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# National Image Construction: A Framework Analysis of Western Media Coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics

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**Abstract:** The 2022 Winter Olympic Games in Beijing have received widespread attention from the world, and hosting a major sporting event provides a valuable opportunity for the host country to present a good national image. However, the effectiveness of national image construction and communication is often constrained by the mediating role of the media. This study selects four mainstream international newspapers, The Times, The Guardian, The New York Times and The Washington Post, and collects 961 of their news reports related to the Beijing Winter Olympics to analyze how the Western media construct China's national image during the preparation and hosting of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. Through coding and textual analysis of these reports, five media frames were summarized for the construction of China's national image by Western media: sports frame, political frame, human interest frame, moral frame and racial frame. After categorizing and analyzing the reports in relation to the time of publication, it was found that the political frame and human interest frame dominated the Western media coverage before the start of the Winter Olympics, while the sports frame dominated after the start of the games. The study concludes with recommendations on how countries hosting major sporting events can enhance their national image, including a focus on event operations and the creation of international communication channels.

**Keywords:** Beijing Winter Olympic Games; national image; Western media; media frame

## 1 Introduction

The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics have gained a lot of attention for China in the world. The reason for this is not only that Beijing is the world's first Dual Olympic City, but also because of the political reasons wrapped up in the context of the ongoing friction between Beijing and the Western world (Lee, 2021; Liu, 2010). With the development and advancement of society and the rapid growth of the sports industry, more and more countries around the world are choosing to bid for major sporting events in order to strengthen their influence and visibility (Panagiotopoulou, 2012). Major sporting events such as the Olympic Games have helped host countries, including developed Western countries, to renew their infrastructures and boost their national images, and promote the economic development of the host countries (Scandizzo, 2018). In addition to this, the cross-cultural communication role of the Olympic Games is well documented. Recent studies on the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, Pyeongchang, South Korea, and Beijing found that the Winter Olympics greatly contributed to the dissemination and narrative construction of cross-cultural perceptions in the host countries (Lee, 2021). The Winter Olympics not only provide a stage for athletes to compete, but also build a platform to showcase the country's image. Since the successful bid for the Beijing Winter Olympics in 2015 to the successful hosting in 2022, China has been committed to promoting the construction of venues, infrastructure, and cultural branding of the event (Li, 2021), which has become an important driving force for the synergistic development of Beijing and its neighboring regions, and has shown a good image of Beijing and China.

At the same time, the risks brought by hosting major sporting events represented by the Olympic Games to the host country should not be underestimated (Liu, 2017). Academics have studied the risks of major sporting events relatively well, mainly from the perspectives of economic risk, security risk, and public opinion risk (Jennings, 2012). It is worth noting that the social and environmental conditions for Beijing to host the Winter Olympics are different from other previous events. First, the political and economic pattern of counter-globalization has gradually taken shape in recent years, and the host and participating countries are gradually making more decisions based on politics rather than on the event

itself, which has created risks to the success of the event (Hayat, 2022). In addition, the rise of China in recent years has caused the West, which dominates the international order, to feel a crisis, and talk of boycotting the Beijing Winter Olympics has been rampant in various official Western media reports (Ross, 2021).

The effectiveness of national image construction and communication is often limited by the mediating role of the media. Although hosting a major sporting event provides a good medium and opportunity for the host country to communicate its national image, how the international media cover the event and related preparations can have a significant impact on the host country's national image-building. Based on media framing theory, this study uses the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics as a case study to analyze how the international mainstream press and media construct the host country's national image during the preparation and hosting of major sporting events.

## **2 Literature review**

### **2.1 Media construction of national image**

The concept of National Image was introduced in 1956 by Kenneth Boulding, an American political psychologist, who defined it as "the sum of shared events and experiences that exist at the level of consciousness of the audience" of the nation. Guan Wenhui (1999), in his book *The Theory of State Image*, proposed that state image is a comprehensive evaluation of the state itself, its behavior and activities, and is a representation of a state's strength and status. It is generally regarded as part of the "soft power" of a country (Fan, 2008), and its formation and construction is a complex and long-term process, which is influenced by various factors such as national strength, international environment and construction channels. With the gradual rise in the status and influence of mass media, the process of shaping national image has gradually transformed from traditional public relations to a comprehensive marketing process based on media activities (Shi Anbin, 2011). Many countries have started to use mass media unconsciously or consciously to shape their good national image and regard national image as an intangible asset of a country. Although the construction of a country's image is based on the country itself, its behavior and its activities, the audience's evaluation of these aspects is often based on the relevant information they receive from the media. Thus, many scholars believe that a country's national image depends to a large extent on how relevant coverage by the news media of other countries is carried out (Liu Jinnan, 2008; He Hui, 2006).

In order to spread a good national image in the international community, the opportunity to present oneself to other countries is particularly rare for the vast majority of countries. Compared to political, trade, and military exposure, hosting international sporting events is an act with a high cost-benefit ratio (Zheng Yan, 2020). As an international event with significant influence, the Olympic Games provide an ideal stage for the national image of the host country to be displayed and disseminated, and become an important motivation for the bidding country to declare the Games. Academics have done a lot of research on the national image communication function and effect of the Olympic Games, and found that hosting the Olympic Games plays an important role in quickly and efficiently enhancing the national image of the host country (Chang, Dongni, 2019; Song, Zongpei, 2018; Liu, Ting, 2018). At the same time, the hosting of the Olympic Games can also help the host country to reverse its negative image in the international arena. Using the Sochi Winter Olympics as an object of study, Sun Yu (2016) argues that Russia used its traditional elegant arts as a basis and the personal images of its President Vladimir Putin and several famous athletes as typical communication materials to showcase Russia's efficient organizational capabilities and steadily growing economic strength to the world, earning the country acclaim in the international community.

### **2.2 Media frame and the communication of sporting events**

In 1972, the anthropologist Bateson introduced the concept of "frames", which he defined psychologically as a collection of information that guides action. Subsequently, the sociologist Goffman (1974) introduced the concept of "constructed reality" in his book *Frame Analysis*. In his book *Making the News*, Tuchman (1988) describes his understanding of news framing as an artificially designed and

produced operational system for guiding and evaluating news production. A media frame can be understood simply as a journalist's mode of thinking and method of analyzing society in order to quickly analyze, process, and publish news to achieve its desired media impact. Gitlin (1980) then built on Tuchman's concept of "media framing", which emphasizes the selection of news content and positions, and argues that media framing is a pattern that naturally develops in the work of communicators.

The selection of news frames is often influenced from a variety of sources. National ideologies, media values, and the pursuit of journalistic professionalism determine how a topic is framed by different media (Iyengar, 1994). Factors at the level of the international system, including political relations, economic relations, cultural tendencies, and national identity, particularly significantly influence frame generation when Western media cover Chinese issues (Kang, 2016). It is not difficult to find that the media's choice of reporting frames is based on ideology and self-interest. Entman (1993) summarized four frameworks for news coverage of major emergencies: "problem definition, causal explanation, moral judgment, and countermeasure suggestion", which are also accepted by domestic scholars. For example, Wang Guohua (2016) verified the applicability of these four frameworks in the Chinese media environment based on a localized Chinese media sample, and found that these four frameworks were progressively applied throughout the coverage of breaking news events. Stieglitz's research team proposed an analytical framework for media content in 2013: i.e., themes, perspectives, and ways of constructing, and this analytical approach has also been widely applied in the analysis of media frameworks for topics related to politics and international relations.

Since the 21st century, the academic community has gradually begun to focus on the process of media framing of major sporting events such as the Olympic Games. Zaharopoulos (2007) analyzed the news framing process of the 2004 Athens Olympics and found no articles framed in terms of peace and friendship, while up to 30% of the coverage was framed in terms of conflict. Xi (2022), in a study of Western media coverage of the Sochi and Beijing Winter Olympics, suggests that the West has positioned the relatively "unfriendly" China and Russia as "systematically doping Russia" and "human rights violating China" respectively, from beginning to end. The framing associated with this negative image positioning has been reported almost throughout the Olympic cycle. A study of the 2016 Rio Olympics also argues that news media coverage of the host country of the Olympics, while sporting as an issue, is ultimately about the host country itself (M. Gutierrez, 2021). Overall, the role of media framing in the construction of a country's image is highly dependent on the social context in which it exists and is influenced by the country's current international status and its national agenda (Shi, 2022).

It has become a consensus among academics that hosting major sporting events such as the Olympic Games is one of the channels to showcase the country and national culture to the international community and to enhance the country's image. However, the Western media's negative framing has largely portrayed China as a "disruptor of order". In order to investigate how this construction is carried out, this study takes the Western media coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics as an example, analyzes the evolution characteristics of the Western media coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics and the construction of China's national image during different periods of the Olympic cycle, and summarizes the situation of China's national image spread in the West during the Beijing Winter Olympics.

### **3 Research design**

#### **3.1 Data sources**

This study selected four mainstream media outlets from the representative countries of the Western world, the UK and the US: the Times, the Guardian, the New York Times, and the Washington Post, which have wide acceptance in Western countries and were all once considered to be the most influential newspapers in their countries, reaching an audience of over 100 million people per month (Wtaerson, 2018; NMA, 2010; CISION, 2019). Using "Beijing Olympic", "Beijing 2022", and "2022 winter olympic" as keywords, the search Since 2015, we searched for reports on the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games in these four media, and the inclusion criteria were news reports with the above keywords in the title or body of the article, and finally we got a total of 961 reports meeting the requirements. Among them, 109

reports came from The Times, 249 from The Guardian, 373 from The New York Times and 230 from The Washington Post.

### 3.2 Analysis methods

The 961 reports were collated and coded with reference to the coding procedure of Grounded Theory, extracting thematic categories and coverage frames layer by layer. All stories were coded independently by two separate coders and subsequently compared, with inconsistent coding discussed until agreement was reached.

First level of coding: specific topics of the press coverage, e.g. "Controversy over the identity of Ailing Gu", "New Zealand athlete Zoi Sadowski Synnott wins gold medal".

The second level of coding: thematic categorisation in press coverage, including "athlete features", "boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics", "analysis and commentary on the Winter Olympics", "event-related coverage", "criticism of Russia", "criticism of the Chinese political system", and other 11 thematic categories.

The third level of coding: frame extraction, including five frames in total: sport frame, political frame, human interest frame, ethical frame and ethnic frame.

In addition to frame coding, in order to explore the use of political issues in Beijing Winter Olympics-related coverage, this study also coded the types of coverage issues (political, sports, other), whether they were directly related to China, and whether they involved political criticism of China. The specific coding included: source media, title, time of publication, classification of publication time (before the start of the Olympics, in progress, after the end), the topics of article content, sentiment (positive, negative, neutral), media frame extraction, and whether it directly involved political issues on China (Table 1). The data were analyzed using statistical analysis software such as MS Excel and SPSS.

**Table 1 Examples of coded content**

Serial number	Source Media	headline		Specific publication date	Publication time classification
1	The Guardian	'Everyone forgets about you': Erin Jackson on returning home after Olympics gold		5/16/2022	After

Subject of article (primary coding)	Article subject classification (secondary coding)	Classification of topics	emotion	Media frame extraction (tertiary coding)	Does it directly involve China	Whether political issues and institutional criticism of China are involved
Feature on American athlete Erin Jackson	Athlete Feature Story	sports	P	Sports framework	N	N

In addition, in order to form a preliminary understanding of the content and themes of media coverage, the full text of 961 reports was analyzed using software such as Nvivo for textual analysis, and the key themes and issues of media coverage in three different periods: before, during and after the Winter Olympics were analyzed from an ephemeral perspective, summarizing the periods when different issues emerged and their role in building China's national image.

## 4 Data analysis

### 4.1 Basic features and key themes of media coverage

Of the 961 stories, only 27 (2.8%) , were reported after the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. In

comparison, there were 379 stories (39.4%), before the Winter Olympics. And there were the most stories in progress, with 555 (57.8%). There were 547 reports of positive or neutral sentiment (57%). But of the 466 reports directly related to China (except for the interview with British athletes), negative sentiment accounted for 65.3 percent. Of these 466 reports, 274 (58.8%), involved criticism of political issues in China.

The word frequency analysis of all 961 reported texts was performed using Nvivo, taking word roots as a grouping categorization. The following results were obtained after deleting meaningless words such as coronals and auxiliaries (the top 20 occurrences were taken as examples) (Table 2).

**Table 2 Word frequency analysis**

<b>word (general term including monosyllables through short phrases)</b>	<b>ranking</b>	<b>frequency</b>	<b>Related Words</b>
<b>Medals</b>	1	2501	medal, medaled, medaling, medalling, medals, medals'
<b>Gold</b>	2	2056	gold, golds
<b>Competition</b>	3	1688	competition, competitions, competitive, competitively, competitiveness, compete, competed, competent, competes, competing
<b>Event</b>	4	1543	event, eventful, events
<b>Women</b>	5	1312	Women, women
<b>Finals</b>	6	1237	final, finale, finalized, finally, finally', finals
<b>Skis</b>	7	1182	ski, skied, skiing, skis
<b>Country</b>	8	1170	countries, countries', countries', country
<b>Skating</b>	9	1100	skate, skated, skates, skating
<b>Finished</b>	10	1042	finish, finished, finisher, finishers, finishes, finishing
<b>Stating</b>	11	1032	state, stated, states, states', states', states 欵, stating
<b>Rights</b>	12	1031	right, rightfully, rightly, rights
<b>American</b>	13	1012	american, americans, americans'
<b>Last</b>	14	959	last, lasted, lasting, lasts
<b>Nations</b>	15	809	nation, national, nationalism, nationalities, nationality, nationally, nationals, nations
<b>Placing</b>	16	777	place, place', placed, places, placing, placings
<b>Russian</b>	17	755	russian, russians
<b>Humans</b>	18	742	human, humanity, humanity', humans
<b>Valieva</b>	19	730	valieva, valievas
<b>Pressure</b>	20	666	press, presse, pressed, presses, pressing, pressure, pressured, pressures, pressuring, pressurized

As seen in Table 2, "medal" was the most frequently used word, followed by gold and competition, and "event" ranked fourth, with over 1,500 mentions. The top 10 words are basically related to the Olympics itself and are words directly related to the event. Political words such as humans, rights, and negative coverage of Russian figure skater valieva also made it into the top 20.

Using the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games (February 4, 2022) as the dividing line, the coverage texts were divided into two parts, namely 379 before the start of the Games and 582 during and after the Games. A word cloud was generated to visually perceive the word usage of the reports during the full period of the Beijing Olympic cycle, as well as the word frequency of the reports in the two parts, before, during and after the games. Figure 1 shows that words related to political issues, such as boycott, human rights, country, government, and democracy, dominated the coverage before the start of the Olympics. In contrast, in the coverage after the start of the Olympic Games, related coverage words were more focused on sports issues, such as gold medal, finish, win, and final dominated this section. Combining the coverage of the whole period, sports-related words such as gold medal and women occupy the main position, while words such as Russia and human rights occupy a smaller proportion in comparison.



Figure 1a Pre-race

Figure 1b In-race and post-race

Figure 1c Full period

Figure 1 Word cloud analysis results

#### 4.2 Reporting framework

Referring to the coding procedure of Grounded Theory, four coders were employed to independently code the data in this study. The primary coding focused on extracting the content themes of each story, the secondary coding categorized the content themes extracted by the primary coding, and the tertiary coding focused on extracting the story frames by combining the content themes of the stories and a review of the textual content. The media frames were extracted while also referring to Van Dijk (2019), Yu (2022) and Gutierrez (2021)'s classification methods for the Sochi Winter Olympics, Beijing Winter Olympics and Rio Olympics news media frames, respectively, as well as the word clustering analysis of 961 reports using Nvivo software (Figure 2). Five media frames were finally obtained: sports frame, political frame, human interest frame, ethical frame, and racial frame (Table 3).

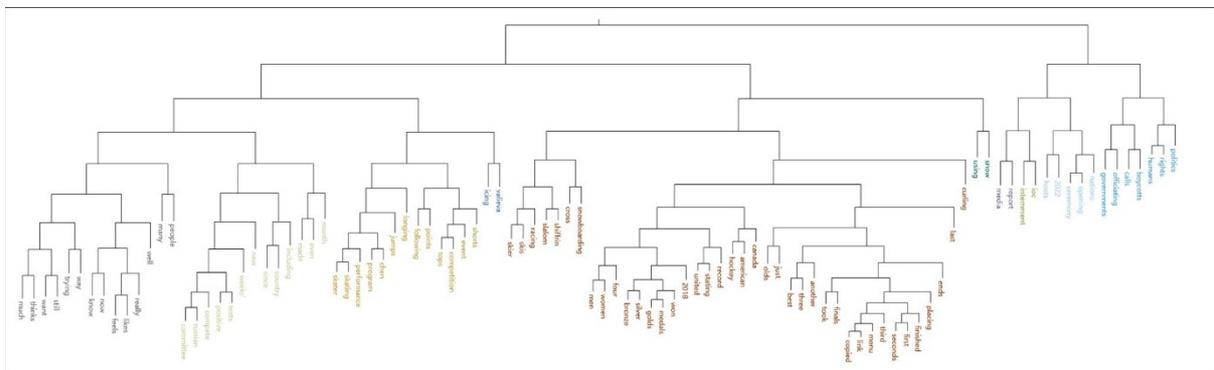


Figure 2 Cluster analysis results

Table 3 Results of media framework extraction

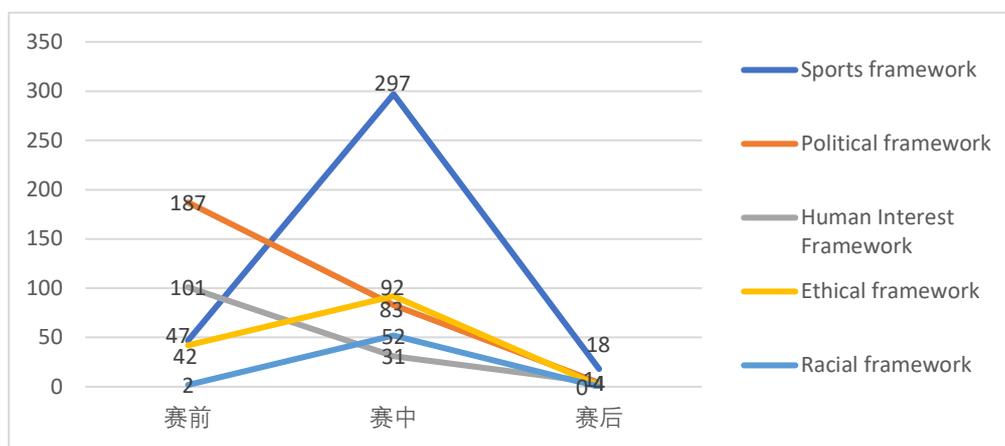
framework	frequency	frequency	Second-order codes included
Sports framework	362	37.7%	Athlete interviews, event-related coverage, analysis and commentary on the Winter Olympics
Political framework	274	26.5%	Criticism of China's political system, Western countries boycotting the Winter Olympics
Human Interest Framework	136	14.2%	Environmental issues, war issues in Ukraine, sustainability issues, human rights
Ethical framework	135	14.0%	Doping Issues, Athlete Quarantine Policy
Racial framework	54	5.6%	Naturalised athletes, athlete nationality

Subsequently, the media frame extraction results were grouped and organized according to the time period when the stories were published (pre-game, in-game, and post-game) in order to analyze the evolutionary characteristics of the frames. As shown in Table 4 and Figure 3, sports-framed stories were mainly concentrated in the in-game phase (297 coverages, 82.1%) , political-framed stories were mainly

concentrated in the in-game phase (187 coverages, 68.2%), human interest-framed coverages were mainly concentrated in the pre-game phase (74.3%), and ethical and racial frames were also largely concentrated in the in-game phase, with 92 (68.1%) and 52 (96.3%) coverages respectively. Of the 27 post-game coverages, the sports frame had a higher number of coverages than the other frames at 18, while the race frame did not appear in the post-game time period. Overall, the pre-game coverage was dominated by stories framed by politics and human interest frames, while the number of sports-framed stories rose rapidly as the Winter Olympics began, well above the other frames.

**Table 4 Media frames (frequency, in-frame frequency) by time period of publication of stories**

Framework	Pre-game	In-game	Post-game	Total
Sports framework	47 (13.0%)	297 (82.1%)	18 (4.9%)	362
Political framework	187 (68.2%)	83 (30.3%)	4 (1.5%)	274
Human Interest Framework	101 (74.3%)	31 (22.8%)	4 (2.9%)	136
Ethical framework	42 (31.1%)	92 (68.1%)	1 (0.7%)	135
Racial framework	2 (3.7%)	52 (96.3%)	0 (0%)	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>555</b>	<b>27</b>	



**Figure 3 Trends in number of frames and time to publication**

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 In what perspective? The content and sentiment of Western media coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics

Although media framing studies of the Olympic Games have generally concluded that political issues dominated the entire media production process, some new findings emerge when the temporal dimension is considered. First, almost all of the coverage related to political issues in the Beijing Winter Olympics was concentrated in the late 2021 to early 2022 period, i.e. 3-4 months before the opening of the Beijing Winter Olympics. During this period, various media outlets focused on human rights issues in Xinjiang, Peng Shuai issues, China's epidemic prevention issues, and the issue of boycotting the Winter Olympics, and the rhetoric about the Beijing Winter Olympics was almost always negative. They were also almost all published in the political and economic pages of various newspapers, rather than in the sports pages related to the Winter Olympics. The coverage of these political issues was so intense that an information network was quickly formed in a short period of time. Based on media construction theory (Scheufele, 1999), this information network has a rapid and significant cognitive impact on Western audiences to a large extent, thus changing their psychological preconceptions about the Beijing Winter Olympics, which may lead to an antagonistic decoding of the messages sent by the host country of the Winter Olympics, China, in its external communications.

In contrast, when the Beijing Winter Olympics opened on February 4, 2022, these political issues instantly disappeared. They were replaced by a plethora of sports issues. But these sports issues were not all focused on the games and the athletes themselves, but were interspersed with a lot of content outside of

sports. In addition to the usual content of athlete interviews and event-related coverage, the Western media spent a considerable amount of ink on the doping scandal involving Russian figure skater Valieva, and all of this coverage was directed at Russia. There is a strong sense of deconstruction in the coverage of Russia, in that the Western media tries to separate Valieva herself from the Russian government, framing the Russian government as a "dictator who forces athletes to systematically dope in competitive sports", while portraying Valieva herself as an "unsophisticated and deceived athlete".

Borrowing from the sports issue as an entry point, there has been a fair amount of critical coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics and the Chinese government, notably related to the much-publicized Gu Ailing. Her dazzling performance helped China win a never-before-seen gold medal in skiing, but her nationality has been called into question. The Western media has used this as a basis to attack the Chinese government for using "gold medal orientation" to "immigrate" to sports as an immoral thing to do. There are also concerns about the environmental aspects of the Beijing Winter Olympics. The amount of snowfall in Beijing and surrounding areas in the winter is so inadequate for skiing and other events that a lot of artificial snowfall is required. Even though artificial snowfall, or artificially altering the environment of the venues to make them suitable for competitive events, is a common practice in various countries worldwide, especially in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Stephenson, 2014), Western media reports do not compare Beijing's practice to the common practice worldwide, but simply create a image of China as a "waste of water and electrical energy". This creation can be efficient, as the relevant reports often carry a great deal of popular science content, and audiences are often influenced by the popular science content to accept and identify with the value orientation behind the content.

From an emotional perspective, we find that Western media coverage of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics is predominantly negative, and mostly focused on political criticism prior to the opening of the Games. In the course of the Olympic Games, the reports reflecting positive emotions also remain very limited. These positive sentiments were mainly concentrated in the following sections: (1) praise for the opening ceremony; (2) coverage of Chinese athletes who performed well; (3) case studies of China's urban renewal and transformation through the Olympics (e.g., the renovation of the Shougang factory). In these few positive sentiments, Beijing is portrayed as a well-organized city with leadership and action. Of course, the question of the "cost" has not been interrupted, which is also a result of the dominant Western values of individuality and the pursuit of absolute freedom.

## **4.2 In what mode? The framework of Western media coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics**

Synthesizing the findings of existing studies and the word clustering analysis of all 961 sample reports, and referring to the three levels coding procedure of Grounded Theory, this study extracted five media frames: sports frame, political frame, human interest frame, ethical frame, and ethnic frame.

### **4.2.1 Sports framework**

The number of stories that fall under the sports framework totals 362, which is the largest share at over 37.7%. The secondary codes under the sports framework are athlete features, event-related stories, etc. Typical coverages such as *"Winter Olympics: Finnish cross-country skier suffers frozen penis in 50km race"* and *"Nathan Chen wins figure skating gold for US and Olympic redemption"* from The Guardian. Coverages that use sports frames generally focus on the event itself, with event briefings and athlete interviews as the main focus.

It is noteworthy that the use of sports frames was concentrated in the mid-competition period of the Beijing Winter Olympics. 82.1% of the sports frames were published in the mid-competition period. Even the few 47 articles before the games were mainly previews and outlooks for the national athletes, such as *"Charlotte Bankes leads medal hopes of GB Winter Olympics snowsport squad"*. Of the 362 stories using the sports framework, 220, or over 60%, were positive. However, only 94 of these stories are directly related to China, which accounts for a quarter of the total.

The most coverage in the sports framework is for interviews with athletes from the country to which the newspaper belongs. For example, the British newspaper——The Guardian, spends a lot of space on the relevant games and achievements of the British curling team. Not much of this section deals directly

with China's national image, mainly portraying China from a side perspective. The sentiment contained in the sports frame is predominantly positive, with the negative content focusing on reflections on unsatisfactory results and some reflections on the sporting system. But if we consider it from another perspective, the smooth progress of the Olympic events and the fact that the athletes can focus on the competition is in itself an affirmation of the host country's standard of running the games.

#### **4.2.2 Political framework**

The political frame was the second ranked frame with 274 items (26.5%). Secondary codes under the political frame include criticism of Chinese politics and Western countries's boycott of Beijing Winter Olympics. The Guardian article "*Spectre of 1936 and 1980 haunts Beijing 2022 as fear and repression breed silence*" and the Washington Post article "*Xinjiang police launch Winter Olympics-inspired military training drive*" are typical examples of the use of this frame. Coverages using the political frame were mainly focused on the three months before the opening of the Beijing Olympics. There were 187 articles related to political framing, or more than 68.2% of the articles published before the opening of the Beijing Winter Olympics. After the opening of the Winter Olympics, the number of coverages using political framing decreased sharply. Moreover, the stories using political framing in the four media outlets selected for this study were largely posted in the politics and international relations section rather than the sports section, which is the most distinctive feature of political and sports framing. It is better to say that it is coverage related to the Beijing Winter Olympics than that it uses the Beijing Winter Olympics to express its own political aspirations.

An important topic in the political framework was the discussion of the boycott of the Winter Olympics in Beijing. All four media outlets have tried to counter Beijing's worldwide image of being out of touch by reporting on the opposition to the Winter Olympics in their own countries and their allies. The Washington Post article "*Olympic boycotts are nothing new. Here are other times countries protested the Games.*" even systematically analyzed the history of the boycott of the Olympics, comparing the boycott of the Beijing Winter Games to the boycotts of the Berlin and Moscow Olympics, in order to justify and explain the boycott. The article even systematically analyzed the history of the boycott of the Olympic Games, comparing the boycott of the Beijing Winter Games with the boycotts of the Berlin and Moscow Olympic Games, in order to justify and necessitate it. This analogy of "drawing lessons from history" often has a broader audience and is more persuasive.

The political framework also contains a large number of attacks on Chinese institutions, that is, ideology, which more often than not are not direct, but rely on individual or small events, and this "see big things through small ones" tactic is widely used, which is also generally considered by the West as an efficient and low-cost way to construct "stigmatization" of other countries in the West (Jin Siyuan, 2020). But from another perspective, the way the political image of China is constructed in the political framework is stable, because the structure of this attack on China appears simple and repetitive. In short, the purpose of the coverage affiliated with the political frame does not serve sports, and its main target audience is not sports fans. Considering that politically framed stories are concentrated in the 3-4 months before the Beijing Winter Olympics, they are extremely cognitively leading for audiences, who are unfamiliar with China and Beijing, and thus have a significant negative impact on China's national image.

#### **4.2.3 Human interest framework**

The number of stories included in the human interest framework was 14.2 percent, with a count of 136. Secondary codes of the human interest framework include the Russia-Ukraine conflict, environmental issues at the Winter Olympics, and human rights issues. For example, the Times's "*Unvaccinated athletes face 21-day quarantine at Chinese Winter Olympics*" slams China's vaccine policy, or the New York Times's "*Beijing Wanted the Winter Olympics. All It Needed Was Snow.*" attempts to portray China as an "environmental destroyer". Of the stories that used the human interest frame, 101 coverages (74.3%) were published before the games. Similar to the political framing, the use of the human interest frame declined rapidly after the start of the Winter Olympics. The human interest frame is also an important part of the construction of China's image.

The so-called "human interest" is closely related to the "universal values" promoted by the West,

including issues such as environmental protection, peace, sustainable development and human rights. This is also the usual construct of the Western media. This section focuses on the environmental aspects of the Beijing Winter Olympics and the segregation of incoming athletes. The snow used for the skiing events at the Beijing Winter Olympics is almost entirely made by hand, and under this topic, the Western media generally cut in with a sci-fi rhetoric, trying to create an image of China as irresponsible for sustainable development. The Times's *"Inside the Beijing Winter Olympics: fake snow, hazmat suits and robot bartenders"* is a typical example of this framing. The power of popularization of science is immense, and topics of human interest like sustainability and environmental protection can easily capture hearts and minds. The number of articles in this type of framework is small, but they can often have a huge impact on readers' perceptions. Because the human interest framework also includes the topic of peace, this framework also includes the topic of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The four Western media used as case studies, such as the Times's *"Winter sports and Cold War games at the Beijing Olympics"*, which accused China and Russia of joining forces to start a new Cold War, or the Washington Post's *"As Olympics begin, Beijing projects 'shared future' of undisputed Chinese power"*, for example, makes the Western world nervous about Russian-Chinese relations, trying to tie the long-established negative image of Russia to China. This "replication" technique makes it easy to transfer the Western world's negative feelings about Russia to China.

#### **4.2.4 Ethical framework**

The number of stories included in the ethical framework was 135, or 14.0%. The secondary codes of the ethical framework include doping topics, international organization decision-making topics, etc. The main content focused on attacks on doping by the Russian Olympic team, such as the Washington Post's *"A timeline of Russia's state-sponsored Olympic doping scandal,"* or the New York Times' questioning of why the Olympic Committee chose China to host the Winter Olympics (*"Once Again the Olympic Games Will Begin, Despite Everything. Once Again the Olympic Games Will Begin, Despite Everything"*). The construction of the issue of doping by the Russian team has been going on for many years, and the extensive coverage at the Beijing Winter Olympics can be seen as a continuation of what has been going on. The issue of decision-making by international organizations is in fact the Western media's perception that China is being treated undeservedly in the international community, ultimately because of the "connivance" of various international organizations that are greedy for Beijing's interests.

Of the coverages using the ethical framework, 31.1% were before the games, while 68.1% were concentrated during the games. The main reason for this is that before the competition the Western media mainly focused on the denunciation of international organisations linked to China, but the coverage was not intensive. The US media, on the other hand, pursued the Russian figure skating team on the issue of doping after the opening round. Since Chinese athletes have never had a doping problem over the years, coverage of doping topics in an ethical framework often fails to make a direct connection to China. The attacks on international organizations, on the other hand, are attempts to create an immoral image of China as a country that has gained international recognition through the illicit transfer of benefits. Combined with the framework of political and human interests, it is easy to see that this is a kind of all-round negative construction of China's image by the Western media. That is, it is an attempt to create an image of China that violates human rights internally and bullying externally.

#### **4.2.5 Racial framework**

The racial framework contained the least amount of coverage with only 54 articles, or 5.6%. The secondary codes of the racial frame mainly include the topic of Eileen Gu's nationality and the topic of Chinese naturalized athletes. Although there are not many articles, this is a new perspective on the construction of China's national image in the Western media since the Beijing Winter Olympics and therefore deserves a separate discussion. The New York Times' *"Eileen Gu fervor takes over China's social media."* takes a disdainful look at Chinese viewers' affection for the American-born but accomplished-for-China Eileen Gu. The Washington Post's *"China filled its Olympic team with naturalized citizens, but fans like them only when they win"* also slammed China's preference for only naturalized athletes with "results".

Within the racial framework, the Western media has mainly used naturalized athletes from China as

fodder for its coverage. Chinese acceptance of naturalized athletes, especially non-"Chinese" naturalized athletes, has been very limited. Likewise, even for naturalized athletes of Chinese descent, audiences have been very critical of their performance. Although the issue of race is a new one in Western media coverage of China, there is no escaping the logical chain of using "Chinese viewers' achievement oriented theory" to deduce that "China is a backward country" and finally the superiority of its own system. Although the Western media uses the race and nationality of athletes as an entry point, they do not really care about the athletes, but their own political demands. However, the coverage within the racial framework is not entirely critical of the nationality of naturalized Chinese athletes, but there are some positive voices that endorse the practice of using naturalized athletes to quickly improve performance, probably because naturalization as a sporting practice is widely accepted and used in the West.

#### **4.3 What can China and other major event host countries do?**

Due to political friction and other reasons, Western media coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics has been dominated by negative news. But Beijing can still improve its international image by doing a good job of external communication. China's foreign communication strategy regarding international sports events should start from several different dimensions of running good sports events, telling good Chinese stories, spreading good Chinese voices, explaining good Chinese roads, and building good Chinese values.

##### **4.3.1 Careful organization of the Olympics to establish the Chinese brand**

After analyzing 961 coverages from four media outlets, this study can summarize the areas to which several categories of positive coverage belong. These include, but are not limited to, the spectacular opening ceremony, the intelligent Olympic Village, the excellent performance of the athletes, and the successful urban transformation through the Olympics. It is not difficult to find that in the context of conflicting political interests and ideologies, the positive coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics in the Western media has largely focused on the good infrastructure and the organization of the event. Based on these themes, the host country of a major sporting event first needs to ensure the smooth running of the event, as this is the heart of the core of the sporting event. Secondly, it needs to ensure the athletes' experience, which includes a suitable environment on the field of play, as well as living and living off the field of play. The rise of mobile internet and short video platforms has made the dissemination of Olympic Games-related information no longer monopolized by mainstream media and authorized broadcasters; athletes themselves have become important content producers, and the TikTok accounts of athletes from various countries have become a strong source of both influence and reach (Hayes, 2022). During the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, athletes from various countries posted a great deal of content related to the event and beyond, including a great deal of praise for the standard of China's running of the games, which would hardly appear in any Western mainstream media. So running the games well, paying attention to details, providing athletes with a comfortable competition environment, and leveraging the power of the mobile internet can largely bypass the Western mainstream media to complete the positive construction of China's national image.

##### **4.3.2 Improving the communication system and active external voice**

General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed during the 30th collective learning of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPC that telling a good Chinese story, spreading a good Chinese voice and presenting a real, three-dimensional and comprehensive China are important tasks in strengthening China's international communication capacity; we should further strengthen and improve international communication, strive to build a credible, lovable and respectable image of China, create a favorable external public opinion environment for China's reform, development and stability, and contribute to promoting the building of make positive contributions to the building of a community of human destiny. To adapt to the new system of international communication situation, it is necessary to seize the current major trend of media integration, while multi-terminal, multi-scene, big data and high intelligence are the key points of international communication (Hu Zhengrong, 2017). For the design of the international communication system of the Beijing Winter Olympics, China should conform to, and even lead, the change of the international communication concept. From the status quo of simply using the few official media and news agencies as external windows, it should change to a multidimensional, three-dimensional, international communication idea based on mobile internet thinking. Chinese media can use culture as a base, technology as a carrier, and an intelligent media production system as a means (Song, 2021) to improve the quality and communicability of media content, thus achieving efficient communication effects. China should actively encourage the media to "go abroad". On the one hand, it should strengthen the influence and recognition of the national news agency Xinhua in the international arena, and on the other hand, it should build a three-dimensional communication pattern with the linkage of official and social platforms by leveraging China's

advantages in mobile Internet, especially short videos.

In addition, opening up a "second front" may be one of the ideas for international communication. Historically, scholarly research has focused on mainstream newspapers in the UK and the US, and even with some expansion, has only included German, French and Spanish media in Western Europe. However, the value of targeting a wide range of developing and third world countries for international communication is also evident to all (Yu Yunquan, 2020). Along with the stereotyping of communication platforms and channels, the diversity of communication audiences needs to be considered. For example, opening accounts on social platforms commonly used in different countries, or multilingual content in languages other than English, and understanding and grasping the historical and cultural veins of different communication target countries are all effective attempts to enable China's national image to be widely disseminated in the world.

#### **4.3.3 Extending Meaningful Identity and Building Chinese Values**

If the 2008 Beijing Olympics was the beginning of China's journey to the world stage, the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics will be a glorious dance for China on that stage. Today China has become a global power, and even before the Winter Olympics, China has stood in the spotlight. On issues such as the US-China trade war, the response to the epidemic, and the construction of international infrastructure, the Chinese media can undoubtedly spread the image of China as a "builder, creator, and order-keeper". Of course, cross-cultural communication cannot "act on its own" (Zhong Xin, 2022), but must build values that audiences can accept, leaving behind the nationalism of the "comfort zone" of news production and embracing multiculturalism. The Winter Olympics is a huge media event, and whether it is the Chinese media's efforts to convey a good image of China to the outside world during the Winter Olympics or the Western media's confrontational framing and even denigration of the event, the effect is short-term empathy and consensus. Shaping and conveying China's image, on the other hand, needs to focus on a more long-term transmission of culture, values, and even collective memory (Xue Wenting, 2022). What is needed to achieve a long-lasting identity is a value that can be widely recognized in the world. This value can be the vision of "a world in which countries treasure their own distinct heritages, appreciate other cultures and promote shared prosperity" or the call to "build a community of human destiny together". As General Secretary Xi Jinping said, "China's development is a great cause that belongs to the progress of all mankind". In the communication process of the Winter Olympics, Chinese media should extend the national identity of China to the common identity of the world. This includes the pursuit of peace, hard work, elimination of hunger, mutual benefit and win-win situation, etc. The extension of meaning and value from the nation to the world will bring about an increase in the effectiveness of the communication of the Beijing Winter Olympics.

### **5 Conclusion**

Against the backdrop of tensions between China and the Western world, led by the United States, the tone of the Chinese national image constructed by the Western media through the Beijing Winter Olympics is gray. By analyzing the reports of The Times, The Guardian, The New York Times, and The Washington Post related to the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, this study extracts a total of five frames: sports frame, political frame, human interest frame, moral frame, and racial frame. Among them, the political frames were concentrated in the three months before the opening of the Winter Olympics and dominated by negative content, and the sports frames rapidly dominated after the opening of the Winter Olympics. This evolutionary feature of frames may be related to the different focus of media audiences on issues related to the Beijing Winter Olympics at different times. The structure of the media itself, such as the work schedule of the current affairs and sports departments, also had an impact on this evolution.

These four British and American mainstream media outlets' constructions of China's national image during the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics start from these five frameworks, where the main negative issues include sports migration, sustainable hosting, human rights issues, and epidemic prevention issues. The starting point is the interests of the country to which the media belongs - which is in line with the interests of the Western media itself. By deconstructing the value of China and the "community of human destiny", the Western media hope to create an authoritarian, unsustainable and terrifying image of the Chinese state. The few positive issues in the coverage focus on the opening ceremony, new technologies and urban transformation. Host countries of major events such as China should pay attention to these angles to provide sufficient resources and topics for cross-cultural communication. From the audience's perspective, the actual effectiveness of such negative constructs is actually quite questionable. Based on the compound effects theory of mass media, which is widely accepted by academia (Wimmer, 2013), audiences tend to be willing to get information and tend to ignore the perspectives imposed on them, so the actual effects of such negative constructs need to be further explored.

The last three consecutive Winter Olympics have not been held in traditionally developed Western countries, so much so that Western media coverage has not shown much positive content. But countries in the non-Western European-North American civilizational sphere can actually promote a range of national development by hosting major sporting events. This includes, but is not limited to, the improvement of sporting event systems, the development of urban infrastructure, the transformation of older urban areas, especially industrial zones, and the construction of cross-cultural communication systems. In conclusion, just like the political boycott in the West, the Beijing Winter Olympics have been subjected to considerable denigrating negative comments by the Western media. China should recognize the situation and respond positively. By establishing a Chinese event brand, building a three-dimensional communication system, and extending Chinese value identity, China should tell a good Chinese story, deliver a good Chinese voice, and show the international community the image of China as a "responsible power".

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### **National Image Construction: A Framework Analysis of Western Media Coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics**

**Abstract:** The 2022 Winter Olympic Games in Beijing have received a lot of attention from the world, and hosting a major sporting event provides a valuable opportunity for the host country to present a good national image. However, the effectiveness of national image construction and communication is often constrained by the mediating role of the media. This study selects four mainstream international newspapers, The Times, The Guardian, The New York Times, and The Washington Post, and collects information on the effectiveness of national image construction and communication. This study selects four mainstream international newspapers, The Times, The Guardian, The New York Times, and The Washington Post, and collects 961 of their news coverages related to the Beijing Winter Olympics to analyse how the Western media construct China's national image during the preparation and hosting. s national image during the preparation and hosting of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. Through coding and textual analysis of these coverages, five media frames were summarised for the construction of China's national image by Western media: sports frame, political frame, human interest frame. After categorising and analysing the coverages in relation to the time of publication, it was found that the political and human interest frames dominated the Western media coverage before the start of the Winter Olympics, while the sports frame dominated after the start of the games. The study concludes with recommendations on how countries hosting major sporting events can enhance their national image, including a focus on event operations and the creation of international communication channels.

**Keywords:** Beijing Winter Olympic Games; national image; Western media; media framework