

# *China's National Image Building by China Daily during the Winter Olympics*

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**Abstract:** The 2022 Winter Olympics has made Beijing the world's first city to have hosted the Olympics twice. It is another rare opportunity for China to attract the world's attention with a large-scale sports event. Therefore, it is necessary to study the Chinese media for national image building. By randomly sampling the reports of China Daily, China's official English newspaper, during the Winter Olympics and conducting a frame analysis, this paper finds the following four main frames – "High-tech Winter Olympics", "Economic Winter Olympics", "China Winter Olympics", and "Spiritual Winter Olympics". At the same time, based on building the framework, this paper also uses the agenda-setting theory of emotions to analyze how China Daily uses the priming effect and emotional consistency under the emotional setting to pave a way for China's national image building, as well as the emotional spiral used in publicity to amplify positive public opinion and consolidate national image. This study concludes by pointing out the achievements of international communication during the Winter Olympics and the prospect of China's international communication.

**Keywords:** Olympic Winter Games, national image, agenda setting frame analysis.

## **1. Introduction**

As a special social and cultural phenomenon, sports have a unique affinity and no barriers in international communication. The Olympic Games, the world's largest comprehensive sports event, may become an important place and opportunity for international communication. When the world enters the post-pandemic era, soft power has become more and more important in the competition among countries. National image has gradually become an important part of the development of soft power in various countries. How to improve China's international image, tell Chinese stories, and spread Chinese discourse has become an urgent problem to be solved.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. International Communication**

With the continuous globalization, the research of international communication has gradually been focused on diversification and the cultural turn. Some scholars point out in their review that the international communication of mainstream media and the construction of international discourse

power, etc. are the main topics of the current research on the external communication of China's mainstream media. As an international large-scale sports event – a typical place for international communication, the Olympics has built a good platform for international communication and has become an aspect that cannot be ignored in international communication.

Some scholars believe that the communication of sports events mainly relies on interpersonal communication, organizational communication, and mass communication. Among the three major communication systems, mass communication is a strong backing in cross-cultural communication. With professionalism and influence, mass communication has become a system that the modern public is inseparable from. It will become the focus of attention of the global audience when holding international large-scale sports events. On this basis, some scholars put forward an AMO analysis on the international communication ability of mass communication and pointed out that mass communication asks the media to localize, entertain, and routinize the content, and maintain concept that is audience-oriented.

## **2.2. The Agenda-Setting Theory**

Dr. Max McCombs and Dr. Donald Shaw developed the agenda-setting theory through the Chapel Hill study. The first-level agenda-setting focuses on the significant shift of the topic itself; the second-level agenda-setting focuses on the multiple attributes of the topic; the third-level agenda-setting focuses on the mass media's emphasis on the relevance of multiple topics or attributes. On the basis of the above research, scholars put forward the latest agenda-setting theory.

Emotional setting refers to that media communication may not be successful in influencing how or what people think and say, but it is sufficient in influencing the emotion with which people think and speak[1]. The four effect mechanisms of the emotional setting are emotional infection and social diffusion, emotional initiation and consistency, emotional co-variation and "emotional spiral", and emotional dynamics and bias in media communication. This study will extend the above research ideas and analyze the emotional agenda-setting of China Daily.

Although there has been much research on the agenda-setting theory, the emerging field of emotional agenda-setting is rarely studied. This study places the emotional setting under the general frame of international communication, hoping to enrich academic research on emotional agenda-setting.

## **3. Frame Analysis and Emotional Agenda-Setting**

### **3.1. Frame Analysis**

The study defines frame as the inner structure of texts and the core idea of organizing materials through which news reports suggest how audiences should understand news events [2].

The author searched for "Winter Olympics" on the official website of China Daily and narrowed it down to relevant news reports from February 4th to February 20th. Finally, 167 out of 679 reports were selected for frame analysis. This study draws on the concept of media package proposed by William A. Gamson et al. as an analysis tool. On this basis, after certain deletion and improvement, sight words, catchphrases, and depictions have been taken for analysis. "Catchphrases" refer to summative words about the report topic, and "depictions" refer to the metaphor or paradigm for the single value of the event.

Table 1: Frame analysis.

	Frame	High-tech Winter Olympics	Economic Winter Olympics	China Winter Olympics	Spiritual Winter Olympics
Framing tools	Sight words	“5G” “3D” “AI” “Virtual” “High-tech” “metaverse”	“boom” “boost” “hotspot” “tourism” “southern China” “enthusiasm” “business”	“traditional” “ancient” “solidarity” “Together”	“Gu Ailing” “politicize” “US” “rebut”
	Catch-phrases	Winter Olympics will end soon, long live its new technologies	Ice and snow opportunity dividends to tap	“Together for a Shared Future” “Safe, simple and splendid”	The Beijing Winter Olympics will be a huge success. Every participant will be a winner
	Depictions	The Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics is not only a sporting event but also a show of new technologies, from artificial intelligence and machine vision to simulation technology and smart venues.	Thanks to the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games, consumption related to the ice-snow industry has gained steam across China.	which will conclude on Sunday, have not only been "safe, simple and splendid" but also given China an opportunity to make the motto "Together for a Shared Future" a reality.	Beijing 2022 should be an international arena for the Olympic spirit, not political manipulation

### 3.1.1. The frame of High-tech Winter Olympics

The core of the High-tech Winter Olympics frame is to emphasize that the Beijing Winter Olympics is an event full of advanced technologies, emphasizing the importance of science and technology to the Winter Olympics.

From a textual point of view, the High-tech Winter Olympics frame mainly builds the national image by introducing various technologies in the Winter Olympics, such as specific technologies used in venue construction, the opening ceremony, athlete training, and virus detection. Through a large number of data analysis and professional terminology, the image of China as a scientific and technological power has been created. China Daily also reported the economic and social effects brought by these technologies to reflect the long-term effects brought by the technologies in the Winter Olympics to Chinese society.

### 3.1.2. The frame of Economic Winter Olympics

The core of the Economic Winter Olympics frame is to express the positive benefits that the Beijing Winter Olympics will bring to China's economy, emphasizing the "outburst" of China's ice-snow economy under the influence of the Winter Olympics. For example, China currently has a total of

654 standard ice rinks and 803 ski resorts, an increase of 317 percent and 41 percent, respectively, compared with 2015[3].

From a textual point of view, the Economic Winter Olympics frame mainly builds the national image by reporting China's ice-snow economy. Through reporting specific economic growth, employment growth, and industrial expansion, an image of economic power is built and China's economic vitality is reflected.

### **3.1.3. The frame of China Winter Olympics**

The core of the China Winter Olympics frame is to reflect the Chinese characteristics contained in the Winter Olympics. Chinese characteristics are mainly composed of the thought of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the unique traditional culture of China in Beijing Winter Olympics.

Under the frame of China Winter Olympics, through reporting leaders' speeches and major meetings or editorializing, China Daily expresses thoughts of socialism with Chinese characteristics such as people first, openness and inclusiveness, multilateralism, green and low-carbon, etc., among which the slogan of the Winter Olympics – "Together for a shared future" has been highlighted. The embodiment of traditional Chinese culture mostly comes from reports on the derivative products related to the Winter Olympics. China Daily builds the frame of China Winter Olympics by reporting on the Chinese elements in the design of mascots, stamps, and emblems. The other part is an introduction to relevant traditional Chinese culture, such as the Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, 24 solar terms, and zodiac.

### **3.1.4. The frame of Spiritual Winter Olympics**

The core of the Spiritual Winter Olympics frame is to express the purity of this Winter Olympics, which is a grand event all over the world. It opposes some remarks and behaviors that politicize the Winter Olympics. The Winter Olympics can be used to fight back against attacks on China. It pays attention to the Olympic spirit contained in athletes and maintains the purity of sports.

Under the frame of the Spiritual Winter Olympics, China Daily highlights the Olympic spirit by featuring close-ups of athletes. By reporting stories such as "finally winning the prize under hard training" or "veterans make up for regrets in old age", the Olympic spirit of the Beijing Winter Olympics was highlighted and a series of typical model athletes were created.

## **3.2. Emotional Agenda-Setting**

### **3.2.1. Emotional Contagion in Media Communication**

In mass communication, there is the phenomenon of emotional contagion and infection, which is an effective condition and prerequisite for the effect of "emotional setting" [1]. The dissemination of media information will bring various functions such as excitation, arousal, and orientation.

On social platforms, the audience's emotions will be influenced by users similar to themselves, influential institutions, or opinion leaders.

The development of the Internet has made social media a major gathering place for the public to express their opinions and spread their emotions. During the Beijing Winter Olympics, China Daily continuously worked on social platforms, carried out emotional contagion, and publicized news according to different audience habits and characteristics of platforms. For example, on Twitter, China Daily mainly posted political news and editorials to emphasize China's political position and declare China's political attitude. On Instagram, China Daily mainly focused on relaxed infotainment, with the promotion of Chinese culture as the main direction. China Daily has matched different news strategies according to the user habits on different platforms to further expand the

scope and influence of emotional contagion. The multi-platform publicity and operation allow China Daily to better carry out emotional contagion.

Under the continuous operation on social platforms, China Daily has gained a lot of attention on major social media. On Weibo, China Daily has accumulated more than 60 million followers and more than 140 million likes and comments, forming the premise of emotional contagion.

### **3.2.2. Second Section**

The priming effect of emotion refers to the fact that in emotional contagion and dissemination, the materials and objects presented earlier produce more facilitative or sensitive emotional hints to the perception, cognition, and mental processing of the subsequent materials [1].

China Daily's reports on the Winter Olympics can be traced back to the successful bid for the Beijing Winter Olympics in 2015, when it began to set the pre-emotional effect through a series of reports. During the opening of the Winter Olympics, China Daily presented the Winter Olympics to the audience through a large number of reports, linking them to positive emotions. Under such a start-up effect, the audiences were better prepared and more sensitive to the reports under the frame. There was also a predisposing effect on their emotional responses and emotional development, as well as cognitive and receptive processes [1].

Under such positive emotions, the audience's acceptance of information often feeds back the emotional consistency. After the positive emotions are pre-positioned, the follow-up reports under the frame are easier to approach the individual memory of the audience and tend to bring positive emotions.

### **3.2.3. Emotional Covariation and Emotional Spiral in Media Communication**

With the transformation of traditional media, the news release is no longer a one-way delivery, but a double-sided communication. New media has become the main platform for the transmission of public sentiment. Under such a public sphere, the emotional polarization and emotional spiral are common.

China Daily makes statements and rebuttal in the face of public opinion attacks, selects topics for public discussion, and guides public opinion, to set the tone of public opinion. In addition, China Daily pins the selected and high-like comments in the comment area to further amplify the positive emotions.

China Daily establishes its own media field through the above methods, provides a common field for the public to discuss, and continuously circulates and amplifies its own media context to finally establish an emotional spiral to guide public opinion.

## **4. Highlights and Prospects**

### **4.1. Highlights**

#### **4.1.1. The Dissemination of Chinese Values has Effectively Strengthened the Construction of the International Image**

As a global social and cultural activity, the Olympic Games effectively construct and disseminate the national discourse by means of the Olympic symbols consisting of "actor symbols", "ritual symbols", and "structure symbols"[4]. Under the ceremonial discourse system constructed by the Winter Olympics, China Daily's reports can receive wider attention.

Including the "Chinese Dream", "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind", or "Together for a shared future" of the Beijing Winter Olympics, it is one of the important tasks of the Chinese

media to spread Chinese values and ideology to the world. In the coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics, China Daily reflected China's values and ideology through direct or indirect methods, such as adhering to multilateralism, pursuing environmental protection, extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits, and other national strategies and wisdom.

#### **4.1.2. Diversified Reports and a Complete Matrix Fully Demonstrated the Comprehensive National Power**

The themes and genres of the reports on the Winter Olympics are diverse, showing China's comprehensive national power from different angles and dimensions. From the perspective of genre, the most basic news, news comments, close-ups, and in-depth reports together depict a more complete national image of China from multiple perspectives. In terms of subjects, in addition to well-reported news related to the Winter Olympics, it also expands the coverage radius. In addition, China Daily has also built a complete reporting matrix. Besides traditional print publication, it also simultaneously updates its WeChat Official Account, Weibo, and Twitter, forming a full-scale media matrix.

Although the genres and themes of the reports are diversified, they are all based on the official publicity activities of the Communist Party of China. The combination of hard news and soft news jointly creates a diversified reporting matrix, which will help the audience to have better value identification and self-substitution.

#### **4.1.3. Micro-narrative and Macro-narrative are Combined to Enrich the Reporting Level**

In the coverage of the Winter Olympics, China Daily has carried out many news reports with micro-narratives, paying attention to individuals in the games, such as members of the medical team, volunteers in the Olympic Village, etc. It attracts readers with more lively and interesting micro-narratives and echoes the macro theme.

China Daily depicted many individuals during its coverage of the Winter Olympics. Taking athletes as an example, China Daily did not report on the concept of "gold first". Some athletes with inspirational stories and special backgrounds have also received attention in the reports. China Daily uses these athletes to echo the grand themes, including the Olympic spirit and patriotism.

## **4.2. Prospects**

### **4.2.1. Turn the Communication Voice from Passive into Active**

From the perspective of the system theory, the national image includes the "source image" of the indescribable national image, the image that the dominant ethnic group in the national system is trying to establish, the image of a country described by the international channel transmission and other countries' dominant ethnic group [5]. The latter two compete for legitimacy among the audience, and the game for discourse between countries largely constitutes the country's image.

Therefore, in order to become active in international communication, China should continue to respond to public opinion attacks with a positive attitude and maintain the image it strives to establish in the "domestic system". On the other hand, it should actively communicate to the world, satisfy the audience's desire for knowledge as soon as possible, and fully occupy the high ground of public opinion in international information dissemination.

### **4.2.2. Improve International Communication Capabilities from Various Perspectives**

Although the Beijing Winter Olympics has attracted widespread attention from the whole society, there are still shortcomings in China's international communication. From the perspective of media,

China Daily can be taken as an example. From the perspective of national strategy, China's international communication focuses on European and American countries. From the perspective of communication strategy, China's international communication overemphasizes government leadership while ignoring the use of private resources and lacks interaction with foreign communities.

China should vigorously cultivate international communication talents, optimize teaching models and methods to supply more talents for the media, and improve the media's communication power. It should turn its attention to third-world countries and countries with close geopolitical ties for effective communication. The communication strategy of "Great Publicity" should be replaced by giving full play to the power of "citizen journalists" and "community journalism" around the world, adding more flexibility to China's international communication.

## 5. Conclusion

Through studying China Daily's reports during the Winter Olympics, this study found four main frames in the reports – "Spiritual Winter Olympics", "China Winter Olympics", "High-tech Winter Olympics", and "Economic Winter Olympics". Using the theory of emotional agenda-setting, it sorts out the underlying logic of China Daily's public opinion guidance and emotion setting.

In the international communication of the Beijing Winter Olympics, China Daily exported China's values to the world, created a diverse reporting matrix, and combined macro-narratives with micro-narratives. However, China still has a long way to go in its international communication. In the face of international attacks, China needs to take the initiative to occupy the high ground of public opinion to sort out its own international image. In addition, it must improve its international communication capabilities in many aspects, from communication strategies to talent training.

The limitation of this study is that the reports of the Winter Olympics were randomly sampled, and not all reports during the Winter Olympics were included in the study. Therefore, the results may be not rigorous. Future research can dig deeper into relevant reports and reach a more reasonable research result.

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