

# A Comparative Case Study of Media Coverage of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of Winter Olympic Games Beijing 2022

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## Abstract

Establishing a good national image and encouraging Chinese culture to spread out is a particularly important part of China's national cultural soft power construction. Winter Olympics Beijing 2022 is a global event, which is of immense value and significance for showing China's cultural charm and shaping the national image. Recently, research on the combination of framing theory and reports on the Olympic Games has significantly increased. However, there are few studies focusing on the cultural part of the analysis of reports. After making a summary of the coverage on China major events and Olympic Games of mainstream media, this study, based on the theory of cultural resistance and cultural-bound frame, chose mainstream media CNN (Cable News Network), BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), and China Daily as samples, attempting to analyze their reports of the Opening and Closing ceremonies of the Winter Olympics Games Beijing 2022. Through the comparative analysis of Olympic coverage, this research shows that foreign media's attitudes towards China have remarkably changed and investigates how Chinese culture is disseminated in some parts of the world to identify the factors affecting the dissemination of cultural elements. The research findings also revealed that coverage of BBC and CNN concerns more about China's alleged abused human rights, while the part about Chinese cultural translation is limited. Only by having a comprehensive understanding of the process of transmitting culture can cultural translation be well-achieved. and it can help promote mutual communication and cooperation of the world.

**Keywords:** Winter Olympics 2022, Opening and Closing Ceremonies, Media, Chinese Culture

## 1. Introduction

As the world's foremost multi-sports event and the largest sporting celebration in modern time, the Olympic Games gathers different nations in the same place to celebrate the friendly competition. Hosting the Olympics is a great honor for a country. The most expensive Games constantly stand out with more overrun than preliminary costs. But why do many cities compete to host it despite the economic burden? And Beijing, the capital city of China, is the first city to host summer and winter ceremonies of the Olympic Games. In addition to the Olympics' enormous economic gains, the Opening and Closing Ceremonies are the best icons to present the host country to the world. This is in line with the "going out policy" of Chinese culture.

The opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic Games are especially important for cultural dissemination because the

host country may use its organizational role to express culturally particular norms and values, though the ceremonies are still overseen by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). McAloon proposed that “To be a nation recognized by others and realistic to themselves, a people must march in the Olympic Games Opening Ceremonies procession” (1991, p. 42). Susan Brownell also maintained that “The Olympic Games have become the world’s largest single event for the production of national culture for international consumption” (1995, p. 314). In fact, the ceremonies are the most popular media events during the Olympic period. These overwhelming reports provide host countries with immense communicative power. Additionally, the ceremonies are a cultural spectacle and a political ritual with symbolism and nuances at play (Horne & Whannel, 2016). The meaningful shows and performances vividly relayed by worldwide popular news agencies make the Olympic celebrations an important venue for cultural communication. In the opening and closing ceremonies of the Beijing Winter Olympic Games, cultural communication was not only the spread of sport culture, but also a dialogue between China and the world. It successfully presented the real China to the world through integration and design of Chinese culture.

However, the Olympic ceremonies are mediated. This means that the content of the Olympic ceremony is communicated via a medium (Hjarvard, 2011). Bouwhuis maintained that “the Olympics are dependent on the logic of media technologies particularly when it comes to the registration of the Olympic opening and closing ceremonies” (2021, p. 51). Currently, news enjoys a remarkable position. Meanwhile, media coverage is a directed activity, and the focus of coverage is targeted. Even if they are reporting on the same event, the angle of coverage, the selection of materials and the writing methods are vastly different.

With the enhancement of China’s national strength and the continuous expansion of its global influence, China is drawing more attention from overseas media. The total amount of China-related reports by foreign English media shows a steady upward trend, the attention of foreign public opinion on China keeps increasing, and the exposure rate of China in the international public opinion field keeps rising. It is also worth noting that media organizations do not cover the whole information; instead, they consciously choose what they want to publish. By filtering information, media organizations inform people in a way that shapes the perception of their audience. Thus, how to represent an event like Olympics to promote China’s image? This is a question that is worthy of pondering.

Aiming to improve China’s image in the world and provide reflections for hosting future major events, this paper makes a comparison of the media coverage of the opening and closing ceremonies of Winter Olympic Games Beijing 2022 by taking Cable News Network (CNN), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and China Daily (CD) as examples. By adopting quantitative analysis of their reports and close reading of the texts, the authors explore the messages and implications conveyed by coverage under the theories of cultural-bound frame and cultural resistance. This paper attempts to compare and analyze the reports by CNN and BBC, seeking to interpret recurring elements and the ways in which they are represented by the media and explore the attitudes held by foreign media towards the opening and closing ceremonies and the acceptability of Chinese traditional culture in various countries. In this regard, factors affecting the communication of cultural elements in the opening and closing ceremonies may be found, and strategies for the effective communication of Chinese culture abroad could be put forward.

## 2. Framing and Cultural Resistance

“Frame,” as understood by American anthropologist Bateson, is an internal psychological state and makes up part of our map of the world, but it is not real, rather, it is an indication of the “sort of thinking in interpreting” (1972, p. 187). Erving Goffman defined frames as “principles of organization which govern events” (1974, p. 10). However, frames are culturally bound. According to Barthes (1993), frames tell us what to expect and it has very definite borders, just as our understanding of an event has a culture-bound frame. Tannen makes it clear that “frames are culturally determined” (1993a, p. 9).

The study of frames can identify the use of certain words, metaphors, visual images, descriptions, examples, and outstanding elements such as titles, among others (Neuman et al. 1992). The frame is an internal mental map that reflects our thinking. Which in terms of maps is a more useful metaphor when considering culture and translation because our first task is to chart the reality as perceived by others (Katan, D., & Taibi, M., 2021). This map tells us what to expect in our own background information and orients us in an event.

In the 1980s, framing theory began to enter the news and communication industry and gradually gained widespread attention. Media professionals refined it by including two new concepts: “media framework” and “news framework”. Framing allows the text to be understood as a system of organized elements that can influence certain attitudes and behaviors of the audience (Katan, D., & Taibi, M., 2021). Frame further defined news-specific that “the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences” (Reese et al., 2001). From this point of view, one can see that media holds an essential role in the framing process.

This can also be applied to news translation, which has a culture-bound framework. As culture has unlimited definitions and there are various approaches to categorize it, what one can do is to try to unify a framework of culture. The culture is the stock of commonly invoked frames. In fact, culture might be defined as the empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited in the discourse. Each culture can act as a frame within which one is understanding of reality or external expressions is interpreted.

In *Translating cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators*, Katan gives us a clear demonstration of framing culture, that is the culture bound mental map of the world. Hence in the present article, the author employs Dilts' logical levels of organization in systems to help interpret how culture reveals in foreign coverage about the 2022 Winter Olympic Opening and Closing Ceremonies. The logical levels are categorized into six main parts: environment, behavior, capabilities/strategies/skills, values, beliefs, and identity. The environment is the basic level about when and where. Organizations and individuals react to and operate on the environment through their behavior (Katan, D., & Taibi, M., 2021, p. 54). Behavior is about what. Capabilities is the level of appropriateness and about how. The next organizational level includes aspects such as: core beliefs, values, attitudes, and criteria, and is about why. And then there are values about why and identity about who.

The Logical Levels function as a hierarchical series of metessages linking behaviour in an environment to a pattern of strategies (how) and organized by a set of values and beliefs (why) (Katan, D., & Taibi, M., 2021, p. 62). These are all framed at a higher level by the role or the identity. It provides a unifying framework to explain how culture functions.

Pym (2004) observes, "The foreign news we read in the local press can legitimately be seen as a localization of foreign-language texts, at some point transformed by the international agencies, and transformed in ways that go beyond endemic notions of translation" (p. 38). What he wants to emphasize here is the notion of localization. According to his explanation, localization is tailoring to local audience's usefulness by transforming the text or any object 'endowed with what we might call meaningful materiality' with the purpose of being able to apply to the new location.

However, there are two influencing factors which Kyle (2010) defined them as cultural resistance one and two. According to him, resistance one is that "the need imposed by the new context of reception to transform a text in order to make it meaningful there, grows with distance: The greater the cultural gap, the more effort localizers must spend in order to make a text conform to end-users' expectations" (P. 42). As for resistance two, it is about the resistance "to the use of language about the whole meaning-making system of culture, of which language is only part" (Kyle, 2010, p. 49).

Members of any culture will have certain background assumptions that inform them how to interpret an object or event. It is impossible to find out all related information; thus, it is an extremely complicated task for journalists to enhance their understanding of certain countries' culture.

So, translating news from one country to another country comes with two kinds of cultural resistance: one is about the degree of localization, the other is translating culture into a form. A group of people have their culture-specific beliefs, values, and behaviors, and one can use the word "appropriate" to describe. Just as Katan (2021) maintained, "Culture-bound beliefs affect the meaning we assign to language and to behavior and are the basis for cultural misunderstanding" (p. 62). So, to have a comprehensive analysis of the media coverage of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of Beijing 2022, it is necessary to consider culture-bound frame and cultural resistance.

### 3. Content Analysis and Cultural Translation of Different Media Coverage

In this part, by searching the key words "2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Opening Ceremony", "2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Closing Ceremony" and checking the date of the ceremonies on the official website of CNN, BBC and China Daily, there are 16 and 4 results respectively for the first two and more results for the domestic media. Then the results are analyzed from the content and the cultural translation of cultural elements in the ceremonies to draw a conclusion to identify the factors affecting the dissemination of cultural elements and media's attitudes towards such event.

#### 3.1. Content Analysis and Cultural Translation of CNN Reports

In CNN, the coverage of 2022 Winter Olympic ceremonies focused on a series of human rights violations of Uyghurs, the continuing "crackdown" in Hong Kong and other abuses. There are also some other negative reports about the political tensions between Russia and Ukraine and the negative influence on the 2022 Winter Olympics. However, there are few remarks on the cultural elements of the ceremonies. Here only some more relevant and representative coverage is to be analyzed.

In the article "China made a statement with Olympic opening ceremony," the journalist Amy Bass pointed out some extremely sensitive topics She states that "China openly acknowledged the layers of political meaning at play," which means it is a presentation of political symbolism. As well as a torchbearer who hails from Xinjiang and has roots in Uyghur minorities. It is held that China illtreated Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang. All these problems become the excuses of the diplomatic boycott of the Game by some western countries. Additionally, in the article "February 4, 2022, Beijing Winter Olympics news and results", the authors maintained that political tensions have dominated the Games, resulting in several countries including the US imposing diplomatic boycotts in protest of China's alleged human rights abuses.

However, there are also some positive remarks about the ceremonies. In the article entitled "Your top Winter Olympics 2022 questions, answered", the opinion within it appreciates the opening ceremony. The expression is like that opening ceremony is filled with fireworks, amazing lightshows, and some colorful costumes. In fact, it presents a defined and improved image of China to international audiences around the world. However, such reports rarely focus on the cultural expression in the opening and closing ceremonies, and focus on international diplomacy, national wars, national image, and regional issues. In the article entitled "Beijing Olympics hit the heights and the depths," Amy Bass states that in the opening ceremony "a giant Chinese knot symbolizing fortune and unity." Chinese knot is a very iconic Chinese element, so that people around the world can understand Chinese culture intuitively. Moreover, "In pictures: The Olympics closing ceremony in Beijing," it is reported that a firework displays spells out "one world." To the song "Let the world be filled with Love," 76 students from different countries walked

together and marched forward side by side. The place they passed behind formed a video composed of photos, showing the life moments of people from different regions and cultures. This show presents the determination of "opening China" to build a community with a shared future for humankind, and the people of the entire world to work together for a better future.

The frame of the coverage of CNN about Olympic Opening and Closing Ceremonies can be categorized into three main parts: alleged human rights violations, political tensions between Russia and Ukraine and objective report on the 2022 Olympic Opening and Closing Ceremonies. Moreover, culture-bound frame of the logical levels it reflects are as follows. The 24th Winter Olympics Games is hosted in Beijing, China from February 4th to February 20th. Dress with culture-specific in the opening and closing ceremonies represent different countries and nations, and people from all over the world to celebrate the big event suggesting a unified world family. The third level capability through spoken and non-verbal channel convey from one country to another country. There are also essential rituals in each Olympic Opening and Closing Ceremonies as Olympic culture, such as the handover of Olympics. For example, in the Closing Ceremony, children representing Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo hug a globe as part of the Olympic handover. The culture-bound belief can be embodied in the IOC president's words. "You not only respected each other: you embraced each other, even if your countries are divided by conflict." Finally, core values are directly and inexorably connected to identity. In translating the core value, the mediator will be concerned about compensating for the lack of connection in the mind of the target culture reader (Katan, D., & Taibi, 2021). Journalist lack of deep understanding of Chinese culture, resulting in small portion of reports on Chinese culture. Furthermore, the coverage encounters cultural resistance two. The opening and closing ceremonies are live shows full of colors, sounds, and actions. Thus, it is impossible to translate all things to merely texts, not to mention invisible, unpredictable, and opaque culture.

### 3.2. Content Analysis and Cultural Translation of BBC Reports

Compared to CNN, there is less media portrayal of opening and closing ceremonies. There are still reporting on the alleged human rights abuses in China. In the article "Winter Olympics: Games officially under way after opening ceremony in Beijing," IOC had been criticized for awarding the Games to China because of the country's alleged human rights abuses. Several countries, including the United Kingdom, declared a diplomatic boycott of the Games with no ministers or officials attending the opening ceremony. The Beijing government is accused of committing atrocities against the Uyghur Muslim population in the northwest province of Xinjiang.

"Winter Olympics: IOC defends use of Uyghur athlete in opening ceremony" expressed, South Korean politicians' criticism towards the opening ceremony after a woman dressed in traditional Korean costume appeared among a crowd representing different ethnic groups in China. Previously, Koreans have expressed outrage over claims that some aspects of Korean culture originated in China, such as kimchi (a side dish made from fermented cabbage), and hanbok (traditional Korean dress). Lee So-young of the ruling Democratic Party of Korea wrote: "We deeply regret that hanbok appeared among the costumes of Chinese minorities at the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics" (BBC, 2022). He also wrote, "Do not covet (our) culture. Oppose cultural appropriation" (BBC, 2022). And the opposition People Power Party called the costume a "rude act of appropriating the culture of a sovereign state" (BBC, 2022).

The article "In pictures: The Olympics closing ceremony in Beijing" described that a firework display spells out "one world," it gave a depiction of red lanterns. It refers to the Lantern Festival on the 15th day of the first lunar month when people hang red lanterns, which symbolize reunion. Cultural symbols such as Chinese knot, are also transformed into pictorial visual decoration, telling Chinese stories in intricate details, and expanding people's aesthetic imagination and association.

The frame constructed in BBC has three parts: IOC's viewpoints, alleged Chinese issues, and the sports events. The reports of sports events are the same as CNN with an objective tone. From the analysis above and by making a comparison, one may find that there are more reports on the Chinese alleged human rights abuses, and both have one or two news to report on the condition of the opening and closing ceremonies complementing with beautiful pictures in an explanatory way. And BBC narrated other countries' boycott of China's hosting of the Olympic Games from the perspective of an outsider, without too much emotional bias, while CNN, as a news organization of the United States, obviously showed its boycott of China due to the influence of the country.

### 3.3. Content Analysis and Cultural Translation of China Daily Reports

Compared to the other two media, China Daily covers more reports. Among these, the reports are about the opening and closing ceremonies including the design concepts and specific details, the diplomacy between Chinese and the world leaders, and athletes. There are also images of some of the highlights of the opening and closing ceremonies interspersed throughout the coverage.

The most extensive coverage was on the design concept and details of the opening and closing ceremonies. The first main part is from the design concept of Zhang Yimou, the director of the Beijing 2022 opening design concept. The reports cover some words of Zhang who design the ceremonies from a global viewpoint aiming to integrate everything and be in keep with Beijing's efforts to stage "simple, safe and splendid" Games. The ceremonies are grounded in Chinese anesthetics, leaving room for the imagination. Moreover, there is a report detailing snowflake's design concept, which fits in with the theme of the Olympics. Describing the lighting of the cauldron, a large snowflake acts as a cauldron framed by olive branches and composed of 91 smaller flakes representing the countries competing at the Games. As the athletes finished entering the arena, the ushers gathered around the field, and all the delegations gathered to build a "big snowflake," interpreting the vision of "Together towards the future." "Together for a Shared Future" is the slogan of this Olympic Games, anticipating people from different countries to learn from each other for the common good of humanity. There are also some reports on the green Winter Olympics.

The ceremonies welcome greener Winter Olympics, reflecting in advanced technologies, clean energy and reduced duration of the show and performer. All the work was done in an environmentally friendly manner.

The second main part of the coverage is the diplomacy. It reported how many international dignitaries attended and what kind of attitude they hold, president Xi's speech and the comments of IOC's president Bach. Bach praised the Winter Olympics as a truly unparalleled event and called on the international community to embrace the Olympic spirit of unity and peace. And there are some reports on the players. One report quoted athletes from different countries appreciating the Beijing Winter Olympics ranging from the warmth of the Chinese people to the friendship of various countries, to the charm of Chinese culture. There are also reports about the winning athletes and flag bearers.

Through the content analysis above, China Daily reported on the opening and closing ceremonies from a more objective and authentic perspective. It described the successful points of the ceremonies and tapped into the real connotation of each design. It was the largest worldwide audience for the Games in the history of Olympics that powerfully come back the so-called "diplomatic boycott" by some western politicians and anti-China forces.

Compared to the other two media, China Daily explains more coverage on the cultural elements in China. In the coverage, the first point introduced is a 24-second countdown. The report explains that the first of the 24 solar terms of the year "Beginning of Spring" coincides with the opening day of the 2022 Winter Olympics, showing the Chinese understanding of time. It means a beginning and new hope. Then the martial designed by arts students from Yantai depicted performance to create a giant image of green grass igniting the magic of the Winter Olympics. It was at that day that athletes from other countries experienced the Chinese Lunar New Year. Some items that can spread festive atmosphere, like the spring couplets, the Chinese character fu (福), the lanterns and dumplings, are mentioned. As the entire opening ceremony was carried out by a snowflake, there is a report that taps into its design idea. The core creative concept of "Build a Snowflake" comes from the poem "The snowflake in the Yan Hill is as big as a sheet of bed mat" by Li Bai, a poet of the Tang Dynasty in China. This poem explains the snowflake idea for the Winter Olympics Opening Ceremony. The guideposts skillfully combine snowflakes with Chinese knot patterns, which emphasizes harmony and beauty. All the small snowflakes get together into a bigger one which echoes the five rings and represents peace. Also, the "Square Dance" was mentioned. It is a creation of ordinary Chinese people who will gather on public squares to joyfully sing and dance after dinner. This symbolizes the happiness of the people because they shake off poverty and live better lives.

Based on the above analysis, the frame constructed in China Daily is divided into three parts: details of the ceremonies, diplomacy, and sports. Every cultural element reported is well interpreted and there is no cultural misunderstanding. Despite the untranslatability of the images, the coverage encounters cultural resistance two and there is almost no cultural resistance one.

Through the comparative analysis of CNN, BBC, and China Daily, the reporting frame is different; thus, each media outlet has a different focus. Western media tend to report on the controversial things while Chinese media report on the event itself. Within the reports, there are very few covers on the Chinese culture. This shows that the foreign media's coverage of China is not arbitrary and unpredictable, but there is a powerful "cultural pushing hand" behind it. If the reporters in China can think differently and look at things from the cultural and social backgrounds and habits of thinking and acceptance of foreign audiences as much as possible, they may be able to better grasp the pulse and trends of foreign media coverage of China, anticipate the topics they care about, provide them with timely and effective information, and help them better introduce China to the world.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on culture-bound frame and cultural resistance theory, this study analyzes the translation of Chinese culture through the analysis of coverage of 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic opening and closing ceremonies from three main international mainstream CNN, BCC, and China Daily, trying to describe how Chinese culture is disseminated in some parts of the world. Here are several key findings revealed in this paper. First, the coverage of 2022 Winter Olympic Opening and Closing Ceremonies from the three medium concerns differently, while the same point is that CNN and BBC all pay attention to the alleged abuses of human rights, which is detrimental to Chinese national image. Second, with the help of culture-bound frame and cultural resistance, the readers can have a great understanding of the process of transmitting culture. Moreover, cultural translation is now achieved better than the past, though there is little space in the report to describe Chinese culture. Additionally, foreign media's coverage of China is not arbitrary as there is "culture pushing hand," and if by the mechanism of culture, it will be of immense help to improve the image of China in foreign media coverage. It is necessary to point out that news translation and culture are intimately connected, and the process of exploring how to decrease the resistance caused by culture has a long way to go. Then in the process of further studies, the comparative studies of more mainstream media about Olympics can be analyzed to explore the factors influencing cultural dissemination in international events that have enormous influence on world.

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