



# Seeing Changes in Attitudes Toward China from Reports on the Two Olympic Games

Houru Pan<sup>(✉)</sup>

Beijing 101 High School, Beijing, China  
23harry.pan@beijing101.com.cn

**Abstract.** This paper focuses on the change in the attitudes that countries around the world have toward China. This study is shown through the comparison of two reports on the 2008 and 2022 Olympics that both took place in China. The main methods are using word clouds to create straightforward graphs and rhetorical analysis techniques to analyze the idea that the author wants to make through. This paper mainly analyzes the news reports from CNN (the U.S.) and Figaro Vox (France) to show the opinion of America and Europe. From the two sets of reports, changes following the same trend yet different in degree can be seen. The U.S. media's attitude turned dramatically negative toward China turn around 2018 due to trade conflicts. On the other hand, although the European media's attitude also turned to a more negative point of view, its reports are more neutral compared to the U.S. media. This might be caused by the differences between the U.S. and Europe when trading with China. From the U.S. perspective, China is its direct competitor while Europe views it more as a cooperater, as seen from the data.

**Keywords:** Reports · CNN · Figaro Vox · Olympic games

## 1 Introduction

The 2022 Winter Olympics took place from February 4th–24th. As an international sporting event that has held so many meanings since its creation, it is naturally in the spotlight, especially in the tragedies of the pandemic. However, the “peace” the Olympics represent would not come peacefully due to the continuous increase of tension in international relations. Aside from that, China has been exceptionally highlighted since 2018 when a trade war between the People's Republic of China and the United States started, and the war has never ended.

One important way of analyzing the attitude people around the world have toward China is by analyzing the news from international newspapers before and during the Olympics.

On February 4th, BBC News published an article called “Beijing Winter Olympics boycott: Why are the Games so controversial?” which summarizes most of the conflict before the Olympics. First, major powers, including the U.S., the U.K., and India along with Australia, Lithuania, Kosovo, Belgium, Denmark, Canada, and Estonia announced a “diplomatic boycott” by not sending officials to the 2022 Olympics in China. Although

the U.S. still sent some officials to China, tensions can still be seen in those diplomatic decisions [1].

Interestingly, these “modern tensions” just mentioned above are drastically different from the attitudes of countries to the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics which was also held in Beijing. BBC host Hugh Edwards commented on the live broadcast of the opening ceremony of the Beijing 2008 Olympics, saying that the opening ceremony fully demonstrated the confidence of the Chinese people. The host of Eurosport said that the scale of the Beijing Olympic Games is beyond any imagination, it is simple, extraordinary, and amazing. Nippon Broadcasting Association TV in Japan reported that the ceremony is a combination of traditional Chinese culture and modern Chinese culture, which is both spectacular and imposing to audiences around the world. This paper would analyze the transition in the attitude of the world to China through the reports on the two Olympics [2].

## 2 Literature Review

In previous research about the transition of international opinions regarding China, writers mainly focus on the opening up and reform of the Chinese economy and how countries, especially the west, respond to it. Although this reform is still happening, researchers usually aim at the timeline between 1978 and 2000. In Google Scholar, most of the papers on top are about social change and reform and are more focused on the few decades before economic reform. JSTOR only has two articles about the 2008 Olympics: “The Beijing Olympics as a Campaign of Mass Distraction” by Anne-Marie Brady, who viewed it as a form of propaganda [3], and “Of Menace and Mimicry: The 2008 Beijing Olympics” by Jennifer Hubbert, who analyzed the Olympics from the discussions of different people with a neutral perspective [4].

For the time period after 2000, most researchers focus on the development of China in its technology, health care, and greenhouse gas emissions as a nation alone instead of as one of the most influential countries in the world. In other words, they are focused on “China” but not “Chinese international affairs”. This situation went on until 2018 when Donald Trump announced his “Maximum Pressure Campaign” to promote conflict in every aspect of U.S.-China relations. This is actually the direct reason that the author wants to write a paper to analyze the transition of the world’s opinion about China. Since it seemed so sudden to the author that it was as if China had suddenly risen from a country ranked second or third in Asia to a direct competitor of the mightiest country in the world.

This incident inspired the author to write, but the author did not know what to comment on at that time as the author did not have enough information and a proper position to analyze the problem. However, after the winter Olympics, the author found that this sporting event that bore the weight of so many wishes of the human race, a symbol of hope, peace, competition, and the will to advance to a higher level, is the best position to analyze the transition of international attitudes regarding China.

### 3 Method

#### 3.1 Research Tools and the Hypothesis

The following are the main tools that the author will use to analyze news articles.

1. A word cloud generator is called “Wordit Out”.
2. Rhetorical analysis techniques.

The hypothesis of this paper is that all the evidence used by the news articles is real. This is because if we start attacking the basis of news articles, then no news article can be credible as credibility is also based on the fact that all the evidence is real. Moreover, classifying one piece of evidence as false would have too much influence on the result. For example, if two news articles are using opposite evidence, classifying the evidence of different news articles as incredible would certainly cause the outcome of the research to be drastically different. Therefore, when conflicting evidence appears, both would not be considered in the analysis.

#### 3.2 Research Method

The author would compare the news of agencies in a horizontal way (across time periods), finding differences and similarities among the articles published by the same news agency about the two Olympics. This kind of analysis is adopted since actions of China are often debated about around the world and news agencies often adopt evidence that are conflicting with the evidence adopted from other agencies to prove their own point. This is especially so in the Human rights section which makes up an important part of China-related newspapers published by CNN, BCC and other influential newspapers.

## 4 Changes of Attitudes Toward China

### 4.1 CNN

The first pair of news articles are both from CNN.

The first one is about the follow-ups of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics reported in 2012: “China’s capital still getting kick from 2008 Olympic party” [5] (Fig. 1).

The second one is reported during the Winter Olympics reported this year: “The Olympics was a success inside China. And that’s the audience Beijing cares about” [6] (Fig. 2).

The difference starts with the titles. The former featured a city and country inspired by the Olympics, while the latter featured a country holding an international sporting event but only caring about its own audience; a country that is isolated from the world.

From the two word clouds shown above, dramatic changes can be seen. Although keywords, like “Games”, “Beijing”, and “China” all stay at the center of the stage for both graphs, the smaller words around them are drastically different. Surprisingly, the words like “politics”, “party”, and “media”, which are considered very important in international reports regarding China, did not appear in the article in 2012. Instead,







Fig. 4. Chinese power in the face of the European challenge

bearing the pressure from the whole country; the spectacular ceremony mentioned in the 2012 report became a “not so sure thing” that nearly failed; even the pictures of the Birds Nest, the stadium that held the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, shown in the 2012 report are changed into protestors trying to extinguish the torch. This change in indications and pictures is guided by the tide of anti-China feelings in the United States, while also creating new tides to lead the public with negative information about China, creating a cycle.

The reports by CNN mainly show the changes in attitudes toward China among countries, especially the U.S.: from a country entering modernization to a country that is not welcome in international affairs. However, that is not the full picture.

#### 4.2 Figaro Vox

The second set of articles are from Figaro Vox in France.

The first article is “Chinese power in the face of the European challenge” in 2007 [8] (Fig. 4).

And the second is “The effect of the Olympics 2022: the “sanitary bubble” set up around the Beijing sites” [9] (Fig. 5).

First, the author wants to state the reasons for choosing these two articles.

Though the first article only uses the Olympics as a lead to the China-Europe relationship, that is the only article that has a connection with politics and international relationships; all the other reports around the time are about French companies entering the Chinese market while using the Olympics as a chance to introduce themselves. As for



between the two major powers. These competitions are slowly converting into conflict as more offensive language is used as time went from 2012 to 2022.

Figaro Vox's attitude was cautious in 2007 stating that Europe needs to cooperate with China and increase its political influence. However, in 2022, its reports are a little negative but are much milder compared to the words of CNN. Moreover, unlike CNN, it seldomly focuses on political factors. This might be caused by the lack of competition between the EU and China, generating less conflict. Additionally, according to Eurostat, the EU exports 223.3 billion euros worth of products to China [10], which is 53% more than the U.S. exports to China [11]. This indicates that Europe is more reliant on China than the U.S., which is also a likely influential factor that makes the European report less offensive.

## 6 Conclusion

All in all, though the press from both regions signaled its negative changes in attitude towards China, the changes are different in degree. Compared with the European media, the U.S. press changed most dramatically. This is due to the fact that the E.U. and China mostly competes economically, while China and the U.S. Competition is nearly happening all fields from economy to politics and military. In the future, on one hand, with the development of the "One belt one road" project of China, the Sino-European relationship would be closer due to more cooperation. On the other hand, Sino-American relationship might continue to worsen as China's overall strength and international influence increase. The U.S. apparently is very reluctant to make a way for this competitor.

Due to relatively few foreign reports collected in this paper, there are some limitations. Because the relevant media reports do not mean that they can show the whole country's diplomatic attitude. In the future, the authors will analyze more reports to produce richer analyses.

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