

# From Outlanders to Compatriots: The Role of Media Discourse in Shaping the National Identity of Naturalized Athletes

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**Abstract:** The media image of athletes has always been a hot topic in academic circles. Naturalized athletes are presenting themselves through social media. The way they present themselves on social media and the changes they present are the focus of research. Based on Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis model, this paper uses multi-modal critical discourse analysis method to analyze the text dimension of social media, the discourse practice dimension of social media and the social practice dimension of social media presentation of Korean and Japanese naturalized athletes respectively. By using Halliday's systemic-functional grammar analysis, it is found that in terms of cultural context, there are great differences in the outline structure of athletes' text genres before and after naturalization. Using visual grammar analysis, the study found that athletes before and after naturalization showed greater freedom in using social media accounts. For athletes, excessive interference in self-presentation is not only an image burden, but also may evolve into a barrier to communication, preventing athletes from changing from a "functional" role to a "community" role.

## 1. Introduction

The naturalization of non-Chinese and Chinese athletes is not a new phenomenon in China. In recent years, under the influence of relevant Chinese policies, some Chinese athletes have voluntarily acquired Chinese and represented China in international sports competitions. The role and importance of naturalized athletes is self-evident, the first is to help Chinese sports to improve the level of weak sports in a relatively short time. In addition, the return of elite Chinese athletes to China can help drive the development of the entire program<sup>[1]</sup>. Naturalized athletes are a way for Chinese sports to communicate with other countries. Through these athletes, they can more intuitively contact and understand foreign training methods, learn from each other and promote the overall level of the project. At the same time, it can strengthen the attention, participation and support of overseas Chinese for the development of Chinese sports, and contribute to the sustainable development of Chinese sports<sup>[2]</sup>.

## 2. Conceptual and theoretical basis

### 2.1 Naturalized athlete

Naturalized athletes refer to the situation in which athletes voluntarily and actively acquire other ethnic groups than those of birth and participate in international sports events on behalf of their country. Under the background of sports globalization, naturalized athletes are essentially skilled immigrants<sup>[3]</sup>. As naturalized athletes in different fields have achieved good or bad results in their respective events, the research heat of naturalized athletes related issues in the academic circle is also rising. At present, the relevant researches of domestic scholars on naturalized athletes mainly focus on naturalized athletes themselves as professional competitive sports players<sup>[4]</sup>. The research topics

mainly involve the transfer, participation qualification and arbitration of Chinese naturalized athletes in the context of globalization, as well as the identity and media image of naturalized athletes.

## 2.2 Media image

At present, it is generally accepted that "media" in the definition of athletes' media image should be emphasized to enlarge the important function of media in shaping and disseminating athletes' images<sup>[5]</sup>. The media image of athletes is constructed through mass media. On the one hand, when the media performs its ontology function, it shapes the natural characteristics of the athletes. On the other hand, the new image given to the athletes by some narrative means is unreal, such as the fictional media image presented in the advertisement.

## 2.3 Theoretical framework

- Fairclough three-dimensional analysis model

Three-dimensional analysis model is used as a theoretical model to analyze text, image text and video text presented by athletes on social media. Most of the self-presented images of naturalized athletes on social media are also narrative images, and the observation of the content and structure of discourse text is the similarity of these two directional qualities<sup>[6]</sup>. "Critical" discourse analysis not only describes the discourse practice, but also "liberates the discourse from the text, leads to the dimension of social practice, and examines the ideology and power relationship in it". This "reveals the constructive role of discourse in social identity, social relations, and knowledge and belief systems."

- Systemic functional linguistics

Systemic functional linguistics is an approach that treats language as a social symbol. "Language is a network of systems, or a set of interconnected options, used to create meaning." In other words, language is a meaning potential that can be selected within a specific network of systems<sup>[7]</sup>. When people want to express a specific meaning or perform a specific function, they must choose the right language according to the specific context. In systemic functional grammar, discourse analysis can be developed from three levels: cultural context, situational context and language<sup>[8]</sup>.

- Visual grammar

For the image presentation of athletes, relying on the analysis framework of Halliday's system language function, visual grammar clearly sets the research object as the picture image<sup>[9]</sup>. It should be noted that the image in visual grammar is closely related to the text presented at the same time, cannot be separated, and there is no primary or secondary division. Visual grammar also deconstructs images or explicit or implicit visual language based on conceptual, interpersonal and textual functions in systemic functional linguistics<sup>[10]</sup>. It turns the subjective analysis of an image into a systematic, evidence-based analysis.

## 3. Text dimension analysis of athletes' social media

Text dimension is the analysis of discourse form, mainly involving word expression, grammatical structure, sentence coherence and text structure<sup>[11]</sup>. It analyzes text from the logic of text grammar itself.

### 3.1 Eigenvector analysis

After collecting the texts of Korean and Japanese athletes before and after their naturalization, 134 and 151 valid texts were obtained respectively<sup>[12]</sup>. Firstly, Nvivo was used to make word frequency statistics. In the statistical query, the minimum length of characters is set to 3, and the word grouping is carried out according to the "materialization" principle. The results are shown in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1 Self-presented text word frequency statistics of athletes before naturalization

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Weighted %</i>	<i>Similar words</i>
Event	10	68	0.88	Action, activity, baby, care
Move	5	62	0.98	Baby, back, bucket, shore
Incident	6	60	0.88	Action, challenge, effort, finish
Do	6	51	0.69	Action, first time, dream, give up
Time	4	37	1.01	Editing, daytime, autumn, the future

Table 2 Self-presented text word frequency statistics of naturalized athletes

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Weighted %</i>	<i>Similar words</i>
Transform	6	163	0.92	Air, appreciate, attack, come back
Incident	5	123	0.82	Activation, breaking, case, change
Move	4	111	0.51	Air, attack, break, circle
Section	4	95	0.54	The air, the back, the back, the body
Team	5	57	0.65	Body, circle, collection, Europe

The following conclusions can be roughly drawn from the changes in word frequency:

(1) After the naturalization of athletes, the presentation of the event schedule is increased, and the presentation of personal inclination is reduced. Before naturalization, athletes often present some fresh experiences and festivals with personal significance, and express positive emotions with corresponding emotional words such as "happy" and "new". However, after naturalization, this kind of presentation is reduced, and the emotional word instead is "active", reflecting a sense of change.

(2) After naturalization, athletes are faced with challenges and impacts brought by "change" and "busyness". These challenges may come from, but are not limited to, new living and competition environments, social environments, media and public opinion environments, athlete norms and sports systems. The use of positive words by athletes reached 86.73%, which shows that athletes seem to be actively overcoming these difficulties and showing strong adaptability.

### 3.2 Systematic functional grammatical analysis of text

- Cultural context and situational context analysis

In a specific society and culture, the cultural context has an important influence and restriction on the speaker's discourse<sup>[13]</sup>. By restricting the specific discourse genre, it will exert an important influence and restriction on the meaning, structure, form, style and expression effect of the discourse.

The outline structure of athletes' text discourse genres before and after naturalization is generally divided into four types, and each athlete will choose one to three or even four of them to present<sup>[14]</sup>. The results of these four structural sentences according to the frequency of occurrence are as follows: the event summary is presented; Corresponding emotions; Express gratitude; Truth and enlightenment. The relevant frequency distribution is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Frequency distribution of athletes' text outline structure before and after naturalization

<i>Outline structure classification</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Corresponding emotion	128
Present event summary	149
Express gratitude	60
Truth and enlightenment	18

The emotions of Chinese naturalized athletes are often presented directly by adjectives, and the emotions are rich; The presentation event summary is embodied by one or several statement clauses, which Narrows the reading distance of the audience and has a certain sense of reality; The expression of gratitude is often dominated by imperative sentences or adjectives, and the phrasing is high<sup>[15]</sup>.

Cultural context is an abstract and generalized concept, while situational context is the direct context of a discourse, extending the concept of register. Register also includes field, tenor and mode<sup>[16]</sup>. In terms of language field, no matter the topic or field of communication is involved in the

discourse, the self-presentation of naturalized athletes on social media is non-technical. As a window for image construction, the self-presentation and self-recognition of the audience are the contents, which have a considerable degree of affinity and appeal. Although athletes have strong subjectivity in self-presentation, and the content presented is created and controlled by individuals to the maximum extent, in a sense, celebrity presentation is to comparatively increase the exposure of positive self-image, in order to attract more fans, enhance visibility and public goodwill, which requires athletes to present themselves. In addition to responding to the requirements and norms of the country and the club, it should be more conscious of strengthening the "cooperation" with the intended readers of the text.

- Lexical-grammatical system analysis

- (1) Transitivity analysis

Transitivity analysis in conceptual function plays an important role in examining semantics. This paper examines the conceptual meaning of athletes' self-presentation on social media through transitivity analysis, that is, how athletes use language to talk about things, time, modality and their understanding of the world in the subjective world and the objective world<sup>[17]</sup>. The text language structure of athletes before and after naturalization is analyzed, and the results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Analysis of transitivity process of Chinese naturalized athletes

<i>Time</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Main clause</i>	<i>Clause</i>
Before naturalization	matter	84	58.33%	64	20
	relation	25	17.36%	21	4
	mind	35	24.31%	33	2
After naturalization	matter	126	50.60%	82	43
	relation	77	30.92%	66	11
	mind	46	18.47%	43	3

Before and after naturalization, the category of clause process is always dominated by material process in athletes' social media text presentation. The reason for this is that material processes are always related to actions and actions, and are a process of "doing". The process emphasizes that one agent performs a certain action on other agents. After combing through all the material process clauses, it is found that the subject of athletes' self-presentation is in the first person in most cases, indicating that athletes seem to have a considerable degree of presentation freedom and have the right to decide what content they want to present on their personal homepage<sup>[18]</sup>.

The relational process reflects the relationship between things, that is, something is regarded as "being" another thing, and two independent components are linked together by some relationship, which is divided into the modification process and the identification process. On the whole, the use of relational processes makes the speech rights of the owners of social media accounts, namely the athletes themselves, clear.

The mental process is the process of "knowing", which revolves around feeling and cognition. The content of athletes' self-presentation takes personal schedule as the main line, interspersed with a large number of emotional words, which is a very subjective statement, but it will be shifted by the will of the speaker or the text reader, involving a large number of psychological activities.

- (2) Interpersonal function analysis

This paper mainly carries on the mood analysis of interpersonal function analysis. The expression of mood in clauses is generally divided into direct mood and imperative mood. The direct mood is more common in conveying information, and can be divided into the declarative mood and the interrogative mood, and the declarative mood can be positive or not. The mood component consists of the subject and the qualifier. The results of tone analysis on naturalized athletes are shown in Table 5.

As can be seen from the table, when athletes present text on social media, most of the clauses are in the declarative tone, and the spoken text has a strong sense of narrative, which has the potential to trigger two-way interaction. The athlete introduces the subject to be clarified by stating the mood clause, and qualifies it by using the mood qualifier, making it an object that actually exists and can

be commented on by all potential readers.

Table 5 Tone analysis of naturalized athletes' text presentation

<i>Time</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Before naturalization	Positive declarative mood	105	72.92%
	Negative declarative mood	12	8.33%
	Interrogative mood	4	2.78%
	Imperative	23	9.24%
After naturalization	Positive declarative mood	205	82.33%
	Negative declarative mood	7	2.81%
	Interrogative mood	3	1.20%
	Imperative	34	13.65%

#### 4. Analysis of social media discourse practice of naturalized athletes

##### 4.1 Text production

After the analysis of the text, it is also necessary to analyze the process of text production and interpretation, that is, to place the text in the context of social conditions. Social conditions include direct discourse context and macroscopic social institutions and structures. This paper analyzes the discourse practice dimension of the nature of text production process and interpretation process, mainly to explore the "power" of verbal expression, the "intertextuality" of text and the "coherence" of text, and the "intertextuality" runs through the whole discourse practice. In the process of constructing the discourse order, the athletes' self-presentation gradually molds and forms a specific type of discourse sequence.

After naturalization, all athletes in the sample increased the intertextuality of Chinese elements, including clothing, Chinese faces, Chinese national flags, the word "CHINA" and Chinese watermarks, regardless of gender type, the background at the time of naturalization, or whether they joined a club. The sample athletes seem to be actively asserting their Chinese identity and winning recognition and support from Chinese sports fans.

##### 4.2 Cultural communication and consumption

The medium or platform itself is also an important mode. The GEM model is used to study the communication process of text on social media platforms to observe how it serves the text and image presentation of athletes. In addition, the text communication process of self-presentation in social media is inseparable from the consumption process, and the study believes that the two should be considered as a whole.

As opinion leaders, star athletes can even construct network media events through their own social media to attract more attention inside and outside the platform field, including mass media. While naturalized athletes actively maintain their self-image on social media, mass media also quietly enter and participate in the construction of "identity legitimacy" of naturalized athletes. With the coupling of various social network carriers, "de-domain" makes the naturalized athlete's image appear "homogenization" characteristics.

#### 5. Optimization strategy of cross-cultural communication of Chinese naturalized athletes

The cross-cultural communication of Chinese naturalized athletes is a kind of rhetoric situation, and in this context, both the naturalized athletes and the receivers of their communication content expect to build a two-way identity, which is the key to the success of rhetorical activities and the key to the cross-cultural communication of Chinese naturalized athletes. Therefore, by applying relevant concepts in Burke's identity theory and combining relevant cases, this paper proposes targeted countermeasures to the problems existing in the cross-cultural communication of Chinese naturalized athletes, so as to help the cross-cultural communication of Chinese naturalized athletes out of the

dilemma.

### **5.1 Establishing opposing identities weakens cultural differences**

Oppositional identity is one of the three forms of content identification that communicators and audiences reach in Burke's identity theory. Oppositional identity refers to the establishment of a common opposite between the communicator and the audience, and the establishment of issues of mutual concern between the communicator and the audience to pull the two sides from the original oppositional relationship to the same front, so as to reach an identity. Due to the cultural differences between the Chinese naturalized athletes and the Chinese audience, their communication content is not easily accepted by the audience. By establishing opposition identity between the audience and the Chinese naturalized athletes and emphasizing the common pursuit of both sides to form a common goal, the cultural conflict between the two can be shifted to avoid the gradual confrontation between the naturalized athletes and the audience. Dilute the contradiction between the two in the concept, and finally reach the opposite identity, to create good conditions for the cross-cultural communication of Chinese naturalized athletes.

### **5.2 Optimize the network media communication content system**

On the one hand, it is necessary to fully consider the communication characteristics of the network media to curb the false reports of Chinese naturalized athletes. On the other hand, it is also necessary to put forward targeted measures based on the dissemination mechanism of rumors, so as to avoid further deepening of cultural conflicts between Chinese naturalized athletes and their audiences as well as between people from different countries. It affects the identity construction between naturalized athletes and audiences. Therefore, the content system of online media communication for Chinese naturalized athletes should be continuously optimized, and the important role of online media in cross-cultural communication should be played.

### **5.3 Build common feelings to strengthen sympathy and identity**

In Burke's theory of identity, sympathetic identity is one of the important means to enhance audience identity starting from communication content. In the group of Chinese naturalized athletes, there may be ideological and emotional empathy between them and the Chinese audience in a certain event, and empathy will also be generated due to common experience. Compared with the similarities and differences of cultures, cross-cultural communication pays more attention to the tolerance of culture itself and the correlation with the receivers. Therefore, in the process of reporting Chinese naturalized athletes or cross-cultural communication of naturalized athletes, the media can narrow the distance with the audience through empathy points as the main content of communication, and strengthen the construction of sympathy and identity as a coping strategy to reduce the audience's stereotype of Chinese naturalized athletes.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper uses Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis model to analyze the text dimension of social media, the discourse practice dimension of social media and the social practice dimension of social media presentation of Chinese naturalized athletes in South Korea and Japan respectively. By using Halliday's systematical functional grammar analysis, the role of athletes' image affinity, concreteness and personification is enhanced. At the same time, this paper adopts Burke identification theory, plays a positive role in the cross-cultural communication of Chinese naturalized athletes, thus providing assistance for our country's sports culture international cross-cultural communication.

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