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How mediated sporting events constitute nationalism: Chinese newspapers covering the 2014 Incheon Asian Games

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How Mediated Sporting Events Constitute Nationalism: Chinese Newspapers Covering the 2014 Incheon Asian Games

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Informed by framing theory, the study strove to investigate nationalism by examining Chinese newspaper coverage of the 2014 Incheon Asian Games. Through document and textual analysis of 324 articles from 5 mainstream newspapers, the study indicated that Chinese newspapers always portrayed Chinese athletes as “dominating the competition” and “lacking opponents in Asia” while portraying other countries’ athletes as “less competitive” and not at the “level of Chinese athletes.” The results also suggested that Chinese newspapers tried to positively spin the story when reporting the failure of Chinese athletes at the Asian Games. However, to increase readership and enhance public awareness of the Asian Games, Chinese newspapers also attempted to create rivalries between Chinese athletes and competing nations and, at times, emphasized national failures.

Keywords: framing, sport media, national identity, media coverage

The globalization of sport has been associated with social development worldwide, allowing countries to uniquely distinguish themselves from other nations while enhancing national identity and pride (Morgan, 2000). International sporting events (e.g., the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup) provide opportunities for media outlets to invoke national pride by emphasizing and increasing the coverage provided to athletes’ and teams’ performance (Vincent & Hill, 2013).

Within the last decade, studies have attempted to explore the connection between sport and national identity by examining media coverage of major sporting events (Alabarces, Tomlinson, & Young, 2001; Bishop & Jaworski, 2003; Buffington, 2012; Scott, Hill, & Zakus, 2012; Tuck, 2003; Vincent, Kian, Pedersen, Kuntz, & Hill, 2010). Bishop and Jaworski discovered that when British newspapers covered a soccer match between England and Germany during the 2000 European

Cup, three strategies were used to associate nationalism and homogeneity: separation, conflict, and typification. The rhetoric of “us” and “them” was broadly used in reporting to separate the two teams (Vincent et al., 2010). Newspapers often use military metaphors and imagery to create a conflict for an athletic match (Vincent et al., 2010). Although previous literature addresses the relationship between sport and national identity in Western culture, few studies have focused on the Asian media, which inform 60% of the world’s population.

Keeping in mind framing theory (Goffman, 1974), this study investigated how mediated sporting events constituted nationalism in China—specifically, how Chinese newspapers covered the 2014 Incheon Asian Games. As one of the largest international multisporting events, the Asian Games are held every 4 years in Asia. The 17th Asian Games were held in Incheon, Korea. The event lasted 17 days (from September 19 to October 5, 2014), attracting more than 9,700 athletes from 45 countries competing in 36 sporting events (Clarey, 2014). As a dominating sport power in Asia for more than 30 years, China has won 342 medals including 151 gold medals in Incheon, more than twice as many as gold medals as the second-place country, South Korea (Talmadge, 2014). The traditional and expected dominance of China at the Asian Games has caused Chinese audiences to devalue the event. As a result, the Asian Games attract a surprisingly small audience from China due to the traditional supremacy of the Chinese at the Asian Games. For example, the television viewing rate was 4.07% at the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games compared with 7.6% at the 2012 London Olympic Games (CSM, 2011, 2013).

Therefore, this research aimed to examine how Chinese newspapers cover the Incheon Asian Games regarding national identity, specifically how newspapers used nationalism as a strategy to increase readership and address interest in the media coverage of the event. Specifically, we aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Do Chinese newspapers provide increased coverage to Chinese athletes rather than competitors from other countries?

RQ2: How have Chinese newspapers framed national identity at the Incheon Asian Games?

Literature Review

Sport and National Identity

Sport has been associated with the national identity since the introduction of international sporting competitions, starting from the end of the 19th century (Crolley & Hand, 2006). Sport provides an outlet for the public to express national values, pride, and identity (Allison, 2004; Cronin, 1999; Hunter, 2003; Maguire & Tuck, 2005). Collective identity has been represented by athletes and teams in international sporting competitions (Crolley & Hand, 2006; Hill, 1996). For instance, athletes have presented their national identities by competing for their countries in international competitions. Team sports, in particular, help promote national identity, building and uniting communities, cities, states, and countries (Barnier, 2001). Athletes have even used national images (i.e., flags) to

demonstrate identification, expressing an overall pride in representing their countries (Tuck, 2003).

Sport is also used to promote political interest. Even before the Korean War, there was tension between North and South Korea. With both countries starting to cooperate in 2000, sport has played a critical role in demonstrating a “unitary Korean nationalism” (Lee & Maguire, 2011). The opening ceremonies of the Sydney (2000) and Athens (2004) Olympic Games, as well as at the Asian Games (2004), exhibited a message of reconciliation from both nations (Lee & Maguire, 2011; Vincent et al., 2010).

Although there have been instances in which sport has unified nations in international sporting events, sport has also been used to increase tensions. International sporting events such as the Olympic Games provide society with opportunities to increase cultural understanding, but sport has also provided nations with the opportunity to demonstrate athletic achievement and development (Vincent & Hill, 2013). Given the popularity of sport in society, the trend of a “sport-nationalism-media troika” (Rowe, McKay, & Miller, 1998, p. 133) has appeared, giving the media the power to essentially globalize sport to increase interest. The media have truly connected sport with this idea of nationalism by covering issues of national culture and national political identity (Harris, 2006). Law (2001) noted that major sporting events provide sports journalists with opportunities to support their national teams using a pin as a way to wave their national flags. To increase readership, Vincent et al. (2010) stated that the media, especially print media, adopted military metaphors and adversarial coverage when referring to sport. For instance, English newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror* and *The Sun* were “xenophobic” by using “Let’s Blitz Fritz” and “Achtung Surrender” in their headlines while reporting the England–Germany semifinal at the 1996 European championships (Vincent et al., 2010).

Sport Media and Nationalism

Agenda setting and framing are two of the most common tools used by the media to associate sport with national identity to influence readers’ perspectives. Initially focused on political communication, agenda setting refers to how the discussion of public events can be shaped and affected by the power of the mass media (Cohen, 1963; McCombs, 1992; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Thus, the media not only tell people what to think but also essentially what to think about. Past research examining the media coverage of 1968 and 1972 presidential campaigns found that the main issues the media covered were highly correlated with the important issues that voters perceived (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Shaw & McCombs, 1977). Sports news and broadcasts have also defined sport media’s agenda setting (McCombs, 2005). For instance, the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the National Football League (NFL) spread brand awareness and increase media exposure by assisting media outlets in selecting the content that will have the largest impact on fan perception (Fortunato, 2004; Yoo, Smith, & Kim, 2013).

Framing occurs as the media actively select certain aspects of an issue to report, affecting the understanding of the message people receive (Entman, 2007). Framing is prominent in sport communication and sport media. In their study on the soccer World Cup, Scott et al. (2012) suggested that “gaining an understanding of the framing processes used by media in their construction of social and political

issues is important due to its influence on attitudes and beliefs of audiences” (p. 24). For instance, in Bie and Billings’s (2014) study on how Chinese and American newspapers covered the success of Chinese swimmer Ye Shiwen at the 2012 London Olympic Games revealed that the way Ye Shiwen was covered by American newspapers was dramatically different from the coverage in China. American coverage of Ye Shiwen was more skeptical of her using performance-enhancing drugs, while Chinese coverage maintained the swimmer’s innocence to maintain the national image and identity.

A number of studies have attempted to explore the connection between sport and national identity by examining the media coverage of major sporting events in the last decades (Alabarces et al., 2001; Bishop & Jaworski, 2003; Buffington, 2012; Lee & Maguire, 2011; Scott et al., 2012; Tuck, 2003; Vincent & Hill, 2011; Vincent et al., 2010). Most research has focused on international soccer and rugby events. Tuck noted that English rugby athletes were portrayed as the “embodiment of England” when analyzing the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Bishop and Jaworski analyzed the British newspapers’ coverage of a soccer match between England and Germany during the 2000 European Cup. Findings suggested that newspapers associated the event with nationalism and homogeneity through the use of three strategies: separation, conflict, and typification. Newspapers used the rhetoric of “us” and “them,” as well as military metaphors and war imagery, to create a conflict for the match (Bishop & Jaworski, 2003). Sports journalists often include historical events to elicit an emotional connection with readers and audiences. Vincent et al. found that the English media used traditions and memories of past English victories to embody patriotism in England regarding the 2006 World Cup. For instance, English newspapers included Great Britain’s past military successes in their reports before the significant match. “I/we” was broadly used in the newspapers to reiterate national identity. Barnard, Bulter, Golding, and Maguire (2006) analyzed the media coverage in British newspapers of the 2004 Athens Olympics Games and discovered that the majority of coverage focused on medals, including medal contenders, winning medal preference, and medal prospects. Researchers also found that English media had less interest in covering other countries, since more than one third of media reports were about British athletes. Moreover, in Angelini, Billings, and MacArthur’s (2012) study of NBC’s coverage in the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, the commentary regarding American athletes was related to success, while commentary regarding non-American athletes was more likely to be associated with failure and lack of competitiveness.

Bias and nationalism in sport reporting have become a concern, challenging the norm of sports journalism (Horky & Stelzner, 2013). Horky, Schauerte, and Schwier (2009) stressed that bias and nationalism in sports reporting has the potential to jeopardize the natural and objective principles of reporting, even though a lack of bias and nationalism may likely cause less-interesting reports. However, despite these questions, including nationalism in sport coverage is still a current sports-journalistic trend.

Scholars have studied the ways in which Asian sports media, often focusing on Korea and China, have reported major sporting events through incorporating nationalism. Cho (2009) analyzed how the media representation in South Korea transformed throughout covering the 1968, 1984, and 2000 Olympic Games. Watanabe, Nie, and Yan (2013) also found that Chinese TV sports commentary was

deeply steeped with nationalism in which commentators spoke positively about Chinese athletes and teams despite the outcome of the competition.

Researchers also demonstrated that sporting-event coverage is closely associated with political and societal changes (Cho, 2009; Watanabe et al., 2013). Even though China and Korea improved their diplomatic relationship in 1992, their mutual civil relationship has not improved as dramatically as their economic ties and cultural exchanges (Zhang & Wang, 2013). In addition to exaggerating negative coverage about other countries in the media, the difference of perspectives in understanding and viewing history results in an intensified civil relationship (Zhang & Wang, 2013). In sporting coverage, the negative image of the other countries has always been exaggerated in the media.

The purpose of this study was to provide a better understanding of how Chinese newspapers use nationalism as a strategy to increase readership and overall interest in the media coverage of the Asian Games. This study was twofold and strove to identify whether Chinese newspapers have provided increased coverage to Chinese athletes rather than competitors from other countries in their Asian Games' coverage and further explore how selected newspapers framed national identity in their coverage.

To reiterate, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Do Chinese newspapers provide increased coverage to Chinese athletes rather than competitors from other countries?

RQ2: How have Chinese newspapers framed national identity at the Incheon Asian Games?

Methodology

Sampling

Five Chinese newspapers—the *People's Daily*, the *China Youth Daily*, *The Beijing News*, the *Xinmin Evening News*, and the *Southern Metropolis Daily*—were selected due to national prominence, circulation, and different target markets. The *People's Daily* and the *China Youth Daily* are two leading national newspapers. The former is the official newspaper of Chinese government, and the latter is the first official independently operated central-government news-media portal in China. As the representatives of Chinese liberal newspapers, *The Beijing News* is the third-best-selling daily newspaper in Beijing, and the *Southern Metropolis Daily* is the best-selling metropolis newspaper in China, mainly distributing in the Pearl River Delta area. *Xinmin Evening News* is one of best-selling evening newspapers in China, located in Shanghai (Statista, n.d.).

It should be noted that articles were collected from the newspapers throughout the duration of the 2014 Incheon Asian Games (September 19 to October 5). To analyze pre- and postevent coverage, data were collected 1 day before the beginning of the event and 1 day after the conclusion of the event.

Content Analysis

Content analysis was the primary methodology used throughout the study, allowing the researchers to gain insight into Chinese mainstream newspapers' coverage at the

2014 Incheon Asian Games. Content analysis is a systematic approach of studying messages in the print media addressing inferences in communication (Budd, Thorp, & Donohew, 1967). As an unobtrusive method, content analysis draws conclusions from text and pictures by applying a systematic rule (Krippendorff & Bock, 2009). Verbal content (articles, headline) was categorized and coded in this study, and all articles in five Chinese newspapers were categorized in terms of genres, issues, and newspaper headlines.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis was used throughout this study to allow the researchers to better interpret and understand the text. This type of methodology is helpful in media and mass-communication studies (McKee, 2003). According to McKee, “textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world” (p. 1). Performing textual analysis allows researchers to examine the cultural and lived experience through interpretation, capitalizing on a distinctive scenario (McKee, 2003).

To best address the developed research questions, a mixed-methods approach was used. Content and textual analyses were used to code the articles, and then independent-sample *t* tests were used to measure whether Chinese newspapers provide equivalent coverage between Chinese athletes and foreign athletes throughout the Asian Games. The themes from the content and textual analyses were developed to provide an in-depth analysis on newspaper coverage throughout the games.

Instrumentation

Based on previous research (Barnard et al., 2006), a coding strategy was established to examine the research questions. First, all articles in five newspapers were coded in term of the genres and divided into five categories: news article, feature, commentary, interview, and other.

Second, each article was coded by the 13 different issues each newspaper covered. This study used modified categories of Barnard et al.’s (2006) study on how British newspapers and television commentary constructed nationalism while covering the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. The 13 categories used in this study were national winning/success, national failure, drugs, rivalry, medal prospects, preparation, sport-star stories, host organization, official news, host-country culture/experience, behind-the-scene stories, sacrifice/sports ethic, and “other.”

Finally, the headlines of all articles in 12 newspapers were coded in five categories: Chinese athletes/teams, other countries’ athletes/teams, both Chinese and other countries’ athletes, neither Chinese nor other countries’ athletes, and “unclear.”

To ensure trustworthiness, reduce bias, and determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings, intercoder reliability was used in this study (Creswell, 2013). Thus, two native Chinese researchers attended a training session, familiarizing themselves with the coding protocol and process. Separately, two Chinese researchers coded the sports section of one Chinese newspaper based on the constructed codebook before conducting the coding process to ensure trustworthiness.

Wimmer and Dominick (2004) noted that the acceptable level of intercoder reliability was .75 or higher using the kappa coefficient. Lombard, Snyder-Duch,

and Bracken (2002) also posited that the reliability levels for individual variables should be counted as the basic principle of evaluating reliability, rather than that for overall variabilities. The results of a pilot study found that kappa levels were above the .75 threshold standard, and the kappa levels were above .92, which was in line with the acceptable level of intercoder reliability.

Next, the two Chinese researchers coded all articles of the selected newspapers separately based on the codebook. After finalizing the coding, two Chinese coders worked together to compare their results to finalize the codes.

To minimize discrepancies between Chinese news articles' translation into English, back-translation was conducted. After drawing the themes from the content analysis, a Chinese researcher translated contents into English first, and the other native Chinese researcher translated them back into Chinese to test the equivalence between two contents. The comparison of contents in both Chinese and English found that they were conceptually equivalent.

Results

A total of 324 articles in five Chinese newspapers were examined in this study. Of the grand total, the three main genres of those articles were news article (46.6%), feature (37.6%), and commentary (7.7%; see Table 1); the three main issues newspapers focused on were national winning/success (26.2%), national failure (13.8%), and features about sport stars (13.8%; see Table 2).

The first research question attempted to measure whether Chinese newspapers provided more coverage to Chinese athletes rather than competitors from other countries during the 2014 Asian Games. The results indicated that 158 headlines of articles (50.4%) included Chinese athletes alone, while 36 headlines (11.5%) included only other countries' teams/athletes. As shown in Table 3, the independent *t*-test analysis indicated that the Chinese athletes/teams were mentioned significantly more than foreign athletes/teams in the headlines of newspapers, $t(168) = 8.232, p < .001$. There were 43 headlines (13.7%) that included both Chinese and other countries' athletes.

In addition, the results of the independent *t* test indicated that Chinese newspapers published significantly more coverage about Chinese athletes than foreign athletes, since 226 articles (72.2%) in these five Chinese newspapers were related to Chinese athletes while only 41 articles (13.1%) were mainly focused on other countries' athletes, $t(158) = 2.175, p < .001$ (see Table 4). Chinese athletes have

Table 1 Different Types of Genres

Genre	Frequency	Percentage
News article	151	46.6
Features	122	37.6
Commentary	25	7.7
Interviews	4	1.2
Other	22	6.8
Total	324	100

Table 2 Different Types of Issues

Issue	Frequency	Percentage
National winning/success	85	26.2
National failure	45	13.8
Rivalry	24	4.9
Doping/scandal	16	7.4
Medal prospect	9	2.7
Preparation	13	4.0
Sport-star features	45	13.8
Host organization	22	6.7
Hard news	9	2.7
Host-country culture	22	6.7
Behind-the-scenes stories	29	9.0
Sacrifice/Sports ethic	1	0.3
Other	4	1.2
Total	324	100

Table 3 Headlines of Asian Games Coverage in Five Chinese Newspapers

Headline	Frequency	%	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
			8.232	<.001
Only Chinese athletes	158	50.4		
Only other countries' athletes	36	11.5		
Both Chinese and other countries' athletes	43	13.7		
Neither Chinese nor other countries' athletes	64	20.4		
Unclear	12	3.8		

also been covered regarding a variety of different issues during the Asian Games. Besides reporting their results and performance, such as winning medals and failures, Chinese athletes also received more coverage about their preparation, their behind-the-scenes stories during the competition, their growing-up stories, and medal prospects of their performance.

Chinese Athletes: Domination, Defense, Frustration

In response to RQ2, regarding how Chinese newspapers framed national identity at the Incheon Asian Games, three main themes have emerged: domination, defense, and frustration.

Table 4 Articles of Five Chinese Newspapers

Contents	Frequency	%	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
			2.175	<.001
Chinese athletes/teams	226	72.2		
Other countries' athletes/teams	41	13.1		
Both Chinese and other countries' athletes	20	6.4		
Neither Chinese nor other countries' athletes	24	7.6		
Unclear	2	0.006		

Domination. Newspapers portrayed Chinese athletes' performance as "dominant" at the Asian Games, and many journalists wrote that about the lack of worthy opponents in Asia, while other countries' athletes have been framed as less competitive and distant from the level of Chinese athletes. Newspapers always used Chinese athletes' victories to enhance national identity and demonstrate pride. The Chinese diving team, for instance, has always been framed as a "dream team" in their sport. After accomplishing a clean sweep in Incheon, the team has won every individual event since the 1974 Asian Games. Xu (2014f) of the *South Metropolis Daily* portrayed the Chinese diving as unbeatable in Asia:

Even though Chinese diving's domination is unwavering, they still send the best squad to the Asian Games. The team claimed two gold medals very easily at the first day's competition. Especially, the men's synchronized platform partnership has trained together for merely one week and then defeated all other opponents. (p. AA27)

Sun (2014d) of *The Beijing News* believed that Chinese diving's domination in Asia would continue; in his article, he wrote, "This is not the first time that Chinese team achieved a clean sweep, and it will absolutely not be the last time" (p. A17).

As the Chinese swimming team defeated its traditional Asian rival, the Japanese swimming team, in Incheon, Xu (2014e) of *Xinmin Evening News* applied a quote from a Chinese coach in his report. "Based on the current developmental model, we do not even have to worry about either the 2016 or 2020 Olympic Games; Japan would never be our competitors in the near future" (p. 23).

To reinforce national identity, throughout Chinese newspapers coverage of the games the athletic performance and achievements of Chinese athletes/teams were often exaggerated. Wang (2014) of *The Beijing News* wrote in his column that "the Asian Games still remain the same since the Chinese delegation still sits in first place, performing 10 times better than Korea and Japan" (p. A12). While reporting the domination of Chinese athletes in certain events, such as diving and table tennis, Wang stated that "the Chinese team turned the Asian Games into China's National Games" (p. A12).

In this sense, newspapers promoted the event by highlighting the success of Chinese athletes in their coverage, allowing readers to feel a sense of national identity and pride in the achievement of the athletes representing them and their countries.

Defense. Failure is also a part of sports. When reporting the failure of Chinese athletes at the Asian Games, Chinese newspapers attempted to put a positive spin on the story. The men's 100-m race has traditionally been one of the more attractive competitions in international multisporting events. Chinese runners Peimeng Zhang and his teammate Bingtian Su were given high expectations before competing at this race. However, when Femi Ogunode of Qatar defeated these Chinese runners, claiming the gold medal along with the new Asian record of 9.93 s, Chinese sportswriters wrote more about Ogunode's original country than his substantial victory. Ogunode was born in Nigeria and emigrated to Qatar at the age of 18. Zhong (2014b) of *Xinmin Evening News* emphasized that "an African breaks the Asian record" (p. A19), implying that the Chinese were still the best in Asia (since they did not lose to an Asian athlete). Sun (2014c) of *The Beijing News* defended Chinese athletes' failure, writing, "With more Western Asian countries importing great African athletes, the Asian Games generally transformed into 'the Asian and African Games'" (p. A22).

Scandal has been a frequent and foremost issue at major international events. Chinese newspapers used different tones and language when covering scandals involving Chinese athletes and athletes from other countries. Wenxiu Zhang, who claimed bronze in the women's hammer throw at the 2012 London Olympic Games, had been referred to as one of the top stars at the athletics competition in Incheon. After failing a precompetition drug test, Zhang was stripped of her Asian Games gold medal, becoming the first Chinese athlete caught doping in a major sporting event in last 2 decades. Sun (2014b) of *The Beijing News* tried to defend Zhang's behavior, emphasizing, "Zhang did not have a motivation to use drugs due to her domination in Asia" (p. A15).

Although there were instances of failure throughout the Asian Games, the news media continued to defend Chinese athletes and teams, turning failure into triumph by promoting nationalism.

Frustration. Due to China's athletic domination in Asia, as Xue (2014) of *People's Daily* mentioned, "The number of medals that Chinese athletes could win at the Asian Games is no longer a major focus of the general public" (p. 6). During 2014 Incheon Asian Games, the media also increased their coverage of Chinese sports' frustration to attract more attention from the general public and thereby reinforce readers' national identity.

Although the Chinese team dominated in gold medals and overall medal counts, the failure of the Chinese at sports in which the country normally dominated received frequent exposure in the selected newspapers. Nearly 14% of 324 articles addressed the unsatisfying results of Chinese athletes/teams (see Table 2).

Some newspapers sarcastically portrayed the losses in Chinese sports in Incheon. When reporting the Chinese men's basketball team's embarrassing performance at the Asian Games, Sun (2014b) wrote that "the Chinese men's basketball team has never been defeated by Japan at the Asian Games; however, they 'made' history this time" (p. A17). Ci (2014a) of *The China Youth Daily* coined a term, *Thai-phobia* (*Kongtaizheng*), to describe the Chinese men's soccer team's embarrassment at the Asian Games: "Chinese men's soccer now has 'Thai-phobia' after suffering 'Korea-phobia' for years. China has not been able to beat Thailand at all-level competitions since 2007, leaving a disappointing head-to-head record of five draws and three losses" (p. 5).

Even though Chinese delegation displayed their dominant performance in Asia, Zhong (2014c) of *Xinmin Evening News* still stressed,

The team sports always play a vital role in global sports. However, the poor performance of Chinese team sports has dimmed the achievement of the Chinese team at the Asian Games, since only the women's volleyball and basketball teams have qualified for the final. Although we are well ahead of our opponents, Japan and Korea, at the medal table, the glory cannot conceal the decline of our team sports. (p. A8)

Other Asian Competitors: Cheater, Revenge, Humiliation

China's main opponents in Asia, such as Korea and Japan, were framed negatively in Chinese newspapers throughout the Asian Games. Three main themes emerged as Chinese newspapers covered other countries' athletes and teams: cheater, revenge, and humiliation.

Cheater. Since the host country, Korea, was the major competitive opponent for China at the Asian Games, Xu emphasized that "competing in Korea has never been an easy thing" (2014c, p. 16). For instance, Xu (2014a) wrote an article titled "The Host Country Racked Their Brains to Win the First Gold" while reporting a Chinese athlete's victory at the competition as the first gold of the Games. In the report, Xu referenced previous Asian Games held in Korea, underlining the challenge that Chinese athletes face while competing in Korea:

This is not the first time for Koreans to plan to win the first gold of the Games. They scheduled the men's air rifle team as the first event of the 1986 Seoul Asian Games, but they lost to the Chinese team. They scheduled men's individual foil competition as the first final event of the 2002 Busan Asian Games since they had the Olympic Champion Young-Ho Kim, but the Chinese fencer won again.

In fact, besides racking their brains to win the first gold, Koreans also racked their brains in other events. The competition between Yang Sun and Tae-hwan Park in men's swimming has attracted plenty of attentions. The host nation scheduled the men's 200-m freestyle as the first swimming race, where Park has the best chance to win, rather than men's 400-m freestyle, which always has been scheduled as the first race of the swimming. Their timidity has given Yang Sun and his coach more confidence. (p. AA14)

Chinese newspapers also framed the host country as a "cheater." Zhong (2014a) of *Xinmin Evening News* reported how the host nation "air-conditioning cheated" at the men's badminton team event. Zhong explained that Korean players "frequently manipulated breaking the badminton shuttlecocks and exchanging them for new shuttlecocks to adapt to the windy condition in the venue" (p. A20), which upset the Chinese coach.

The statement that "Chinese athletes always competed in an unfair environment" also was underlined in print media. The story about Chinese shooters facing "unfair judges" was an example. Xu (2014b) of *Xinmin Evening News* reported that Zhang Binbin was disqualified from the women's rifle team event by judges after her rifle exceeded the maximum weight limits of the regulation. This decision

was overturned on appeal from the Chinese coach, and Binbin went on to win gold in the event.

At the conclusion of the Asian Games, Chinese media emphasized “the conspiracy theory” (p. A12). “Boxing has been one of the most controversial events, where Chinese and Mongolian boxers were unsatisfied with some critical judgments that caused South Korean and North Korean boxers’ victories” (Xu, 2014h, p. A12).

Revenge. In a response to the low public interest in the Asian Games, the hostile relationships between Chinese athletes and competing nations were framed in Chinese newspapers to constitute nationalism. Rhetoric such as “us” and “them” was implied in the articles. Xu (2014g) of *The South Metropolis Daily*, for instance, used *enmity* and *avenge* to describe a Chinese women’s volleyball victory over Thailand after the Chinese men’s soccer team was defeated by Thailand’s soccer team:

Women’s volleyball becomes Chinese team sports’ last life-saving straw again after the failure of soccer and basketball. Even though a B team was sent to the Games, young players still fulfilled their mission of defeating Thailand, making through to the final. [Women’s volleyball] has avenged men’s soccer since they have lost to Thailand twice in the recent 2 years. (p. AA22)

Despite swimming’s being an individual sport, Chinese print media portrayed the swimming competitions at the Asian Games as a contest between China and Japan. Xu (2014d) of *South Metropolis Daily* titled an article “China’s Victory Against Japan in Pool Is in Sight” (p. AA29). Sun (2014a) of *The Beijing News* wrote an article titled “Sun Yang Felt Awesome After Leading Chinese Defeated Japan at the Men’s 4 × 100-Meter Freestyle Relay” (p. C11):

The 4 × 100-m freestyle relay has always been the contest between China and Japan. The young Chinese men claimed the gold with a new Asian record after accomplishing an amazing comeback.

The Chinese swimming team has obtained 15 gold medals after yesterday’s competition, leading opponent Japan by a margin of 7 gold medals at the medal table. When asked how he felt about the victory over Japan, Sun Yang claimed that he was not only feeling awesome but also thought “the Chinese let our anger out tonight.” (p. C11)

Humiliation. As presented previously, Chinese sportswriters attempted to spin the story as they reported scandals involving Chinese athletes and teams. However, reporters used different tones and language while covering scandals and problems involving foreign athletes. Writers were very critical as they reported scandals associated with athletes from other countries. One example was how Chinese sportswriters framed the incident of Japanese swimmer Naoya Tomita being expelled from the Asian Games for stealing a camera from a Korean photographer. Ci (2014b) of *China Youth Daily* framed this incident as a “humiliation in the Asian Games” (p. 4).

Since Korea is not only the organizer of the Asian Games but also one of China’s main opponents, it is only fitting that the Chinese media criticized the host country’s organization to cover their main rival negatively. So, when the media criticize the organization of the games, in essence they are criticizing the host country.

Xu (2014h) of *The South Metropolis Daily* criticized the Incheon Asian Games as “very disorganized” (p. A12), as some “ridiculous things”—“flaming on the cauldron was off after the opening ceremonies,” “the shooting event provided expired lunch boxes to the officials and volunteers,” “salmonella and other potentially dangerous bacteria were found on lunchboxes provided to athletes”—had occurred (p. A12).

Discussion

The results of this research displayed how Chinese newspapers tendered a clear nationalistic lean toward Chinese athletes/teams throughout the coverage of the Asian Games. The findings are in line with previous studies concentrating on Western newspapers (Barnard et al., 2006; Vincent et al., 2010), given that there were 5 times as many stories about Chinese athletes. Such results could be interpreted for the following two reasons: At first, Chinese athletes’ performance is worth reporting since traditionally the Chinese dominate the Asian Games. In addition, these newspapers’ main target market is in China, which means that they have to place their Chinese athletes’ stories as the highest priority in story selection to satisfy their readers’ demands. It is also important to know that China, like many countries, views sport as a way to display international dominance. The media do not want China to appear weak compared with its rivals, and, as such, there was emphasis placed on Chinese success or attempting to demonstrate Chinese power to further nationalism.

Chinese newspapers framed Chinese athletes and foreign athletes differently during the Asian Games. Chinese athletes were framed as “dominators” in Asia, which is not merely overstating the significance of Chinese sports in Asia but also triggers readers’ national pride in an attempt to enhance their nationalism. As Chinese athletes failed in some major competitions or were involved in some scandals, Chinese sports journalists put a positive spin in their coverage and aimed to defend their mistakes or failures. Conversely, non-Chinese athletes did not receive the same treatment if they were in the same circumstance. For instance, Chinese sportswriters framed Korean athletes and organizers as “cheaters,” downplayed Qatari athletes’ winning performance in men’s 100-m as an “African’s victory,” and described Japanese athletes who were involved in a scandal as “an embarrassment.” These findings reflect the nationalistic bias in sports coverage that has broadly occurred in Chinese newspapers’ Asian Games coverage. In addition, these content themes may also have effectively connected with their audiences and readers. Since Chinese readers are their newspapers’ main consumers, sportswriters may have to report more nationalistic sentiments about Chinese athletes to favor local readers. This is not different from prior studies on how American television presenters commented on Olympic events. Billings and Eastman (2002) noted that American commentators always unfolded their nationalistic sentiments in their Sydney Olympic Games’ commentaries, where they emphasized that American athletes have always been better than their opponents, to evoke national unity and enhance audiences’ national identities.

The domination by Chinese sport in Asia has affected the way Chinese newspapers cover the Asian Games. Since Chinese audiences and readers have less interest in watching competitions in the Asian Games and reading stories about

them, Chinese newspapers attempted to frame adversarial relationships between Chinese athletes and their opponents to draw awareness and increase their readership. As an example, before the Asian Games started, Chinese newspapers had exaggeratedly reported the competition between Sun Yang of China and Tae-hwan Park of Korea in multiple swimming events. Emphasizing the rival relationships among athletes could not only stimulate interest in competitions but also help trigger readers' sense of patriotism. Similarly, Western newspapers have also produced and promoted a feeling of "us" and "them" in their sport coverage (Vincent et al., 2010). For example, British newspapers such as *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* extensively used "I/we" pronouns to "evoke a sense of national unity" when they covered England's national team's performance in major international soccer events such as the World Cup and the European Cup (Vincent et al., 2010). By using "we/us" rhetoric in their coverage, they may increase readers' interest in the events.

International sporting events such as the Olympic Games have also been described by media as "war without weapons" (Drehle, 2000). For instance, British sportswriters adopted military metaphors as they covered an international soccer match at the FIFA World Cup (Vincent et al., 2010). Chinese sportswriters in this study also used military metaphors such as *enemies* and *revenge* in their stories to describe the relationships between Chinese teams and their opponents. This symbolic war indicated that victories in international sporting events could inspire readers' national pride (Chang, Crossman, Taylor, & Walker, 2011).

One surprise finding of this study is that increasing coverage on the failure of Chinese athletes has also been a prominent approach that Chinese media outlets constituted nationalism in sport coverage. Previous studies (Barnard et al., 2006) suggested that the amount of coverage from mainstream British newspapers in national success and medal-winning performance in the 2004 Olympic Games was nearly 6 times the amount of coverage of the failure of British athletes/teams. However, this study underscored that the amount of news items that related to Chinese athletes' winning performance at the Asian Games was merely twice the amount of that on their failures, although Chinese athletes won 34% of 439 events in Incheon. From most Chinese sports journalists' and newspaper editors' perspectives, overemphasizing Chinese athletes/teams' successes in Asia apparently may be unlikely to retain readers' interest, since readers might have predicted that Chinese athletes would be able to win the majority of events in the Asian Games. Selecting and framing unfavorable messages and news could provide additional lenses where sports fans and readers could reinterpret media discourses and understand the games from different angles. In addition, it may be able to challenge their original thoughts that Chinese athletes are unbeatable in Asia. These efforts may eventually galvanize readers to rekindle their interest in the coverage of the Asian Games.

Conclusion

Mediated sport is a mirror that helps us understand culture (Wenner, 2006). This study helps push forward the theoretical understanding of how sport media constitute nationalism in the coverage in an international sporting event, especially in an Eastern context. Since the majority of traditional research has only focused on the Western context, this study fills a gap by providing insights on how Chinese

newspapers use nationalism to increase their readership during an international event. By exploring the contents of Chinese newspapers' Asian Games coverage, it helps us understand how sports journalists help their readers find their national identity by applying framing strategies.

Future research could be directed in several different directions. Since Chinese media including newspapers face government regulations and controls, whether the governmental censorship has affected media coverage in sports is worth studying. It would also be interesting to study whether communist newspapers such as *People's Daily* have adopted different approaches in their reportage to frame Chinese athletes and their opponents from that of commercial newspapers such as the *South Metropolis Daily*. In addition, as Watanabe et al. (2013) noted, Chinese sports broadcasting has been shaped and shifted dramatically as the entire Chinese society has experienced a massive transformation in social ideology in last 3 decades. Therefore, further research should continue to explore how social-ideological changes have reflected on Chinese print media's coverage in the sports context. Furthermore, scholars could investigate the relationship between governmental censorship and ideological changes and sports reporting in China in the future. Examining sports coverage in the media offers us a chance to have a more in-depth understanding about modern Chinese society and Chinese consumers, and it would also help future marketers precisely target Chinese sport-media markets.

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