

ПОЛИТОЛОГИЯ

УДК 327.8; 316.77

A STUDY OF WESTERN MEDIA COVERAGE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SPORTS POLITICIZATION: A CASE STUDY OF CHINA

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Abstract: *The original purpose of the International Olympic Games was to promote world peace outside of politics, but politics is often an important factor in the success of the Games. Throughout the history of international Olympic development, the Olympic sport has been unable to escape the fate of being politicized. By the beginning of the 21st century, Western countries, represented by the United States, stigmatized the Winter Olympic Games held by China and Russia on various grounds such as «human rights». Politicization of Sports in recent years, China has been paying more and more attention to building its soft power, and despite the complicated and severe international situation, China is trying its best to present a positive image to the world, tell a good Chinese story, and resist the sometimes malicious voices in the public opinion arena. The world's attention is once again focused on China, but the focus of each perspective is different, and a «counter-current» represented by the United States and the United Kingdom is particularly vivid in the media coverage. This paper attempts to explore the discourse and focus of the Western media, led by the U.S. and the U.K., when reporting on major events held in China, in order to further clarify the current obstacles and challenges to China's «soft power» diplomacy in the Winter Olympics, and to identify the preparations and countermeasures needed by the national media. While this type of campaign is not fresh in itself, and to some extent accompanies almost all major international competitions, it vividly demonstrates how negative press in the British and American media can offset the associated image dividends.*

Keywords: *Politicization of sports, Beijing Olympics, Guangzhou Asian Games, Beijing Winter Olympics, British and American media, mass media, national image, social media*

INTRODUCTION

As the 22nd World Cup kicks off in Qatar on November 21, 2022, a decade of controversy has surrounded the quadrennial international soccer tournament, with Qatar at the center of the controversy. A large number of Western media outlets have denounced Qatar as «unworthy» of hosting the sporting event, calling on fans around the world to boycott the World Cup in Qatar. In an article published by ALJazeera titled «The Qatar World Cup is about to shatter colonial myths,» the author writes: «the Euro-American imagination has long dictated what is “good” while determining how the Oriental “other” is represented. And the World Cup offers an opportunity to reset these narratives.» Besides, the article notes that «Yet while football

fields are supposed to inspire international unity and a spirit of sportsmanship, there shows in the systematic, relentless and racially prejudiced campaign in the West against Qatar in the years leading up to this World Cup.» So no matter how carefully Qatar prepares for the World Cup, «Qatar was viewed with disdain the moment it won its bid, treated as an outsider gatecrashing a party of the elite.»¹

Major international sporting events, especially the Olympic Games, are not only a platform for the host country to demonstrate its political strength, economic status and international influence, but also a good opportunity to showcase the country's cultural soft power. Before the opening of Olympic Games/Asian Games, it is important to identify its key ideas, communication components and its strategic objectives. Given the number of countries and the sheer scale of the games, the preopening publicity preparations are very important, and this is related on the success of the Olympic Games/Asian Games. For example, the 2008 Beijing Olympics featured the new image of the dynasty in the media several times before the games; the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics focused on promoting the new Russian image, using the new Sochi Winter Olympics logo to break the previous stereotypes of Russia in the West and promote a vibrant, digital and modern Russia.

As the largest sports forum and the most popular entertainment product, the Olympic Games provide host countries with the opportunity to shape or improve their foreign policy image, national reputation, and, as many experts in the field of international relations have pointed out, serve as a platform to showcase the «soft power» of the country. This paper presents a chronological analysis of Western media coverage of China's hosting of international sporting events, with case studies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games, and the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. According to the collected data, critical, overtly biased, and politicized sports events dominate, with many reports focusing not on the games themselves, but on China's «human rights protection» and «rights expansion». What actions should China take to deal with these pressures and how to improve the country's effective media strategy? Faced with a series of challenges such as the continuous impact on traditional media, the increasing threat of cyber security, and the pressure of stigmatization of Western public opinion, it will become an important issue for Chinese media to explore how to make use of the respective advantages of Russia and China in the field of new media development, learn from each other, develop exchanges and cooperation, provide more high-quality media public products, enhance the international influence of national media, and deepen media cooperation between Russia and China to deal with the malicious Western intentions to politicize sports events.

METHODOLOGY

While analyzing Western media coverage of the major sporting events in China, the research has been based on primary and secondary sources, as well as on qualitative research methods of documentary and case study analysis. The original reports issued by the Western media were wildly collected and analyzed, and the information and insights of the articles from the different media were summarized in order to understand the logic of the discourse

¹ For more information, please refer to <https://bbcgoossip.com/news/the-qatar-world-cup-is-about-to-shatter-colonial-myths/>

and the main intentions. Thus identifying the main issue or challenge that this paper focuses on, namely the fact that China is extensively attacked by the Western media for non-sporting issues in the context of sporting issues. In addition to the first-hand information, we have made full use of the available statistical results and analyses to further substantiate and highlight the concerns of this article and to enrich the thinking on the issue, such as its background, causes and implications, on the basis of which the research attempts to propose some solutions or effective recommendations.

THE IMPORTANT OF MASS MEDIA TO INTERNATIONAL MAJOR SPORTS EVENTS

The mass media has a wide range of communication, a strong timeliness, rich content and a wide audience to promote the process of holding the Olympic Games. Regarding these aspects, mass media has a very special position. With the charm of sports competition, mass media attracts viewers and readers all over the world, shortens the social distance between sports and people, speeds up the spread of sports, expands the social coverage of sports, raises people's awareness of sports, and promotes the development of sports technology; sports cannot be separated from mass media, and mass media cannot be separated from sports². Under the conditions of modern information society, the characteristics of the Olympic Games and the image (success or failure) of the Games in the minds of the audience are directly related to the tone of the publications covering the event. At the same time, considering the country's participation in the Winter Olympic program and the specific connection of the Games with the hosts, the coverage of the Games affects the national image of the participating and host countries, especially the hosts, which, if properly organized, may become an effective conductor of «soft power» and contribute to the desired national image. The media are often used as a tool for the implementation of governmental will and diplomatic strategies, and they strongly influence the development of international relations in the context of globalization. In the era of globalization, mass media can cause «soft blows» to international politics, as opposed to hard military blows, which can cause a total cultural, political and positive blow to a country. Mass media are less restricted by time, have a wide range of communication, are time-sensitive, rich in content, and have a wide audience, and often act as a means of political struggle and have a strong impact on traditional national security concepts³.

Mass media drives the growth of Olympic audience and influences the construction of national image. The modern Olympic Games are very different from the Olympic Games revived by Baron Pierre de Coubertin in 1896: for more than a century, there have been both Winter and Youth Olympic Games, as well as Paralympic competitions. The format of the Olympic Games has become diverse. Most important, however, is the shift towards globalization that has occurred in the information environment. Mass media and sports communication in the context of globalization have driven the development of world sports in such conditions that

2 Huang S. K., Lin S. N.. The influence of mass media on China's sports communication in the post-Olympic era under the background of globalization. *Liaoning Sports Science and Technology*, 2012, 34(01): 35-37+46. DOI: 10.13940/j.cnki.lntykj.2012.01.014.

3 Wang Jiayu. The influence of mass media on political struggle in the era of globalization. *Xi'an Social Science*, 2011, 29(02): 130-132+177.

information has almost no barriers below and time, and the audience has grown significantly. It is important to note that not only quantitative indicators have changed (for example, the reach of «traditional media» - TV and radio), but also the nature of information received: the diversity of mobile devices allows viewers to follow events in real time and access to information are constantly increasing. In the context of this information boom, the Olympic Games offer an opportunity to reinforce the image of the host country through an aggressive campaign, a mega-project with human values. At the same time, there is no way to change objective indicators (e.g. athletes' performances), which may be infinitely amplified by the media or ignored as unimportant events.⁴ (For example, in the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, in the 500m men's short track speed skating competition, South Korea's Huang Daxian had an accident during the competition and not only failed to collect his blade in time before falling out of the race, but also raised his ice skates high, while it was China's Wu Dajing behind him, causing Wu to be disturbed in the final sprint and failed to enter the final.)

MASS MEDIA AND COMPETITION OF SOFT POWER

With the dividends of mass communication and the potential of international sporting events to project the «soft power» of the host country, they can be an effective tool to enhance the image of the country (In some studies, even the level of organization of the Olympic Games and athlete performance factors are included in the «soft power» index). However, before the games began, the organizers faced the opposite trend: the Western media, led by the United Kingdom and the United States, portrayed China in a negative light, diverting the audience's attention away from the sporting event itself. These included boycotts of Olympic events, fears about the safety of the games, China's respect for human rights and freedoms, and conflicting assessments of the construction of Olympic facilities (mainly environmental aspects). There are many historical continuity issues, and there have been many instances of countries participating in large-scale boycotts of the Olympics, such as the South African boycott associated with apartheid in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which exemplify the trend toward politicization of the Olympics. It is because of the political context that accompanies the competition that these events have continued to arise. The rules of the Olympics imply the presence of certain political categories: for example, the division of participants according to nationality, the use of national attributes - emblems, national anthems and flags. Moreover, individual components of the Games, especially the opening ceremony, do in fact have a political dimension - there is always a large number of foreign leaders in attendance, which makes it look like an important international forum.

CASE STUDIES

2008 Beijing Olympic Games

The 2008 Beijing Olympics, from the opening ceremony to the performance on the field to the closing ceremony, from the front stage to the backstage, China completed an excellent answer sheet, giving the nation a sense of pride and identity, and giving foreign people a chance to get to know China. In such a grand international sports event, the Western mainstream

4 Д.Е. Воинов, «Мягкая сила» Игр «Сочи-2014» и зарубежные медиа: анализ политико-информационного фона российской Олимпиады, Вестн. Моск. ун-та. Сер. 25: Международные отношения и мировая политика. 2015. № 2

media coverage of the Beijing Olympics became the main force of international public opinion, spreading the image of China in its perspective to the world, but in the process of information selection and processing, it actually produced a large number of misinterpretations and misunderstandings, causing a real negative impact on China's soft power.

In the run-up to the opening of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the focus and discourse of the Western mainstream media was clearly negative, with a predominantly «accusatory» and «unfavorable» attitude. After the opening ceremony, the proportion of neutral colors in the reports increased, but there were still more negative reports on China than positive ones. The Western media diverted attention from China's outstanding performance in various ways, often interpreting the events from a special perspective, which lost objectivity and to a certain extent deliberately vilified China's national image in the Beijing Olympics.

Taking the New York Times' coverage of the Beijing Olympics as an example, some scholars have conducted detailed statistics on the sample, which provides an observation point for exploring how the Western mainstream media construct China's national image. In the sample of direct headlines, it is estimated that: sports coverage directly about Phelps (23 articles, 23%), basketball (22 articles, 22%, including only 2 articles about Yao Ming), volleyball (12 articles, 12%, including 4 articles about coach Lang Ping and the Chinese team), gymnastics (2 articles, 2%), and track and field (8 reports, 8%, including 3 reports on Liu Xiang's withdrawal), 3 reports on table tennis (3%), 1 report on boxing (1%), and the rest are reports on other national players' awards.⁵ The analysis shows that its coverage highlights the outstanding achievements of American athletes, while selecting some disadvantageous sports of China and information about several Chinese athletes' injuries or withdrawals, which is evident in the New York Times' deliberate practice of downplaying China's outstanding achievements on the field.

In the sample of indirect headlines, that is, direct coverage of non-Olympic sports, the main concentration is in the World section of the New York Times pages (40 articles, 58.8%), the Business section (10 articles, 14.7%), the Science and Technology section (1 article, 1.47%), the Literature and Arts section (2 articles, 29.4%), the Commentary section (6 articles, 8.8%), the Sports section (7 articles, 10.3%), and the New York section (2 articles, 29.4%). This actually increases the exposure of such news and attracts more attention. Political news was the focus, with human rights and environmental issues about China, as well as a lot of spin on attacks on dead and injured American tourists, creating the impression to the foreign public that U.S. citizens are in an unsafe situation in China, which distort and amplify Chinese political, social, and ecological issues.

Behind the New York Times' figures, similarly, some negative reports by other Western mainstream media such as Associated Press (AP), Reuters and Agence France-Presse (AFP) all have three main potential reasons: First, such media have always been accustomed to covering the Olympics in the form of topic bundles, and in this Beijing Olympics, the coverage of pure sports topics does not fit the personality of their discourse, but tends to focus more on political topics. As Britain Reuters editor-in-chief had publicly stated on the eve of the Games, «As with any previous Olympics, we will not only cover the sporting events themselves, but also

⁵ Puping, Zhang Weimin. Foreign media's coverage of China under the framework of construction: The New York Times' coverage of the Beijing Olympics as an example. *News World*, 2009(03):14-15.

focus on various related areas such as politics, economy and society of the host country.»⁶ Thus skepticism and criticism of China's human rights issues, Tibetan issues, security efforts, and China's environmental pollution and air quality were ubiquitous in their coverage.

Secondly, the Western media pushes negative news, spreading positive news is considered less meaningful, and conversely criticism and exposure are considered powerful, and this value judgment together with its monetary interest makes the positive news of Beijing Olympic Games scarce.

Thirdly, the media's communication can hardly hide the political and ideological point of view behind it-international communication starts with confirming the correctness of its own ideology and making judgments on what is alien to it⁷, journalists from abroad hardly have similar cultural and value backgrounds with domestic ones, so their room for understanding and tolerance is limited, especially the international political considerations, the denigration and discrediting of socialist values by the U.S. and Western countries, and the suspicion and worry about the rise of China make the prejudice and misinformation even deeper.

As a weak player in the international communication discourse, China's major domestic media have limited influence at the international level, and are in fact greatly influenced by the various reports of the Western mainstream media, and various stereotypes will not be easily removed. China's overall soft power development will also encounter many setbacks.

But China was not entirely passive, and in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, a hard-won opportunity to express itself to the world, it also tried to partially balance the negative impact of Western public opinion through practical actions. In the opening ceremony and various image designs of the Beijing Olympics, China injected a lot of Chinese elements into them, which were well conceived and reflected the profundity and beauty of Chinese culture, such as the logo design with Chinese characters, the torch design with scrolling clouds, the costume design with celadon idea, the medal design with inlaid Hetian jade, etc.⁸, all of which give people visual enjoyment; In addition, the Bird's Nest, as the main venue of the Beijing Olympic Games, has been named by Time Magazine, The Times and The Guardian as one of the world's ten most outstanding buildings in 2007. Even though these cultures and designs have had limited exposure in the Western mainstream media, they have enhanced the national image of the country.

When faced with unexpected events, the Chinese government's timely and effective public relations actions played an important role in improving the trend of international public opinion. The Beijing Organizing Committee held several press conferences, informed the media promptly, and informed the public of the latest information available and how to handle the situation, thus avoiding the negative effects of poor information.⁹

All in all, the 2008 Beijing Olympics were a success, with China becoming the first Asian

6 Wang Gengxi. A review of three major Western news agencies' coverage of the Beijing Olympics in China. *News Knowledge*, 2008(12):43-44.

7 Tou Jiguang, Huang Jibing. The game of China's national image in the information communication of Beijing Olympic Games. *Journal of Chengdu University (Educational Science Edition)*, 2008(03):1-4

8 Tang Yunbing. China's national image being watched: A study of visual culture communication of Beijing Olympic Games. DOI:10.13598/j.issn1004-4590.2010.02.006.

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country to top the gold medal table in the history of the Olympics, highlighting its booming sporting career and making it a source of pride for the Chinese people; it also made China more open to the world. At the same time, we need to see the important role played by international communication, to look at foreign media reports rationally and to understand the motivation behind them. Because of the huge differences in ideology and political systems, the majority of the Western media have a deep-rooted preconception of China, and it is not realistic at this stage to expect the Western media to take the initiative to change the misinterpretation of China's image. The only thing we can do is to explore various ways to change this situation, mainly in three major ways: first, to gradually reduce the chances and degree of misinterpretation by the Western mainstream media; second, to effectively participate in international communication by various forces in China; and third, to transform foreign propaganda into cultural exchange and communication.¹⁰

Guangzhou Asian Games

The 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou was another major event for China to showcase itself on the international stage after the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai World Expo. In general, overseas media coverage of the Guangzhou Asian Games has been dominated by Asian media, with less attention from Western media. There are several reasons for the relatively low attention of the Western media: 1. the Shanghai World Expo has just closed, and its large scale and high profile make its news value much higher than that of the Asian Games; 2. the Asian Games involves fewer Western countries among the participating countries, and the Asian Games itself is less attractive to Western countries; 3. the strict control of the Chinese media hinders the Western media from reporting. From the collected Western media reports, we can see that there are positive and negative comments on the Guangzhou Asian Games, but the degree of criticism on the Asian Games is much less than that on the Olympic Games and the Shanghai World Expo.

The search reveals that most of the reports about the Guangzhou Asian Games have objective headlines, and there are still a small number of subjective headlines implying the possibility of disparaging the image of the Guangzhou Asian Games and China. In terms of content, 1. the reports directly related to the content of the Asian Games expressed recognition and praise for the wonderful water performance of the opening ceremony. 2. most of the news focused on aspects other than the event itself, with most of the reports on infrastructure construction, transportation, and environment existing. The New York Times' «Asian Games - Guangzhou Settles Final Details of Asian Games Work,» noted that the prestigious Asian Games has made residents complain and will waste money, but ordinary people are afraid to have complaints for fear of retaliation. In «China's Asian Games host city takes 'coercive measures' to clean up air,» Reuters focuses on the environmental problems caused by the Asian Games, pointing out that a series of measures taken by the Guangzhou government during the Games, such as banning barbecues, halting construction work, banning private cars and requiring free subway rides, caused chaos in public transportation and the potential for poor policy implementation. 3. Western media are also interested in the topics of Asian Games security and relocation of local residents. The Associated Press, in its report «Local residents to

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be relocated for the opening of Asian Games», said that the reason behind the Asian Games, which is very exciting but the nearby residents cannot watch it at home, is the relocation of residents to ensure the security work is foolproof, which is a violation of the right to freedom of residence and human rights. Accusations of security problems are mainly related to newly announced bans that affect the lives of residents, such as the requirement to show ID cards to buy medicine in pharmacies in Guangzhou, while «high security» security checks are almost everywhere in Guangzhou, and the athletes' and media villages are surrounded by multiple layers of barbed wire and uniformed guards are on duty at the entrances around the clock. The atmosphere of the Asian Games was affected by the «military-like buildings».4. The Western media continued to make accusations about the so-called democracy and human rights issues in the Asian Games. For example, the BBC's «Asia Pacific Watch» carried two negative stories from Radio Free Asia: «Chinese dissident writers driven out of Guangzhou during Asian Games» and «Chinese crackdown on unofficial Protestant house church meeting on eve of Asian Games». 5. There were some far-fetched interpretations of the Asian Games in the Western media, such as the sailing show at the opening ceremony, in which the Western media tried to politicize by giving political significance to the show. The US «Newsweek» (Dec. 6) said that this was China's «hint at the Sino-Japanese fishing boat dispute» and a display of China's «tough diplomatic attitude», revealing China's «nationalist deterrent» and «hints of maritime expansion».

Although several Western media were able to cover the state of the Asian Games relatively objectively, it does not mean that the Western media have completely changed their stance and way of reporting on China. We can accept and correct the criticism of relative objectivity, but there is still the phenomenon of politicizing sports events and linking them to topics such as human rights/democracy/freedom.

2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games

On the eve of the Olympic Games, China made ample preparations for such a special occasion, and on the basis of the almost complete completion of the hardware facilities for the Winter Olympics, the cultural connotations and promotional elements derived from the Games were carefully designed, and China's aim of shaping its national image and enhancing the impact of its soft power was somewhat successful. The theme slogan «Together for a Shared Future» was officially announced on September 17, 2021, which actually brought enthusiastic and positive reactions, as Chen Ning, Director of the Cultural Activities Department of the Beijing Winter Olympic Organizing Committee, said: «This theme slogan is in line with China's initiative to build a community of human destiny, reflects the concept of 'sharing the Olympics' and 'opening the Olympics', is in line with the common aspiration of the world's need to work together towards a better tomorrow under the current conditions of dealing with the new coronary pneumonia epidemic, and is in line with the core values and visions of the Olympic and Paralympic movements-the pursuit of unity, peace, progress and inclusion. At the same time, the slogan is simple and concise, easy to read and remember, and has a strong call to action.»¹¹

On the same day, the unveiling of the mascot of the Winter Olympic Games «Bing Dwen

11 Wu, Dong, Zhuo Ran. «Together to the Future» - Interpretation of the theme slogan of the Beijing Winter Olympics and Winter Paralympics. Beijing Daily, 2021-9-18(6).

Dwen» is also a successful result of receiving the love of the general public. The image of the naive panda gained a positive media image and unexpected popularity, and was snapped up both inside and outside the Olympic Village, leaving a deep impression of China in the form of a national treasure.

Nevertheless, during the preparation and hosting of the Beijing Winter Olympics, many contradictions emerged in the Western media, led by Britain and the United States, both directly related to the Beijing Winter Olympics and to various aspects of China's political and economic life, reflecting an ulterior motive to politicize the Olympics and demonstrating the close connection between sports and international relations. On the eve of the Games, there is still a great deal of negative coverage by the foreign media, who continue their usual style of discourse and contempt for China from the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, skillfully dealing with the successes and shortcomings of China's Olympic Games with negative sentiments. As the Time reported more than a decade ago, «False prosperity fools the Chinese themselves», describing the achievement of second place in the gold medal tally as «weakness in the popular events». On the eve of the competition, the leading British magazine Economist was also not optimistic about China's performance in the upcoming Winter Olympics: «China's performance in the winter events is expected to be tricky because she is a relative newcomer». The alternative facts pulled up by the media and the voices of politicians boycotting the Olympics have become the mainstay of an information and opinion war, trampling on the host country's «soft power» strategy.

About the epidemic prevention and control policy

First, in preparation, the Beijing Winter Olympics Organizing Committee has planned an unprecedented set of prevention policies, requiring strict enforcement of quarantine, vaccination and other standards, and has announced that tickets will not be sold to foreign visitors, an important aspect of ensuring the smooth running of the Winter Olympics, but also a serious challenge. This is a far cry from the concepts and practices held by the US and Western countries, and has been used as a «handle» by the media, represented by the UK and the US, to attack China, emphasizing the strong control of the Chinese government and the risks under this policy, and the possible discontent and inconvenience caused.

The BBC report highlighted China's «zero Covid» policy, showing a skeptical attitude before the fact of successful prevention and control of Covid-19, concluding at the end of the piece that China is almost the only country that insists on a «zero Covid» policy regardless of personal freedom and economic costs, and the cost of «banning the rules of the game». It mentioned that «one must fear that if vaccination rates in China fall, the country could be at risk of a widespread outbreak».

CNN also commented on the Chinese government's vaccination policy, expressing alarm at the severe restrictions on the movement of athletes in the early stages and accusing China's official media of being eager to spread positive commentary while completely failing to report criticism from athletes. The Deutsche Zeitung was even harsher in its assessment of Beijing's virus policy, using the story of one athlete, Eric Frenzel, to voice complaints and accusations about the policy, portraying the isolation suffered by the positive athlete as unfortunate and

painful and painful, and that «11 days of isolation must have had a significant impact on the 2014 and 2018 Olympic champion» to the extent that he was unable to win.

About human rights issues

On the eve of the Olympics, China's human rights issues are once again at the center of a public storm, with numerous accusations being made and certain U.S. and Western countries announcing a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics. The Beijing government is accused of committing atrocities against Uighur Muslims in the northwestern province of Xinjiang, as described in a BBC report, «Human rights groups believe that more than a million Uighurs have been held in a vast network of what the Chinese government calls 're-education camps' over the past few years, with hundreds of thousands have been sentenced to prison.»

The issue of human rights in China was also mentioned in an article published in *The Economist*, which wrote that «the theme of the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics in Beijing was primarily intended to demonstrate one of President Xi Jinping's slogans 'a Community of Shared Future for Mankind', thus getting the world to accept China's authoritarian government and ignore its violation of human rights and refusal to accept the Western-dominated global rules». Besides it pointed out that the Chinese spread some government conspiracy theories after the US announced a boycott of the Winter Olympics over human rights issues, such as that the Covid-19 virus had been created in a US military laboratory.

About Program Security

In addition, Western media have expressed distrust of the Chinese government and concerns about internet security and espionage by suspecting possible security flaws in China's Olympic application. On the one hand, foreign countries restrict their athletes from using the digital RMB. Among others, CNN also mentioned its negative attitude towards the publicity effect of the digital currency, arguing that the Chinese government's efforts to showcase the digital RMB internationally would be defeated by the limited number of participants in the Olympics. On the other hand, the face recognition system at the entrance to the Winter Olympic Village and venues that appeared in the video gained noticed. And the foreign press questioned the threat to personal information security posed by the collection of face information.

Despite the criticism of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics in the foreign media before the games, there is no hiding the fact that the world is still highly interested in the Winter Games. As mentioned earlier, in the context of globalization, the power of the mass media is immense and rapidly driving the dissemination of news about sporting events. The communication is characterized by its speed, scope and impact. The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games itself will be contested by 91 countries and regions, with 2,880 athletes, but a thousand times more spectators would learn about the Games through the media than would be able to experience the Beijing Winter Games for themselves. According to the website of the American magazine *Variety* on February 15, the American company Discovery Media (Discovery) revealed that after the opening of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games, more than 156 million Europeans visited Discovery's platform during the current Winter Olympics, streaming more than 1 billion minutes of viewing, 19 times more than the previous Winter

Olympics. Discovery+ and Eurosport streaming services saw an eight-fold increase in viewers compared to the previous Winter Olympics, with users watching more than twice as much content and an average of more than seven hours per viewer during the Games. Besides, eight times more viewers watched the Winter Olympics games via streaming services compared to the same period at the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics. The same trend was seen for live television, with viewers of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing watching 24% longer on average than at the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang.¹²

It is worth mentioning that in the communication of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, foreign social media platforms have become a new variable in the international public opinion landscape. And TikTok, the international version of Jitterbug, is favoured by foreign netizens. In the run-up to the Beijing Winter Olympics, there was a concentration of negative information in international public opinion, especially in the traditional media which set negative issues about the Beijing Winter Olympics. However, social media has always had a higher level of emotional identification with the Winter Olympics than traditional media. The athletes' social media accounts have become an important driver of conversation involving the Winter Olympics, and the athletes themselves play an important role in the spreading of China's national image. Star athletes such as American skier Shaun White (@shaunwhite) and American snowboarder Maddie Mastro (@maddie_mastro) have millions of followers in TikTok. And they have uploaded videos of their daily life in the Winter Olympic Village on social media platforms, which have accumulated millions of views. Sharing a first-hand perspective on the daily life of the Winter Olympics that is different from traditional Western media, it is more convincing and influential. They interacted with fans and netizens through social media, providing a platform for the 'physically absent' public, helping to increase the sense of participation in the Winter Olympics among the world's netizens, promoting a relatively objective public perception of the Winter Olympics, and helping to raise the profile of the Beijing Winter Olympics. On 18 February 2022, IOC President Thomas Bach said at the regular press conference for the Beijing Winter Olympic Games that «the IOC's social media accounts reached 2.7 billion views during the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games and 1 billion comments on the social media accounts of star athletes».¹³

Social media boosts international spread of Chinese culture during the Winter Olympics. Shaun White's video introducing Chinese food such as Kung Pao Chicken and Dan Dan Noodles on Shake International received over 150,000 likes and over 1,500 comments. Maltese skier Jenises Spiteri (@jenisespiteri) goes viral with her recommendation of red bean package. Instruction on how to make «Bing Dwen Dwen dumplings» also topped the list of current affairs topics. In addition, in the face of individual foreign media smears against the Winter Olympics - «poor food, poor accommodation and poor internet speed» - athletes took to social media to showcase first-hand accounts of integrated Winter Olympics services such as smart beds, smart restaurants, robot services and hair and nail services, powerfully

12 For more information, please refer to <https://new.qq.com/omn/20220302/20220302A06NM000.html>

13 Guo Xing, «Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games Successfully Concluded with a World Family Embracing the Future,» Central Commission for Discipline Inspection State Supervision Commission website, https://www.ccdi.gov.cn/toutiaon/202202/t20220221_172986.html, February 21, 2022

countering some of the inaccurate comments. The natural image of athletes streaming through social media attracts traffic to mainstream media outlets that broadcast Olympic events», said a Reuters article.¹⁴

In general, the topic of politics was a major flash point in the coverage of the Winter Olympics, the biggest stain on China's national image before the games and the main reason for the Western countries to launch a boycott. While the actual effectiveness of such coverage should be questioned, with the impact of the diplomatic boycott minimal and fading from the public eye. The bubble created by the international media did not overwhelm the positive image that the Beijing Winter Olympics brought to China for several reasons.

First of all, the careful preparations and related work for the Winter Olympics were put in place and the policies of preventing epidemics was tightly carried out. The advanced and complete facilities of the Olympic Village and other major venues were not as much criticized as the cardboard beds that were exposed in the Tokyo Olympics in Japan. It was also a side show to the world of China's economic and technological strength in many ways. At the same time, the dedication of the many volunteers is a detail worthy of attention. Volunteers usually present the image of a country's public and spare no effort to export enthusiasm and warmth to the outside world, giving a good feeling while they can also be seen in the corners of the screen, leaving a positive impression on the viewers.

Secondly, the overall trend of public opinion in China is positive. National self-confidence is on the rise. When the voices of Western politicians boycotting the Winter Olympics in Beijing like a raging fire in various media channels, the attitude of Chinese netizens is often one of disinterest or resentment. And they prepare to respond positively to their critics. Such old-fashioned tactics do not seem to have created much of a stir.

Thirdly, in an age of globalization, the self-published media has a greater influence on the topic and the power to shape public opinion. Athletes, delegation members and media reporters have real time, authentic information from the Winter Olympics. The image of China they convey is very different from the labelled and stigmatized 'image of China' portrayed by traditional Western media. The Beijing Winter Olympic Games have received more positive comments on social media platforms, creating a positive and enthusiastic public opinion.

Fourthly, as a grand sporting event, people's eyes gradually returned from the complicated branches to the main trunk, to the world's top athletes, to the exciting competition itself, cheering and shouting for the glory of winning a medal. And the Chinese athletes exceeded expectations, covering more events and locking up third place in the Winter Olympics gold medal standings. It countered the underestimation and belittling of Chinese ice and snow sports by the foreign media on the eve of realistic results. Also thanks to the fact that there were no major political scandals or embarrassments during the games, the positive energy and enthusiasm of sport was widely radiated.

It is to be stressed that, despite the apparent intensification of the information confrontation between Beijing and the West. It does not exclusively represent the «immoral» West against a

14 From clothing hauls to TikTok trends, Gen Z Olympians show new side of Games, Reuters/
<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/clothing-hauls-tiktok-trends-gen-zolympians-show-new-side-games-2022-02-11/> 2022-2-11

«rising» China, and the sporting event should not be interpreted politically. External criticism of the Beijing Winter Olympics should not be seen as a means of hurting China at a particular time. We need to accept and rectify factual criticism, and we need to respond strongly to ideological and other ‘habitual’ criticism. Typically, the international media rarely cover the upcoming Olympics in a positive context. For example, the main criticism of Rio 2016 boils down to the lack of time organizers have had to build sports facilities and the risk of disruption to the Games. On the one hand, the infrastructure of the last Tokyo Olympics left a bad impression. On the other hand, the world is worried about the smooth running of this Beijing Winter Olympics and the adequacy of epidemic prevention and control measures because of the impact of the epidemic. The uniqueness of the situation may therefore distort the analysis of the confrontation of information related to the Winter Olympics.

CONCLUSION

Major international sporting events were initially seen in China as one of the most ambitious projects since the founding of New China, aimed at projecting a positive image of the country on the international stage. But in this case, the opposite trend can sometimes occur - the acute realization of certain themes in the foreign media during the final stages of the Olympic Games/Asian Games preparations: human rights issues, epidemic prevention and control issues, etc. In general, the tone initially set by the media was not determined by the Chinese side, but by the Western media, mainly led by the UK and the US. They have played a fundamental role in balancing China’s ‘soft power’, spreading the message to millions of people around the world, diluting the focus on the Winter Olympics and shifting it to issues such as human rights. We should be aware that China’s media potential is unlikely to determine the information agenda for years to come. Therefore, an important task for our country is to counter the attacks of the foreign media within the framework of information campaigns.

Of course, the successful organization and staging of the event (from the force majeure factor to the efficient performance of the Chinese team) has been a constant source of interest for the foreign media. But the realities of the information society have profoundly affected the image of the Olympic Games in the minds of viewers. In the eyes of the nation one can look to the Olympics to strengthen the country’s image. But in reality the foreign media have created a parallel reality in which China appears as an outsider, constantly in crisis of public opinion and facing other damaging dilemmas. But at the same time striving at all costs to be on the world stage and to show its great power. It is clear that in the modern conditions of information confrontation, a country can prepare for major international sporting events at an appropriate level without necessarily reaping the greatest image benefits from them at the same time. This is because competitors in the information space actively engage in gaming.

Some Western countries are making a big effort to revive the Cold War mentality and politicize sports to boycott the Olympic Games, which is not only impossible to achieve their sinister intentions, but also against the Olympic spirit created for centuries. As Russian scholars say, «Our world is complicated and divided enough. Sport is now almost the last chance - at least temporarily - to unite cities, regions and entire nations. It transcends class, race, religion and ideological differences and is held without any prejudice. Sport should not

be a tool of politics. The life of sport lies in its autonomy and the joy it can inspire, as well as the social cohesion it can generate. To politicize sport would deprive people of the last bastion of consensus.»¹⁵

As mentioned earlier, media interest in the Olympics/Asian Games disappeared almost simultaneously with the end of the Games. Therefore in the future, China's media strategy should work more effectively in all three dimensions of the media space: past tense, present tense and future tense (i.e. creating the necessary context before, during and after the event). And it is also supposed to position itself not only as a domestic media but also as an international one. It is, of course, easier for the domestic media to implement such a strategy: arranging for extensive coverage of the preparations for the Games on the country's main television channels, daily coverage during the games and classic reports on the Games. The purpose of the mass media campaign is to strengthen the country's image, to increase the image capital that China gains through the Games and to prevent opportunities for interested foreign media to distort events or to distract viewers with topics such as «human rights issues». Such an argument may seem far-fetched, but recent political and informational precedents attest to the fact that history and the past can still be ideal objects for political manipulation by the media, and that they can influence organized work in the context of history.

In the future, China will be expected to make its own media bigger and stronger and to participate actively in the globalization process. Under globalization, it is impossible for any media to survive and develop by relying entirely on their own individual efforts to maintain their leading position, let alone catch up with the best in isolation. We need to be more open and strengthen our cooperation with media outside of China and learn from their mature experience in editorial, production, broadcasting and management. So that our sport communication can reach the people's hearts and minds, while enhancing international discourse.¹⁶ China needs to pay attention to social media, which satisfies the multilevel needs of the public for interaction and emotional communication. It is important to tell the Chinese story on social media platforms, to tap into the journalistic discourse applicable to the social media scene, and to correct the stigmatized image of China conveyed by traditional media. In addition, the Chinese and Russian mass media should strengthen cooperation, jointly face the hegemony of public opinion of the Western media, jointly counter the distorted interpretation of China and Russia by the Western media, and strive to disseminate an objective national image.

In the future, sports should serve as a bridge between nations, not as a political fence that some countries use to fight others. In the period before the opening of the Beijing Winter Olympics, some ulterior motives of individual Western countries would undoubtedly continue to politicize sports, and the old Cold War stigmatization tactics will continue to be revived, pressuring other countries to jointly implement diplomatic sanctions through political, economic and diplomatic levels; forcing multinational companies from Western countries to

15 Осинина Д.Д. Урожок Е.А.. Спорт и политика в современном мире. Научные записки молодых исследователей, 2016-2.

16 Huang Shiguang, Lin Shaona. The influence of mass media on China's sports communication in the post-Olympic era under the background of globalization. Liaoning Sports Science and Technology, 2012, 34(01):35-37+46. DOI:10.13940/j.cnki.lntykj.2012.01.014.

withdraw from Beijing through certain political and economic threats. Some sponsors of the 2022 Winter Olympics will be forced to withdraw from the list. In response to the fact that some Western politicians have maliciously stigmatized the Beijing Winter Olympics, China should adhere to Xi Jinping's spirit of «telling a good Chinese story» and also realize that it is not enough just to refute the politicized views of Western countries on sports, but must build a narrative system for the Olympics and take the initiative to shape the international public opinion on the Olympics. We must build an Olympic public opinion narrative system, take the initiative to shape the international public opinion environment related to the Olympic Games, spread it through reforming and innovating China's international communication methods and means, and make efforts to defend the spirit of the Charter of the Olympic Movement, which is non-politicized. In addition, Chinese and Russian mass media should have to strengthen strategic partnership, face the hegemony of public opinion by Western media together, counter the distorted interpretation of China and Russia by Western media together, and work for spreading an objective national image. On the one hand, Chinese and Russian media should set diverse news issues, reflect the multi-polarity and cultural pluralism of the world comprehensively, and present a relatively objective and realistic world to the audience; on the other hand, Chinese and Russian media should improve the quality of communication products, enhance international communication and international competition, and realize the complementary advantages of resources. In addition, China and Russia should use the media as an intermediary to comprehensively promote exchanges and mutual trust, solidify the foundation of Sino-Russian friendship and public opinion, explore cultural resonance points between China and Russia, and actively innovate media cooperation models. Finally, we should improve the cooperation mechanism, promote the construction of new media platforms, establish a fair and reasonable new order of international information dissemination, and lay a solid foundation for the media and do of both countries.

This project is funded by the 2022 Jilin University «Student Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Program», Project No. X202210183122.

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Ли Мэнлун, Цинь Бенчюю, Сюань Цзян

АНАЛИЗ ОСВЕЩЕНИЯ СОБЫТИЙ В ЗАПАДНЫХ СМИ В ПЛАНЕ ПОЛИТИЗАЦИИ СПОРТА: ПРИМЕР КИТАЯ

Аннотация: Первоначальная цель Международных Олимпийских игр состояла в том, чтобы способствовать укреплению мира, но политика часто является важным фактором успеха Игр. На протяжении всей своей истории международное олимпийское движение не могло избежать политизации. К началу XXI века западные страны, прежде всего США, заклемили зимние Олимпийские игры, проводимые Китаем и Россией, под предлогом нарушения прав человека. В последние годы Китай уделяет все больше внимания наращиванию своей мягкой силы, и, несмотря на сложную международную ситуацию, он старается явить миру положительный имидж, рассказать хорошую китайскую историю и противостоять злонамеренным критикам. В этой статье предпринята попытка изучить дискурсы западных СМИ, освещающие крупные события в Китае, с целью дальнейшего прояснения текущих препятствий и вызовов китайской дипломатии «мягкой силы» на зимних Олимпийских играх, а также определить подготовку и контрмеры, необходимые национальным средствам массовой информации.

Ключевые слова: Политизация спорта, Пекинская Олимпиада, Азиатские игры в Гуанчжоу, зимние Олимпийские игры в Пекине, британские и американские СМИ, средства массовой информации, национальный имидж, социальные медиа

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