

# A Corpus-based Study of Chinese Media Discourse: Reporting on Chinese Athletes at the Paris Olympics

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**Abstract:** *With the development of social politics, economy and culture, sports have become a momentous topic in China, especially in the context of the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. The performances of Chinese athletes during the Paris Olympic Games have received a lot of Chinese media coverage, which has huge positive effects all over the world. In an era where readers increasingly rely on diverse media platforms for news, there is a prevalent belief that news discourse faithfully records events and provides unbiased information. However, this is not always the case. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a key theory in discourse research, focuses on analyzing news discourse to uncover underlying ideologies and power dynamics. Based upon the theoretical framework of Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the thesis conducts a critical discourse analysis of 119 news reports on the performances and successes of Chinese athletes at the Paris Olympic Games. These articles were sourced from Chinese authoritative English-newspaper media outlets such as China Daily and Xinhua News Agency. The study aims to examine how Chinese media constructs the image of Chinese athletes and tells China's sports stories. Through the analysis, it was found that the media coverage prominently emphasized collectivism and the rising role of female power. On the reports highlighted collective achievements, prioritizing team success over individual accomplishments. In addition, the increased visibility and recognition of female athletes reflected a growing focus on gender equality and female power in Chinese society. This study reveals how sport-related news reports in China employ language strategies to construct a positive national image that reinforces China's rising stature on the global sports stage. At the same time, these narratives challenge traditional gender norms by celebrating the resilience and achievements of female athletes. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how media discourse shapes national identity, gender representation, and public perception of Chinese sports in contemporary China, providing valuable insights into how China's sports narratives can be better communicated to the world.*

**Keywords:** Critical discourse analysis, Sports image, The Paris Olympic Games, Chinese athletes.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, sports have become a hot topic in China, with the Olympic Games serving as a symbol of national pride. The 2024 Paris Olympic Games, in particular, drew widespread media attention to the performances of Chinese athletes, both domestically and internationally. As China strengthens its presence on the global sports stage, media coverage plays a critical role in shaping a favorable national image (YANG Guoshu 2025). The way Chinese media portrays athletes and their achievements directly contributes to national identity construction and influences public perception (CHI Tianlin 2024). Although sports media is often viewed as objective, the language used can subtly embed ideologies (LI Dian 2019). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a valuable framework to examine how media narratives construct values such as nationalism, collectivism, and gender roles (LI Jiewei 2013, ZHU Qiuyi 2023). By analyzing linguistic features in media texts, this study uncovers the deeper meanings behind athlete portrayals, especially during *the Paris Olympics*. This research applies CDA to Chinese media reports from *China Daily* and *Xinhua News Agency*, revealing how discourse reflects broader sociopolitical agendas. It highlights how media promotes nationalism and collectivism, and female empowerment, offering insights into China's evolving cultural narrative. Overall, this study contributes to the growing literature on media, identity, and sports, demonstrating how discourse shapes public understanding and national self-image.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Previous Studies on Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has evolved into a widely recognized approach in linguistic and social studies, aiming to uncover the ideological and power structures embedded in discourse (ZHOU Chen 2020).

Originating in the late 20th century, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been significantly shaped by famous scholars. Fairclough (1989) regarded discourse as a form of social practice and later developed the influential three-dimensional model (1992), which are texts analysis, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. His subsequent works emphasized the integration of discourse studies into broader social research through a trans-disciplinary approach (2006, 2013). In addition, Teun Van Dijk (1993) introduced a cognitive dimension to CDA, proposing the socio-cognitive model which focuses on how discourse structures reflect and shape mental models, beliefs, and ideologies. He highlighted the media's role in reinforcing dominant ideologies and legitimizing power structures. Meanwhile, Wodak (2010), developed the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), combining historical and political contexts with discourse studies and emphasizing intertextuality and interdisciplinary. Although CDA has been widely used to explore ideology in media discourse, its application to sports media, particularly in the Chinese context, remains under-explored.

In terms of the qualitative analysis, researchers have advocated for integrating corpus-based approaches. Mackiewicz and Thompson (2016) emphasized how corpus tools like *AntConc* can help analyze complex data, revealing

high-frequency words and collocations often overlooked in traditional analysis. Similarly, Baker (2023) demonstrated that corpus analysis allows for the contextual study of recurring linguistic features, aiding in the identification of underlying ideologies. Despite these methodological advances, few studies have combined corpus linguistics with CDA to examine Chinese sports media, particularly in terms of national image-building and the portrayal of female athletes.

In China, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has emerged as important approach for analyzing discourse in media, politics, and education. Influenced by Western scholars such as Fairclough, Wodak, and Van Dijk, Chinese researchers have localized CDA to address China's sociopolitical and linguistic contexts. For instance, DING Jianxin (2001) examined how Chinese news discourse uses ideological strategies, such as euphemisms and passive constructions, to reinforce state authority and shape public opinion. Similarly, XIN Bin (2002) emphasized the theoretical foundation of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in CDA, arguing that linguistic features in media texts often reflect underlying political ideologies and help maintain national unity. What's more, CHEN Zhonghua (2002) analyzed media narratives surrounding key national events, concluding that discourse reinforces governmental ideologies by framing policies positively and marginalizing dissent. Extending this line of research, DAI Weihua and CHEN Yuyun (2004) emphasized the media's role in shaping collective consciousness and legitimizing state power. However, these studies primarily relied on traditional qualitative CDA and lacked large-scale empirical data from sports media contexts.

More recently, researchers have begun integrating corpus-based methods into CDA. QIAN Yufang (2010) analyzed large corpora of Chinese newspapers using word frequency and collocation patterns, revealing systematic ideological framing through lexical choices. XIN Bin and GAO Xiaoli (2013) used concordance analysis to examine how rhetorical strategies, such as modality and passivization, shape political discourse and public perception. Despite these advancements, there remains a lack of corpus-assisted CDA applied to Chinese sports media, especially in relation to gender representation and national identity construction.

While CDA research abroad and in China has established strong theoretical foundations for analyzing discourse and power, more integrated, data-driven studies are needed in the sports media domain to uncover how sports discourse contributes to shaping sociopolitical ideologies in contemporary China.

## 2.2 Previous Studies on Chinese Sports Image

Recent research on China's sports image has explored various ways of constructing national identity. CHEN Ping (2019) used semiotics to examine how sports symbols like *the Beijing Winter Olympics* shape cultural identity and support international diplomacy. However, his study lacks analysis of how global perceptions of Chinese athletes are evolving. ZHONG Xin and YIN Qianyun (2021) analyzed Beijing's strategic image during the 2022 Winter Olympics, emphasizing traits such as credibility and likability to appeal

to a global audience by blending tradition with modern sports values. On the historical front, WANG Jingfang (2024) examined visual portrayals of women athletes in *Young Companion* magazine between 1926 and 1945, finding that such images supported modern gender norms and reflected broader societal changes. Yet, she did not address the influence of today's digital media. Focusing on multimodality, LI Nian (2024) studied Douyin videos from the 2023 China Open, arguing that short video content enhances Beijing's international image as youthful and dynamic. However, her work paid limited attention to the role of broader socio-political influences.

The integration of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with sports image studies offers valuable insights into how language and media construct national identity. HUANG Mingcheng (2022) used corpus-based positive discourse analysis on *China Daily's* Tokyo 2020 coverage, highlighting how narratives of perseverance reinforced China's resilient image. Similarly, SHI Menglong (2023) examined how media portrayals of sports reflect themes of Chinese-style modernization and cultural identity, and DENG Jinxiu (2023) analyzed *The New York Times's* Olympic coverage, revealing how Western media frames Chinese sports achievements through geopolitical narratives. XIE Sisi (2023) further used CDA to uncover political and cultural ideologies embedded in Olympic discourse. These studies underscore CDA's effectiveness in revealing how media frames national sports images. However, the intersection of gender representation and national identity, particularly in Olympic discourse, remains underexplored. Further research is needed to understand how portrayals of female athletes contribute to shaping China's evolving global image through sports media, particularly in the context of how digital and global media platforms shape, reinforce, or challenge traditional narratives of Chinese sports culture and national identity.

To address the research gap, this study employed a corpus-based CDA approach to examine the construction of China's sports image on collectivism and female strength. The specific research questions are outlined as follows:

- 1) How does the Chinese media portray Chinese athletes in relation to their achievements at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games?
- 2) How do collectivism manifest in the linguistic choices in media reports about Chinese athletes?
- 3) How does the representation of female athletes contribute to the construction of China's image in international sports?

The research aims to uncover the discursive strategies used in the media's portrayal of athletes and their performances at the Paris Olympics, as well as the implicit ideologies related to gender and national pride.

## 3. Methodology

The study employs Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model as its theoretical framework, focusing on textual, discursive practice, and social practice dimensions. Fairclough's model is adopted in this study to analyze media

representations of Chinese athletes during the 2024 Paris Olympics. Textual analysis, using *AntConc*, examines linguistic features, discursive practice explores news sources and representation methods, and sociocultural practice interprets these within broader economic and political contexts. The aim is to uncover hidden ideologies and power relations, focusing on how nationalism, collectivism, and gender representations are constructed to shape China's sports image in both domestic and global media discourse. By combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, this methodology offers a comprehensive examination of how language shapes public perceptions and contributes to the construction of China's sports image.

### 3.1 Data Collection

The self-built corpus of this paper is composed of media reports from *China Daily* and *Xinhua News Agency* on Chinese athletes during the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. The keyword search is set as *the Paris Olympic Games*, *Chinese athletes* and *sports*. The time frame of the corpus covers the period from April 1, 2024, to December 1, 2024. After removing duplicate and irrelevant articles, a total of 119 reports were selected, with 76 from *China Daily* and 43 from *Xinhua News Agency*, comprising a total of 55,272 tokens. The selection of these two newspapers is based on their prominence in Chinese news media landscape and aims to ensure diversity in corpus sources, thereby avoiding the limitations of a single-media case study.

### 3.2 Data Analysis Method

This study combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze media coverage of Chinese athletes during the 2024 Paris Olympics. Using *AntConc*, word frequency, concordance, and collocation analyses reveal key discourse patterns and emotional tendencies. Fairclough's model guides the qualitative analysis of how gender, collectivism, and nationalism are represented. This integrated approach uncovers implicit ideologies in the language, offering insights into how Chinese sports media shapes national identity and gender representation within broader sociocultural and political contexts.

## 4. Results and Analysis

### 4.1 Textual Analysis

Text is the first dimension of Fairclough's Three-dimensional Model for CDA. The text level focuses on the specific details of language use, including vocabulary, grammatical structure, and rhetorical devices. This section will reveal how the media constructs specific issues and emotions through analysis of thematic vocabularies, high-frequency words, and syntactic structures.

#### 4.1.1 Thematic Words Analysis

Thematic words are the words with high occurrence in the texts (HOU Chang 2020). Through observing the thematic words, we can clearly see the lexical features of the texts. The frequency word list is significant to CDA, for these thematic words present some way of expressing information, which

provide a breakthrough point for the researchers to deeply explain some language facts effectively (DU Xueli 2014).

Applying the software *AntConc*, the top 30 key words of *China Daily* (CD) and *Xinhua News Agency* (XNA) are extracted and presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** The top 30 key words in CD and XNA

Rank	Keyword	Frequency	Rank	Keyword	Frequency
1	China	491	16	best	101
2	Olympic	471	17	sports	101
3	team(s)	386	18	champion(s)	98
4	gold	337	19	silver	98
5	Chinese	329	20	competition(s)	95
6	medal(s)	314	21	point(s)	92
7	women	253	22	record(s)	80
8	world	247	23	table tennis	76
9	first	219	24	top	75
10	athlete(s)	206	25	swimming	63
11	event(s)	191	26	tennis	55
12	win(s)	135	27	diving	43
13	won	132	28	swimmer(s)	39
14	second	132	29	medalist(s)	37
15	time	120	30	winner(s)	27

In the above table, the top 30 keywords are listed by frequency. Observing Table 1, the top-ranked words can be classified into three major themes, making Table 2.

**Table 2:** Keywords in the Dataset

Categories	Keywords With Frequency
Achievement	gold (337), medal(s) (314), win(s) (135), won (132), champion(s) (98), silver (98), record(s) (80), medalist(s) (37), winner(s) (27)
Sporting Event	table tennis (76), swimming (63), tennis (55), diving (43)
Actor	Chinese (329), women (253), team(s) (386), winner(s) (27)

The first theme relates to *achievements*, including keywords such as *gold* (337 times), *medal(s)* (314 times), *win(s)* (135 times), *won* (132 times), *champion(s)* (98 times), *silver* (98 times), *record(s)* (80 times), *medalist(s)* (37 times), *winner(s)* (27 times). The prominence of these words suggests that Chinese media focuses on highlighting athletes' victories as a testament to China's athletic excellence. The significantly higher frequency of *gold* compared to *silver* reflects an aspirational and goal-driven mindset, where striving for the best is deeply embedded in China's sports culture. This emphasis on excellence aligns with China's broader vision of continuous improvement and global competitiveness in sports, reinforcing an image of a nation dedicated to progress and achievement. Additionally, terms like *record(s)* indicate that beyond winning medals, Chinese athletes are also recognized for pushing boundaries and achieving historical milestones. This perspective shifts the focus from mere competition to inspiring stories of perseverance, breakthrough performances, and global recognition. The use of words such as *champion(s)* and *winner(s)* contributes to a narrative where Chinese athletes are portrayed as symbols of determination and resilience, embodying values that resonate deeply with both domestic and international audiences.

The second theme revolves around *sporting events*, including keywords such as *table tennis* (76 times), *swimming* (63 times), *tennis* (55 times), *diving* (43 times). The selection of these sports reflects China's continued dominance in its traditional strengths, such as table tennis and diving, while also expanding its global influence in other competitive fields.



The high frequency of table tennis reinforces China's long-standing reputation as the world leader in this type of sport, while the growing focus on swimming and tennis suggests a strategic diversification of China's sports excellence on the world stage. By highlighting multiple sporting disciplines, Chinese media conveys a message of all-around strength, demonstrating China's ability to excel in globally competitive events. This diversified representation of Chinese sports strengthens China's image as a dynamic, forward-moving nation that continues to make breakthroughs in international sports.

The last theme is about *actors*, comprising with keywords like *Chinese* (329 times), *team(s)* (386 times), *women* (253 times), and *winner(s)* (27 times). From Table 2, it is evident that the frequent use of the keywords *women* and *team* emphasizes the Chinese media's focus on both female strength and collectivism. This frequent use of *women* reflects the increasing attention to gender equality and female strength in Chinese media. The significant presence of female athletes in media reports highlights their contributions and achievements in sports, helping to build a more empowered image of women in China, particularly in the context of national pride and global sports performance. In addition, the use of *team(s)* reflects the collectivist nature of sports discourse in China, where the emphasis is on group effort and national identity rather than individual success. The focus on this word suggests that Chinese athletes, regardless of gender, are seen as part of a larger collective that represents the nation's achievements on the international stage.

#### 4.1.2 The Lexical Level

Having an examination of lexical choice is an integral part of the production of ideology to unveil the hidden ideology underneath the media coverage (ZHANG Yingying 2013). Originally, three most frequently occurred nouns, *China* (497), *team(s)* (386) and *gold* (337), in the news reports were selected, and their concordance lines were scrutinized. Subsequently, to uncover the implicit meanings and ideological implications embedded in media discourse, their collocation patterns and semantic prosody were also examined. Upon examining the thematic word list, it was observed that while they frequently occurred in the news reports, they demonstrated limited collocation patterns. After careful observation and experimentation, two words, *more* and *medal*, were identified as the most valuable for further analysis. *More* was chosen because it often signals aspirations, progress and growth in the narrative, while *medal* represents tangible achievements and recognition. These two words play a significant role in conveying the ideological narratives of ambition and success within the media coverage. Consequently, this study conducts a concordance analysis of the word *more* and a collocation analysis of the word *medal* to explore their contextual significance.

##### 4.1.2.1 The Concordance Analysis of *More*

The Table 3 displays part of the 138 concordance results of *more* as the search word from CD and XNA.

An investigation of the concordance lines of *more* finds that the collocated words can be classified into 2 types. The first

type is the expressions of growth and achievements, such as *more attention*, *more gold medals* and *more established international opponents*. Take *more gold medals* as an example for a deeper analysis. This phrase symbolizes success and excellence, emphasizing the positive growth and improvement in the athletes' accomplishments. The present perfect tense, *have grabbed*, indicates that the gold medal has been achieved, and at the same time, it can express strong positive emotions and shape the brilliant achievements of Chinese athletes. All these collocations contribute to a narrative of continuous progress and excellence, reinforcing a positive and aspirational discourse in the text. The use of *more* suggests not just an increase in quantity but also a shift towards greater significance and importance in the context of Chinese sports performance.

**Table 3:** The Concordance Results of the Word *More* in CD and XNA

1	... people now are paying	<b>more</b>	attentions to the athletes' competitive...
2	Chinese athletes have grabbed	<b>more</b>	gold medals than they obtained...
3	... doubt my abilities, the	<b>more</b>	determined I am to prove...
4	... I focused on being	<b>more</b>	aggressive, increasing my attacks and...
5	... the sports to have	<b>more</b>	balanced competition. Today, China was...
6	... it is a much	<b>more</b>	professional model than what we...
7	... to vie with their	<b>more</b>	accomplished international rivals for...
8	... boxing can make women	<b>more</b>	confident because women are perceived...
9	... be a little bit	<b>more</b>	consistent, a little bit smoother...
10	... will have to add	<b>more</b>	difficult tricks to my runs...
11	... have caught attention from	<b>more</b>	established international opponents. Five-time world...
12	... sports in China, inspiring	<b>more</b>	girls to pick up a...
13	... core players have grown	<b>more</b>	mature. We've come to know...
14	... it pumped up for	<b>more</b>	success to come in China...
15	Committee's effort to bring	<b>more</b>	urban and youth dynamics to...

The second type is expressions of aspiration and expectation. The expression, *more success*, indicates a hope or expectation for further success, which shows a desire for improvement or reaching a higher level of achievement in the future. Also, the phrase, *more consistent*, reflects the goal of achieving greater stability and reliability in performance, suggesting an ongoing effort to maintain or improve performance consistency. And the collocation, *more confident*, expresses a desire for personal empowerment and increased self-assurance, especially among athletes, highlighting a progressive emotional and psychological growth. These expressions contribute to the overall discourse of optimism and future-oriented growth, where expectation for improvement is central. The repeated use of *more* implies that success and growth are ongoing, and there is always room for further development.

All these words and expressions create a narrative of forward momentum, focusing on both individual and collective improvement in sports. By utilizing the word *more*, the discourse emphasizes growth, achievement, and aspiration. These collocations build an uplifting and progressive tone,

reinforcing the image of China's sports community as one that is continuously striving for greater success, recognition, and global competitiveness. Through the use of *more*, the narrative constructs an ideal future for Chinese sports, where success is constantly expanding and expectations are ever-increasing.

#### 4.1.2.2 The Collocation Analysis of *Medal*

The word *medal* frequently appears in the context of achievement and recognition. The prepositions following *medal* contribute to the overall message by indicating the type of medal, location, sport, or achievement context. *AntConc* was used to search for the collocation of *medal*. The Table 4 shows part of the 89 collocation results of *medal* with prepositions of *in*, *at*, *with* and *for* from CD and XNA.

**Table 4:** The Collocation Results of the Word *Medal* in CD and XNA

1	... receiving the bronze	<b>medal in</b>	the women's 100m butterfly final...
2	... defended her gold	<b>medal in</b>	the women's 10m platform diving final...
3	... earning China its first gold	<b>medal in</b>	any horizontal jumping event...
4	... settled for a bronze	<b>medal in</b>	her first final session...
5	... marking the host nation's first-ever	<b>medal in</b>	team table tennis...
6	... win a brighter colored	<b>medal at</b>	the Paris Olympics.
7	... marked the Chinese swimming team's first gold	<b>medal at</b>	the Paris Olympics Games.
8	... won the silver	<b>medal with</b>	a total of 299 kg.
9	... took the silver	<b>medal with</b>	90.7 points from her second run.
10	... secured the gold	<b>medal with</b>	a record-breaking throw of 67.93 meters.
11	... marks the first gold	<b>medal for</b>	the Chinese diving Dream Team.
12	... marked the fourth gold	<b>medal for</b>	the Chinese shooting team.
13	... winning the first gold	<b>medal for</b>	the Chinese gymnastics squad...
14	... happy to have won a gold	<b>medal for</b>	China.

##### 4.1.2.2.1 Prepositions After *Medal*

Some prepositions are popular to be used after the word, *medal*, to limit the scope of the description. There are 47 results of *medal in*, 23 results of *medal at*, 11 results of *medal with*, and 8 results of *medal for*.

**Eg 1.** ... receiving the bronze *medal in the women's 100m butterfly final*... (CD, 29/07/2024)

... defended her gold *medal in the women's 10m platform diving final*... (CD, 06/08/2024)

... earning China its first gold *medal in any horizontal jumping event*... (CD, 05/07/2024)

... settled for a bronze *medal in her first final session*... (CD, 29/07/2024)

... marking the host nation's first-ever *medal in team table tennis*... (XNA, 09/08/2024)

The preposition, *in*, often refers to a specific event or competition where the medal was awarded. It emphasizes the specificity of the achievement. This collocation highlights the focus on the event in which the medal was won, contributing to the sporting achievement narrative.

**Eg 2.** ... win a brighter colored *medal at the Paris Olympics*. (CD, 20/06/2024)

... marked the Chinese swimming team's first gold *medal at the Paris Olympics Games*. (CD, 05/08/2024)

The preposition, *at*, is used to denote the location or major international event where the medal was awarded. This adds a layer of prestige to the medal, linking the achievement to a globally recognized event, reinforcing international competitiveness and high-level recognition for the athletes.

**Eg 3.** ... won the silver *medal with a total of 299 kg*. (XNA, 11/08/2024)

... took the silver *medal with 90.7 points* from her second run. (CD, 31/07/2024)

... secured the gold *medal with a record-breaking throw of 67.93 meters*. (CD, 05/07/2024)

The preposition, *with*, is often used to describe the achievement score or measure associated with the medal. In this context, "299 kg" refers to the performance metric. This usage not only highlights the medal itself but also quantifies the performance of the athlete, contributing to a narrative of precision and technical prowess in the sport.

**Eg 4.** ... marks the first gold *medal for the Chinese diving Dream Team*. (CD, 27/07/2024)

... marked the fourth gold *medal for the Chinese shooting team*. (CD, 01/08/2024)

... winning the first gold *medal for the Chinese gymnastics squad* ... (CD, 05/08/2024)

... happy to have won a gold *medal for China*. (CD, 05/08/2024)

The preposition, *for*, is used to highlight the team or group receiving the medal, emphasizing collective success. This reinforces the narrative of teamwork and national pride, presenting the achievement as a shared victory, rather than focusing solely on individual accomplishments.

##### 4.1.2.2.2 Predicate Verbs Before *Medal*

The verb-noun collocations are hugely with positive attitudes, such as *won the medal*, *earned the medal*, *defended the medal*, *secured the medal* and *marked the medal*. The expressions intensively emphasize the athletes' achievements in the context of victory. The verb, *secured*, is used to convey the certainty of the victory. It adds a sense of assurance and achievement, emphasizing the athletes' ability to guarantee a medal win, often implying that the athletes had a dominant performance. In terms of the verb, *earned*, it suggests that the

medal is not just awarded, but earn through hard work and perseverance. It reinforces the idea of merit and deserving recognition, contributing to a narrative of effort and determination.

#### 4.1.2.2.3 The Usage of *Silver Medal and Gold Medal*

With the observation of Table 5, the collocations after *silver medal* and *gold medal* are different, which also convey subtle emotions.

**Table 5: the Expressions of *Silver Medal and Gold Medal***

... <b>silver</b> medal	with a total of <b>299 kg</b> .
... <b>silver</b> medal	with <b>90.7 points</b> from her second run.
... <b>gold</b> medal	for the <b>Chinese diving Dream Team</b> .
... <b>gold</b> medal	for the <b>Chinese shooting team</b> .
... <b>gold</b> medal	for the <b>Chinese gymnastics squad...</b>
... <b>gold</b> medal	for <b>China</b> .

Observing the expressions of *silver medal* and *gold medal*, one can see that *silver medals* are usually followed by specific data, while *gold medals* are typically associated with a range. The specific data, such as *90.7 points* and *299kg*, are used to underscore the high quality of performance, demonstrating that the athlete's achievement was close to a gold-level performance. By including specific figures, the silver medal shifts the focus from being a "second-place finish" to a measure of excellence in its own right. The data implies that the athlete performed at a very high level, and the difference between first and second place was likely minimal. This approach creates a narrative of near-perfection for China's athletes, highlighting their competitive edge and positioning them as top-tier competitors globally. In contrast, gold medals are seldom associated with specific sports data. They are primarily described as facts, reflecting the humble image of China. This difference in treatment between silver and gold medals reveals how the media shapes the narrative of achievement.

While silver medals with specific data show that second place still represents top-tier performance, creating a narrative of exceptional athletes who are always near the top and have the potential to achieve even greater success, gold medals with a range are recorded simply. Chinese journalists often present the facts without embellishment.

These narratives contribute to the image of China as a rising sports superpower, capable of competing at the highest level across various disciplines and continuously achieving excellence on the global stage.

## 4.2 Discursive Practice

The discursive practice is the second dimension of Fairclough's three-dimensional model, which is between the social practice and the text. The analysis of discursive practice explains precisely how participants produce and interpret texts with reference to the particular economic, political and institutional settings within which discourse is generated (Fairclough, 1995).

### 4.2.1 Implicit Ideology

The word, *team*, frequently appears in the context of collective effort and unity. The dominance of this word

suggests an ideological emphasis on group success and collaboration rather than *individual* achievement. In contrast, terms like *individual* and *person* appear far less frequently, indicating a tendency to downplay personal glory in favor of group identity. *AntConc* was used to search for the frequency of these three words, including *team(s)*, *individual*, and *person*, intended to discover the underlying meaning of these words.

**Table 6: the Words Related to the Group**

Rank	Word	Frequency
1	team	386
2	individual	40
4	person	3

From Table 6, the word, *team(s)*, is by far the most frequent word, compared to *individual* and *person*. The dominance of *team* suggests that the discourse is heavily centered around collectivism, which reflects an implicit ideology that values group effort and collective identity, over individual achievement. In sports discourse, particularly in the context of Chinese media or national pride, the emphasis on *team* can indicate an ideological preference for unity, collaboration, and national solidarity. The lesser emphasis on the individual points to an implicit ideology that values the group over the person, which aligns with collectivist ideologies commonly found in many Eastern societies, including China. When individuals are mentioned, they might be framed within the context of how they contribute to the team's success or national pride, rather than focusing on personal glory or achievement.

### 4.2.2 The Construction of Gender Discourse

Some words related to gender were chosen to form the Table 7, and then further analysis was then conducted.

**Table 7: The Words Related to Gender**

Rank	Word	Frequency
1	her	472
2	women	253
3	she	249
4	men	154
5	his	138
6	he	104
7	him	14
8	man	8
9	woman	3

According to the table, female-related words such as *her*, *women*, and *she* significantly outnumber male-related words like *he*, *his*, *men*, and *man*. This suggests a noteworthy imbalance in gendered language representation that warrants closer investigation.

The first one is that the reports from CD and XNA strongly express female strength. The frequent use of words related to gender of female can be interpreted as an attempt to center women's stories in media coverage, particularly female athletes. The high frequency of these terms reflects the growing importance of female athletes in global sports, and more specifically, the increasing visibility and recognition of Chinese female athletes.

Additionally, the reports from these two media outlets highly reflect the resilience of Chinese female athletes. The strong

presence of female-related terms can also be linked to the resilience and determination of Chinese female athletes, especially in the context of their global competitiveness. Chinese female athletes have achieved remarkable success, and the emphasis on female pronouns in the discourse serves to celebrate their strength and ability on the world stage.

Eg. She **defended** her gold medal. (CD, 06/08/2024)

The verb *defended* creates an image of a strong, determined athlete who is not only achieving victory but also sustaining success over time. This is especially significant in portraying Chinese female athletes as individuals who maintain dominance and resilience, rather than simply winning once.

### 4.3 Sociocultural Practice

Social practice is the third dimension of Fairclough's three-dimensional model. Here discourse is regarded as an action mode or a form of social practice. To interpret discourse from this dimension is to analyze the social and cultural factors which involved in the production process of discourse (CHEN Qianling 2012). The discursive strategies adopted in the producing processes cannot be fully understood without referring the social background. Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing the collectivism and female strength.

#### 4.3.1 Nationalism and Collectivism

The data from Table 4 further reinforces the implicit ideologies of Nationalism and Collectivism. The dominance of *team(s)* in sports reporting, as compared to the relatively infrequent mentions of *individual*, indicates that the narrative is being shaped to reflect these ideologies. While individual athletes certainly achieve success, the media's focus on *team* serves to undermine the individualistic pursuit of glory in favor of a larger, more socially acceptable narrative of national pride.

The low frequency of *person* indicates that the individual is often seen as secondary to the collective effort in the Chinese media discourse. This aligns with the collectivist ideology, where individual accomplishments are often presented in the context of contributing to the success of the team.

By emphasizing team over individual, Chinese media is actively shaping the national identity through a lens of unity and collective strength. In this way, sports reporting becomes a tool for reinforcing sociocultural values such as solidarity, group harmony, and nationalism. Nationalism is reinforced as the sports victories of athletes are portrayed as representations of China's global rise, strengthening the idea that national pride is interlinked with the nation's success in sports. Athletes, particularly when their achievements are framed within the collective success of the team, become symbols of the nation's unity and strength on the global stage. Similarly, the focus on collectivism aligns with the idea that individual achievement and glory are secondary to the importance of national unity, with success being framed as a result of collective effort.

#### 4.3.2 The Rise of Female Strength

The data from Table 5 show that the high frequency of

female-related words signifies a growing media emphasis on female athletes and their achievements. This trend reflects a shift in gender dynamics within the Chinese sports narrative, where female athletes are increasingly recognized for their achievements, resilience, and competitive spirit. The discourse surrounding female strength no longer merely reflects the importance of women in sports, but also their dominance in the global arena. And the repeated use of female pronouns like *her* and *she* in sports media constructs a narrative where female athletes are positioned as leaders, taking center stage in the discourse of sports success and national pride. This aligns with the sociocultural change where female empowerment and gender equality are prioritized in China's evolving identity as a global sports power. The media coverage of Chinese female athletes reflects a broader trend in China's efforts to establish itself as a global leader in sports, where both men and women contribute to national success. The portrayal of female athletes as integral to China's success on the global sports stage strengthens national pride, reinforcing the idea that female athletes are central to China's identity as a rising sports power.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 The Role of Collectivism in Shaping the Discourse

As established in the analysis, the prevalence of the word *team(s)* over terms like *individual* and *person* and the low frequency of the term *individual* signal a broader cultural preference for collectivism, aligning with LHI Menglong's argument (2023) that focuses on team success rather than individual achievements reinforces the national narrative of unity and collective effort, which is consistent with China's broader sociocultural values. This finding mirrors DING Jianxin (2003), who highlighted how media in China manipulates discourse to support state ideologies, particularly by privileging group over individual accomplishments.

It is worth noting that this paper adds to existing literature by exploring sports media specifically and how its linguistic choices reflect national pride and global competitiveness. The increased emphasis on collectivism in sports coverage may also be seen as an attempt to project China's growing influence on the global stage, positioning its athletes as representatives of national strength rather than mere competitors. This is a key finding that reflects the sociocultural values of China, where collective success is often celebrated over personal glory. By focusing on team achievements, the Chinese media shapes the public's perception of athletes as representatives of the nation, underlining the idea that China's success in sports is a collective national endeavor, not merely the result of individual efforts.

### 5.2 The Rise of Female Strength

Another novel contribution of this study is its focus on the rising prominence of female athletes in Chinese media. The high frequency of female-related pronouns like *her*, *women*, and *she*, compared to their male counterparts, suggests a growing emphasis on female strength in the context of China's global sporting narrative. While previous studies like



HUANG Mingcheng (2022) have explored gender roles in Olympic coverage, the growing visibility of female athletes in this study's findings is notable. For instance, the use of verbs like *defended* and phrases that describe female athletes' ongoing dominance, such as *she defended her gold medal*, emphasizes that female athletes are seen as role models of resilience and perseverance, traits traditionally associated with masculine ideals. This shows the portrayal of female athletes as resilient, strong, and central to China's success, reflecting a shift towards gender equality and empowerment in Chinese society. This finding aligns with XIE Sisi's (2023) work on metaphors in sports discourse but adds a new dimension by revealing how female athletes are framed as symbols of national pride and strength. This portrayal reflects the evolving gender norms in China, where women's athleticism is increasingly seen as a source of national pride, not just within the context of their achievements but also in terms of their contribution to national unity. Moreover, the focus on female athletes as symbols of national pride reflects China's ongoing efforts to establish itself as a leader in global sports, not only through male athletes but also through female athletes. The media discourse around female athletes shows that they are integral to the narrative of China's rise, contributing to the nation's image as a global sports superpower.

The portrayal of female resilience and achievement challenges traditional gender norms and aligns with China's broader push for gender equality, an area not sufficiently explored in previous CDA studies of sports media.

### 5.3 Implications of the Findings

Both quantitative and qualitative analysis are used in this paper, which offer a more systematic and objective approach to understand reports.

The findings of this study have important implications for both critical discourse analysis and the sociocultural understanding of sports in China. Firstly, the emphasis on collectivism in the portrayal of athletes reveals the ideological role of media in shaping public perceptions of national identity. As demonstrated by the analysis, the media plays a crucial role in shaping the national identity and projecting China's image on the global stage, particularly through the lens of athletic achievements. By framing Chinese sports victories as collective efforts, the media contributes to the national narrative of China's global competitiveness.

Secondly, the rise of female strength further underscores the transformation role of sports in challenging traditional gender norms. The portrayal of female athletes as symbols of strength, resilience, and determination signals a shift in gender relations and gender expectations in China. This shift not only reflects China's evolving societal norms but also contributes to the global visibility of Chinese women as athletes who are recognized for their achievements on par with their male counterparts.

Finally, the use of language in sports media has a profound impact on how society perceives both athletic performance and gender roles. By focusing on both the athletic performance and the cultural values conveyed through media

portrayals, this study underscores the need for sports media to go beyond simply reporting results. Instead, it calls for a more intentional framing of Chinese sports stories that highlight themes of resilience, perseverance, and gender equality. This narrative can serve not only to inspire domestic audiences but also to shape international perceptions of China as a nation that embraces modernization, gender empowerment, and global leadership.

Therefore, the media's role in constructing and promoting these sports stories is key to reinforcing a cohesive national image and advancing China's soft power in the global arena. By strategically utilizing sports media to convey a positive and inclusive narrative, China's sports achievements can be framed as part of a broader story of national pride, unity, and cultural pride, ensuring that the stories of Chinese athletes resonate both at home and abroad.

## 6. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the critical discourse analysis (CDA) of Chinese media's portrayal of athletes, particularly during the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. Through a systematic application of Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the research analyzed the media's construction of China's sports image, with particular attention to issues of nationalism, collectivism, and gender representation. The findings revealed that the Chinese media frequently uses linguistic strategies to emphasize collective success and national unity, highlighting the collective effort of athletes as representatives of China's growing strength in international sports. Additionally, the increasing prominence of female athletes reflects a shift towards gender equality and female empowerment, contributing to a narrative where female athletes are celebrated as symbols of strength, resilience, and national pride.

This study combines both quantitative and qualitative analysis to contribute to the literature by offering a systematic and objective understanding of Chinese sports media. The findings reveal the significant role of media in shaping national identity by emphasizing collectivism in portraying athletes. By framing sports victories as collective efforts, the media contributes to China's narrative of global competitiveness. Additionally, the rise of female athletes challenges traditional gender norms, portraying women as symbols of strength and resilience. This reflects shifting societal norms and enhances the global visibility of Chinese women in sports. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of media framing, urging sports coverage to focus on not just athletic performance but also cultural values like resilience and gender equality. By strategically shaping sports narratives, the media strengthens China's national image and soft power, projecting a positive and inclusive story of national pride, unity, and female empowerment to both domestic and international audiences.

While this study offers valuable insights, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the analysis was based solely on articles from *China Daily* and *Xinhua News Agency*, which, while influential, may not fully represent the diversity of media voices in China. Future research could benefit from a broader range of sources,



including social media and other news outlets, to capture a more comprehensive view of sports discourse in China. Moreover, the study primarily focused on linguistic elements within text. However, visual elements and multi-modal analysis of sports coverage could further enhance the understanding of how the image of Chinese athletes is constructed. Visual imagery, such as photographs and video content, can play a significant role in shaping public perceptions and could add depth to the understanding of the relationship between language, gender, and nationalism in media. Future studies can incorporate multi-modal approaches to investigate how visual media contribute to the construction of national identity and gender representation in sports.

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