding *China's* low-cost manufacturing advantages, which pose challenges to Czech industries. Additionally, Czech discussions often reflect concern over the potential risks stemming from *China's* economic slowdown, signaling heightened sensitivity to the broader global economic landscape and its interconnections with *China's* economic trajectory.

#### (2) Political Attitudes: A Blend of Criticism and Pragmatism

In the political sphere, shaped by Western values, the Czech Republic tends to adopt a critical stance toward *China* on issues such as human rights and political governance. As a member of the European Union, Czech diplomacy towards *China* remains guided by EU policies, reflecting a strategic alignment with broader multilateral frameworks. This diplomatic approach is characterized by a delicate balance between ideological differences—especially concerning *China's* political system—and pragmatic national interests, demonstrating both caution and calculated engagement with *China* in the international arena.

#### (3) Cultural Perceptions: Tradition Meets Modernity

Czech perceptions of Chinese culture predominantly focus on its traditional aspects, such as Chinese medicine and calligraphy, reflecting an appreciation for *China's* historical and cultural depth. However, the understanding of contemporary Chinese culture remains relatively limited. The phrase "Made in *China*" frequently appears in Czech discourse, often associated with mass production and low-cost manufacturing, which reinforces an economic, rather than cultural, image of modern *China*. This portrayal reflects a broader gap in recognition of *China's* cultural diversity and its evolving role on the global stage in areas such as innovation and creative industries.

### Conclusion

Czech perceptions of China are multidimensional, encompassing both cooperation and recognition, as well as misunderstandings and competition. As Sino-Czech relations continue to evolve, these perceptions will become increasingly complex, reflecting a more nuanced image of China. In this context, the Czech Republic serves as a "mirror" of China's international image, often revealing biases and highlighting areas for improvement. This dynamic underlines the importance of addressing the way China's image is constructed and perceived globally, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe.

Central and Eastern European countries, including the Czech Republic, primarily view China through the lens of tangible benefits derived from cooperation and the broader impact of China's growing influence. This pragmatic perspective offers opportunities to strengthen China's image by emphasizing mutual benefits and win-win outcomes in bilateral relations. Deepening cooperation across sectors such as trade, investment, high technology, and green energy, while optimizing trade structures, could help showcase China's innovation potential and position it as a reliable and forward-thinking partner.

Beyond economic and political considerations, promoting soft power and people-to-people exchanges is crucial for improving China's image in the Czech Republic. By sharing authentic stories of ordinary Chinese citizens and fostering concrete cultural and educational collaborations, China can build deeper understanding and trust. Such emotionally resonant narratives can counterbalance misunderstandings and antagonism, gradually bridging the gap between traditional perceptions and modern realities.

Furthermore, proactive engagement in guiding public discourse is vital to shaping how China is perceived in Czech society. Strengthening ties with mainstream and social media, actively presenting China's contributions to global affairs, and addressing concerns in a timely manner will enhance credibility and improve China's overall image. By strategically managing its public narrative, China can more effectively influence perceptions and bolster its standing as a positive global actor.

This study constructs a framework for understanding China's image within the Czech context, based on an analysis of Czech-language corpora. It offers valuable insights into the evolving perceptions of China, suggesting directions for future research. Further studies could refine and expand upon these findings by utilizing specialized corpora, providing a deeper understanding of Sino-Czech relations and contributing to a more accurate and comprehensive image of China in the global arena.

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**Author Bio:**

Ziyue Lu (born May 1999), Female, Han Chinese, Shijiazhuang, Hebei; Master's degree; Lecturer; Research direction: Czech corpus studies, China-Czech cross-cultural studies.

Sijia Song (born May 1998), Female, Han Chinese, Hangzhou, Zhejiang; Master's degree; Assistant Researcher; Research direction: Czech studies.

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