



Review on Construction of National Image of China from Reports by Western Media on the Olympic Games --- Taking the 315 Reports in <<Reference News>> as the Analysis Target

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Abstract

Essence of construction of national image is to gain extensive recognition of the international society, namely, recognition of an identity. All censure from western media in their Olympic reports about China reflects conflict between cultural concepts and social identity is an awkward circumstance in construction of national image. How to eliminate or heal these differences is a significant task in the foreign dissemination of China. Regarding the 315 reports with Olympic topics in <<Reference News>>, the author of this article summarizes causes for censure of western media on China by analyzing trend, standpoint and concern of western media in their Olympic reports, and therefore, puts forward valuable recommendations for moulding a perfect national image.

Keywords: Social identity, Cultural concept, National image, Olympic Games, Western media

1. Research goal

The 2008 Beijing Olympic Games is an athletic sport for human beings to challenge their limits. In an information era in which symbolic signs prevail, Olympics bears more of political meanings. Therefore, understanding of Olympics shouldn't be merely confined to the scope of a sports event, but more a significant opportunity to display a national image. National image is an overall assessment on the relative stability by the citizens of the international society. Moulding and dissemination of a national image is based on comprehensive national strength, and to a great extent, derives from cultural influences of the nation. As a global medium event, Olympic Games is both a global sports party and a carrier of multicultural. Holding of Olympic Games can not only display and disseminate educational, physical and cultural concepts of the Olympic system per se, but can sufficiently reflect unique humanistic style and value concept of the host country. It is a reflection of spiritual meaning and cultural meaning of Olympic Games under a circumstance of multicultural. Therefore, each action of China in this particular feast receives much concern from western media.

Social identity is a sociology concept, which means social recognition of one's identity, namely, definite international status. For any country, if it intends to participate in international affairs or to play an important role in international affairs, it has to develop its economy, strengthen its national power, and improve its people's livelihood and quality of its citizens, etc. The international society is supposed to be a public place in which all countries participate in the international affairs equally, but western countries take up absolute advantages in terms of national power, military, and economy, etc. Therefore, the international game rule is formulated by these powerful countries. As an eastern and developing country, China has to follow game rules and value concepts of western developed countries in order to obtain "social identity" of the international society. Due to differences in ideology and divergence in cultural concepts, China and western countries often contradict with each other in international affairs, hard to tolerate each other. The grand occasion of Olympics is undoubtedly a great opportunity to eliminate western prejudice, win respect and gain international identity. The author sets about her study from reports of western media, which is aimed at analyzing in

which aspects western media recognize Olympics, and in which aspects they hold a critical attitude. Then the author elaborates with quantized data, and traces the root of the above results, from which he discovers approaches to gaining international identity and to providing valuable suggestions for moulding a perfect national image.

2. Research approach

This article adopts content analysis, namely, to regard as the research target <<Reference News>> --- the authoritative newspaper reported by foreign media and to sample the 315 reports by western media on Olympics from July 8 to September 26, 2008. And then the author classifies these reports in a chronological order into three periods, namely, the period before the Olympic Games (July 8 --- August 7), the period during the Olympic Games (August 8 --- August 24), and the period after the Olympic Games (August 25 --- September 26) and makes analysis on reports at different periods, namely, their reporting standpoint, trend, focus, attitude and implicit sense of their words. The sampling method is as follows: to collect report materials on the website of Reference News. In light of the fact that the website of Reference News also makes a selection from those published articles, this survey doesn't make a group sampling any more, but directly accumulates all reports.

3. Research results

3.1 Concern and of western media on Olympics and their intention

What did media concern about? How was their attitude? Whether their focus was transferred during the Olympic Games? And how was their attitude? Whether their attitude was changed or not? Whether Olympics has changed prejudice of western media on China? To what extent? Whether there is something wrong with our foreign communication strategy? In which aspects have we taken a false step? In which aspects we are unassailable? How to carry out an effective communication strategy in the future? For answering these questions, the author will make clear the attitude of western media in those three periods of Olympics. She will analyze concern of western media on Olympic Games and where their intention lies by a comparative verification.

Before the Olympic Games (7-8 --- 8-8), focus of western media on Beijing was concentrated on three aspects (150 reports): city image (including environmental protection, security guarantee and Olympic facility), cultural concept (including the issue of human rights and understanding of Olympic spirit), and quality of national citizens. Through relevant reports, the author finds out that overall trend and standpoint of western media about Beijing Olympic Games is negative, and their attitude is tough and rough. Among the three aspects they are most dissatisfied with is cultural concept. 23 reports (92%) which criticize Olympic Games also consider Beijing Olympic Games a political movement to suppress human rights and misinterpret Olympic spirit. 22 reports which criticize security guarantee in Beijing completely negate each effort of Chinese people for the Olympic Games, and regard Beijing Olympic Games as a movement to suppress domestic democrats. The only aspect western journalists cannot find fault with are Olympic volunteers and quality of national citizens, and reports of praise account for 80%. Attitude towards environmental protection and Olympic facilities is also relatively appreciative. However, it seems that western media collude with each other, and nitpick although there is nothing to find fault with. They seize on an incident to exaggerate matters and wilfully misinterpret everything. In view of media distribution, most of negative reports come from Britain, France and US, and then Germany. Japanese media are quite cautious, and seldom take the floor. Such countries as Latin America all present amicable olive branches to China because they are aware of difficulties encountered by developing countries. However, their friendship towards China is merely manifested in the full passion to support Beijing Olympic Games without specific comments, so such kinds of reports haven't been listed out separately (20 reports). Besides, those innocuous neutral reports (55 reports) are not to be stated more than is necessary (for detail, please see Table 1, Table 2 and Figure 2).

Insert Table 1 about here

Insert Table 2 about here

Insert Figure 1 about here

After the formal opening of Olympic Games (8-8 --- 8-24), focus of western media was immediately switched to the competition. They were no longer tenacious in such wheezy issues as human rights and political ideology, etc, but concentrated upon the competition and influences of the Olympic Games. In the process of communicating with Olympic volunteers and Chinese citizens, western journalists gradually changed their original prejudices against China and assessed quality of the citizens and the Olympics with a relatively objective attitude. Western media poured all their enthusiasm to the competition which lasted only 16 days, and Beijing became the focus of world attention. The number of relevant reports even surpassed 100. In addition, a certain degree of pro-China trend was revealed naturally in some reports. Almost media from all over the world marveled at Chinese culture and history and at the line-up of Olympics opening ceremony. Even the punctilious Japan had to gasp in admiration in presence of this great feast. Chinese culture has overcome media and friends around the world. Thirty reports in the opening ceremony were full of words with enthusiasm, and besides, the five reports in the closing ceremony were convinced of Chinese culture. During the

competition, marvellous performance of Chinese team members made western media panic-stricken, with different states of mind, some worried, some watching from sidelines, and some pretending to be indifferent. Among 12 reports, there were even over 7 reports that disparaged Olympic spirit of Chinese athletes and misunderstood the goal of Beijing Olympic Games, which accounted for 58%. There were merely 2 reports with relatively objective analysis (17%), and another three reports were neutral. Among those reports which predicted influences of China, 19 reports (86%) approved of Beijing Olympic Games, and affirmed positive role of Olympics in moulding the national image and cultural reflection and economic impacts followed. Only America and Germany (3 reports, accounting for 14%) showed no understanding of the times to make disharmonious voice. After the Olympic Games, foreign tourists and journalists keep in more touch with Chinese citizens increasingly. With further communication and understanding, Chinese citizens leave them good impression, so 7 out of 9 reports were full of words of praise and only 2 reports contained meaning of criticism (for detail, please see Table 3, Table 4 and Figure 2).

Insert Table 3 about here

Insert Table 4 about here

Insert Figure 2 about here

Within one month after the Olympic Games (8-25 --- 9-26), Beijing and China was still a topic concerned by western media. So what influences did Olympics bring about? Whether it was as western media worried about that soft strength of China increased significantly, Olympics pulled Chinese economy to grow rapidly or the prospect was not optimistic? Therefore, western media aimed their camera shot at two sensitive topics, namely, influences of Olympics and quality of national citizens. There were totally 65 relevant reports, and 22 reports were concerned about influences of the Olympic Games, among which 18 reports spoke highly of positive influences of Olympics, and only 4 reported negative assessment. Such types of reports were relatively impartial. There were 19 reports on quality of national citizens, which included 11 reports approved of high quality of Chinese citizens, and merely 8 negative reports which were mainly from such countries as US, Germany and France, etc. Furthermore, there were also three other articles deserved to be noticed about Chinese cultural concepts. There is a relative small number of other reports on city construction and its image, etc, and their attitude is not explicit (21 reports), so here the author will not discuss one by one (for detail, please see Table 5, Table 6 and Figure 3).

Insert Table 5 about here

Insert Table 6 about here

Insert Figure 3 about here

Conclusion: from the above statistical data, it is discovered that most of western media hold a critical attitude towards the city image, such as environmental protection, security guarantee and facilities, etc, while their attitude towards the quality of the citizens and their cultural concepts is relatively complicated and multivariated. (See Table 7 and Figure 4).

Insert Table 7 about here

Insert Figure 4 about here

3.2 Cause analysis of identity conflicts

Firstly, difference of ideology between China and western countries. To China, Olympics is not a common sports event, because it carries dreams of too many Chinese people. History of humiliation during the past hundred years leaves Chinese people a profound complex of national calamity. Olympics is a means for them to display their physique robustness and mightiness of Chinese national power and to get rid of the nickname of "sick man of Asia". Indeed, robustness of the physique doesn't necessarily represent mightiness of the national power. However, perfect performance of Chinese people in the Olympics will be bound to bring strong political influences. Just as Sandschneider, the head of DGAP and famous expert in Chinese issues, predicted that, "The Olympics had never broken away from politics. Whether it is concerned about conferring of the right to host the Olympic Games, or about the methods of a host country to hold the Olympic Games, what the world public are interested in is not merely sports, but the political influences and means of the international society to manifest itself.... Holding of the Olympic Games certainly has a particular significance for the national image of China as well as for its international image. Olympics symbolizes that China has regained its international prestige, and also has reflected growth of its international influences after 30 years since its successful implementation of the reforming policy." (<<Reference News>>, July 31). Therefore, this desire to urgently remould its international image is inevitably reflected as making too much of the Olympics, extremely nervous that pretty disturbance might affect the significant opportunity to present the best side of China to the world. Hence we play so much emphasis on the security guarantee, improve air quality at any economic cost and try to ensure safe and sound proceeding of the Olympic Games. Maybe there exist cultural differences between overemphasis of China on the Olympics and understanding of western media in the Olympics, so misunderstanding emerges among western media.

Secondly, differences in several aspects of Chinese and western cultural concepts. For instance, in terms of authority concept, Chinese people hold hierarchy and authority in esteem, and their bureaucratism prevails, while westerners are indifferent to the authority concept, and they emphasize equality of people and authority of the law. In terms of behavioral way, Chinese people emphasize collective and cooperative spirit, and stick to the doctrine of the mean Confucian, while westerners emphasize individualism which prevails. In terms of life value, Chinese people despise acquirement of interests and pay attention to “face”, indirect and tolerant, while westerners focus on acquirement of interests and are indifferent to the concept of “face”, straightforward and strict. These cultural characteristics endow people with totally different thinking ways, value orientation and psychological characteristics. In terms of thinking way, Chinese people concentrate on imaginal thinking, while westerners prefer abstract thinking and logical thinking; Chinese people prefer comprehensive thinking, while westerners prefer analytical thinking; Chinese people pay attention to “unification”, while westerners emphasize “independence”. The differences of thinking way and behavioral mode will necessarily cause divergence in looking upon an issue and analyzing an issue between Chinese people and westerners. What seems quite natural might be a fuss in the eyes of westerners. However, what we believe should be reasonable in such a way might have other fish to fry in the eyes of westerners. For example, in terms of security guarantee, western journalists mistakenly believe that we resort to security guarantee to attack hostile forces within the country, while actually we just ensure successful proceeding of the Olympic Games. We believe that the opening ceremony can be magnificent and grand with the premise of being uniform, while westerners who attach great importance to individualism mistakenly consider it as a dictatorship and a suppression of the personality. Westerners regard it a waste of money to expend a huge fund to build Olympic venues and other constructions, while “pursuit of face” is a common fault of Chinese people, which it is difficult for westerners to recognize. Therefore, differences of cultural concepts cause western media to rise frequently in revolt to the Beijing Olympic Games, while it is also hard for Chinese people to accept excessive “nit-pick” of westerners.

4. Communication strategy

Distortion of western media in the national image of China is reflected both in divergence of ideology and difference of cultural concepts. Since we cannot change the ideology of each other, then it is possible to try to make up for differences in terms of cultural concepts. We should enhance an open context, and enable more westerners to understand our culture and to accept our civilization. Therefore, in the aspect of foreign communication strategy, we should pay attention to communication of two respects. Firstly, to disseminate profound historical culture of China and to present an authentic and comprehensive China to western countries. One westerner has pointed out that, “the biggest issue of Chinese development in the future is not economy, but a distorted national image.” Currently, China is at a critical sustainable period, so it needs to create a favorable public opinion environment and a harmoniously interactive atmosphere by means of moulding and disseminating its national image. Significance of sports in transmitting cultural value and moulding the national image cannot be overestimated. In an era of globalization, significance of cultural and knowledge system is on the increase, and cultural communication has become an important “soft strength”. It’s thus clear that westerners show a great interest in the historical civilization of China with a long history of five thousand years. Communication of historical civilization and culture is the best approach to attracting and impelling other nations.

Secondly, to mould the national image with an identity of the young “bird nest generation”. A national image can be signified and represented by a single individual or a group. For instance, the personal charm of a leader can represent the national image, and also the national image can be delivered by vigour and vitality of the young. What remains fresh in our memory is the young American President Kennedy, who represents the American culture filled with vigor and vitality. Also, the American “beat generation” in 1960s also conveys a national image of “depravation and degeneration”. Liang Qichao stimulated young people on their mettle and revitalized the country by his words “intelligent young people and then an intelligent nation; powerful young people and then a powerful nation”. Whether should we mould our national image with an identity of the contemporary vigorous young generation? As a matter of fact, excellent performance of the contemporary graduate volunteers during the Beijing Olympic Games has gained acclamation of the world. their honesty smile, intimate and polite attitude, their tolerant, open-minded and gratuitous breadth of mind, their ability to respond to all sorts of problems, their fluent foreign language, and their decent and generous gesture and dressing, etc, all manifest the national image of a new generation in China to the whole world, and enable oversea media to raise a high voice upon the rise of “bird nest generation”. “Rise” of the “bird nest generation” will endow the national image of China in the future with a brand-new supportive power.

In sum, construction of a national image not only depends on internal effort, but also on external assessment, and a powerful national economy will not necessarily result in improvement of a national image. An effective foreign communication should be applied to break through those ingrained prejudicial attitudes. Therefore, enlarging cultural communication and moulding an image of young people in a new era will play an extremely significant role in constructing the image of a country with enthusiasm in international affairs.

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All data in the article originates from the significant research project of the national humanistic and social science assumed by Renmin University of China, "Olympics: Construction of Chinese national image of Humanistic idea, Social value and Culture". Feng Huiling and Hu Beijing are principals of the project group.

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Table 1. Reports by western media before the Olympics (criticism)

Concern Project	City image			Cultural concept (Human rights and understanding of spirit of Olympics)	National citizen's quality
	Environmental protection	Security guarantee	Olympics facilities		
The number of reports and the percentage	4/7 (57%)	22/22 (100%)	9/16 (56%)	23/25 (92%)	1/5 (20%)
Keywords	Absolute role	Destruction, dissatisfaction, neglect of management, severe and discordance	Headache, flinch, and disorder	Pain, venting of grievance, conceit, irritability, xenophobia, infringement, and oppression	language barrier, prostitution and cheat

Table 2. Reports by western media before the Olympics (praise)

Concern Project	City image			Cultural concept (Human rights and understanding of spirit of Olympics)	National citizen's quality
	Environmental protection	Security guarantee	Olympics facilities		
The number of reports and the percentage	3/7 (43%)	0	5/16 (31%)	2/25 (8%)	4/5 (80%)
Keywords	Fresh and clean and perfect		Sufficient	Pride	Perfection, diligence, modesty and good temper

Table 3. Reports by western media during the Olympics (criticism)

Concern Project	Cultural concept (opening/closing ceremony)	Competition (Understanding of Olympic Spirit)	Prediction of influences (economics, culture and national image)	National citizen's quality
The number of reports and the percentage	0	7/12 (58%)	3/22 (14%)	2/9 (22%)

Keywords		Craze, Sick man of Asia, cockiness, national humiliation, wild ambition, culture of golden medal, sports machine, malformation, abnormal state and mistreatment	Arrogance, nationalism trend, inferiority complex and lack of democracy	Hard draw and drag
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Table 4. Reports by western media during the Olympics (praise)

Concern Project	Cultural concept (opening/closing ceremony)	Competition (Understanding of Olympic Spirit)	Prediction of influences (economics, culture and national image)	National citizen's quality
The number of reports and the percentage	35/35 (100%)	2/12 (17%)	19/22 (86%)	7/9 (78%)
Keywords	Enchanted, gorgeous, magnificent, charming, spectacular, splendid and extremely shocked	Accompaniment and dignified and imposing	Leader, strengthen, creativity, culturally powerful nation, global views and pride	Intimate, well-mannered, fair, optimistic, vitality andpatriotic

Table 5. Reports by western media after the Olympics (criticism)

Concern Project	Influences (economics, culture and national image)	Cultural concept	National citizen's quality
The number of reports and the percentage	4/22 (18%)	2/3 (67%)	8/19 (42%)
Keywords	pile of money, craze, exhaust, narrow, ambition and conceal	Block, pinchbeck, and play tricks	Violation, contradiction, Sick man of Asia, self-distrust, nationalist sentiment and vent

Table 6. Reports by western media after the Olympics (praise)

Concern Project	Influences (economics, culture and national image)	Cultural concept	National citizen's quality
The number of reports and the percentage	18/22 (82%)	1/3 (33%)	11/19 (58%)
Keywords	regard with special esteem, perfect, respect, mature, confident and miraculous	Harmonious	Public and sweet

Table 7. Changes of attitude of western media during the three periods of the Olympics

Concern Period	National citizen's quality		Cultural concept	
	Praise	Criticism	Praise	Criticism
Before the Olympics	4/5 (80%)	1/5(20%)	2/25(8%)	23/25(92%)
During the Olympics	7/9(78%)	2/9(22%)	35/35(100%)	0
After the Olympics	11/19(58%)	8/19(42%)	1/3(33%)	2/3(67%)

Figure 1. Comparison of attitude of western media before Olympics

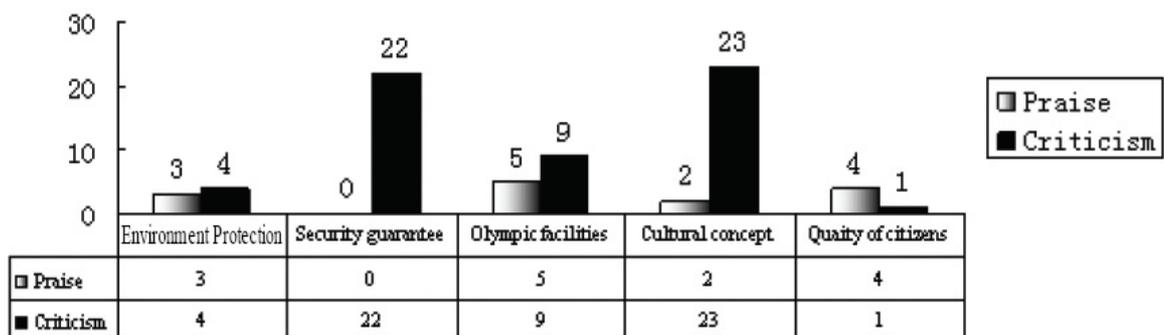


Figure 2. Comparison of attitude of western media during Olympics

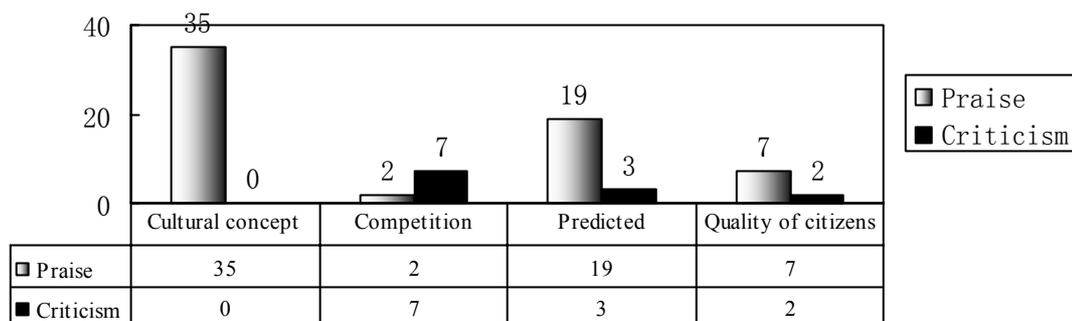


Figure 3. Comparison of attitude of western media after Olympics

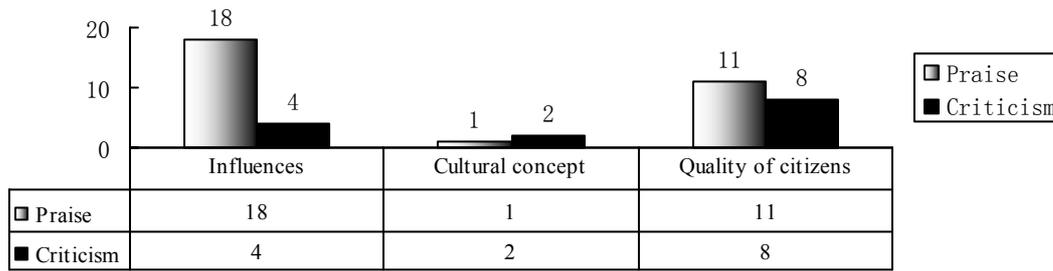


Figure 4. Changes of attitude of western media at three periods of Olympics

