

Full Length Research Paper

Mass media in Taiwan and the formation of Chien-Ming Wang's baseball superstar image

Shane-Chang Lee¹, Po-Hsiu Lin², Jye-Shyan Wang¹, Chih-Cheng Huang³, Chen-Yuan Chen^{4,5,6*} and Po-Hsuan Huang^{6,7}

¹Department of Physical Education, National Taiwan Normal University, No 162, HePing East Road Section 1, Taipei 10610, Taiwan.

²Graduate Institute of Sports and Leisure Management, National Taiwan Normal University, No 162, HePing East Road Section 1, Taipei 10610, Taiwan.

³Physical Educational Office, National Yang-Ming University, No.155, Sec.2, Linong Street, Taipei, 112 Taiwan.

⁴Doctoral Program in Management, National Kaohsiung First University of Science and Technology, 2 Jhuoyue Rd. Nanzih, Kaohsiung 811, Taiwan.

⁵Global Earth Observation and Data Analysis Center (GEODAC), National Cheng Kung University, No 1, Ta-Hsueh Road, Tainan 701, Taiwan.

⁶Department and Graduate School of Computer Science, National Pingtung University of Education, No. 4-18, Ming Shen Rd., Pingtung 90003, Taiwan.

⁷Department of Computer Science and Information Engineering, National Central University, No.300, Jhongda Rd., Jhongli City, Taoyuan County 32001, Taiwan..

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This study aims to analyze the methods used by mass media in Taiwan to manipulate the idolization of Chien-Ming Wang on his road to become a well-known Taiwanese baseball star using documentary analysis method and to further explore how Chien-Ming Wang had become the most famous star in Taiwan under the manipulation of mass media through marketing by interviewing some sports journalists and Wang's sponsors. And it is found that Chien-Ming Wang's outstanding performance as a Yankee player in the Major League had got Taiwanese mass media's attention. Therefore Taiwanese mass media had adopted the agenda-setting method to sell Chien-Ming Wang to audience/readers through news framing. At the same time, Wang had been labeled. Wang's eastern characteristics which are valued by eastern society, such as being silent and hard-working with fighting spirit while putting the team ahead of his personal glory, had been combined with mass media. Sports sponsors had also used these elements to sell products related to Wang. Thus, under the combination of mass media and symbols of eastern values, Wang had become a celebrated sports superstar in Taiwan.

Key words: Chien-Ming Wang, sports media, agenda setting, endorsement marketing, news coverage.

THE CHIEN-MING WANG PHENOMENON IN TAIWAN

In competitive sports, the behavior of players and the decision making processes can range from the most simple reactive behaviors, such as running towards the ball, to complex reasoning that take into account the behavior and perceived strategies of both team-mates and opponents (Jonsson, 1998). The 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games created a historic record

number of American viewers—217 million (Hiestand, 2008) and it became the most watched TV event subsequently in U.S. television. People tuned in for the nationalism, the appeals, and the drama to self-actualization and above all are exemplified by athletes performing at peak condition. In recent years, sport media already became the indispensable object in our life. Related contents also affect a lot of social phenomenon, and there are many researches which confer heroism (Butterworth, 2007), violence (McDaniel, 2007) and young people pedagogy (Lines et al., 2007). In

*Corresponding author. E-mail: cyc@mail.npue.edu.tw

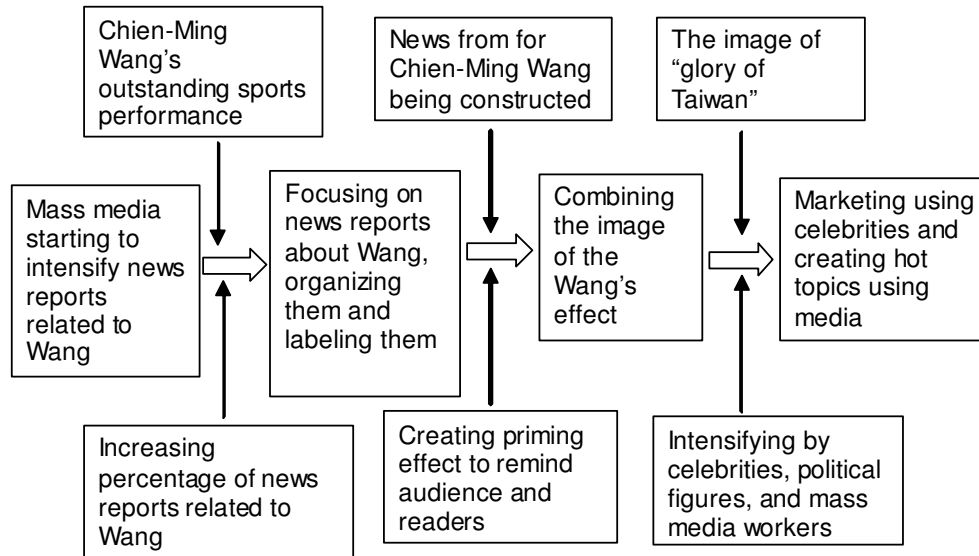


Figure 1. The theory of creating a mass media issue, using the Chien-Ming Wang effect as an example Information source: summarized by the researcher.

this paper, we will focus on how mass media create a sports star.

In 2006, Chien-Ming Wang scored most of the goals in the games they won in the league. Mass media had kept Wang's news around us by posting reports using large space in newspapers over and over again and interviews. Huang (2006) discussed him in his article, "How high has the Chien-Ming Wang heat gone? The Taipei Rapid Transit Corporation had issued Chien-Ming Wang easy cards. Wang's fans had got into fight just to get one of the cards. If you use Chien-Ming Wang as key words to search for products in an auction website, 5 or 6 thousands of products will be found. A 7-inch figure of Wang costs over 10 thousand dollars..." Because they have the potential to reinforce stereotypes of athletes through sport commentary, mass media have the ability to indirectly make reality (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). As Daniel (1992) believed that "celebrities are well-known by their popularity while heroes are recognized by their achievements." A celebrity is known by his image and brand. A hero creates his own image with merits and achievements. A hero is a big man, while a celebrity is a big name (Andrews and Jackson, 2001: 2).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the mass media and combine cultural values to discuss a miracle of sports star in Taiwan.

THE IDOLIZATION OF CHIEN-MING WANG AND MASS MEDIA

Without mass media, there would be no sports stars. Because of the tight relationship between sports stars

and mass media, the Chien-Ming Wang effect had become a hot topic for mass media in Taiwan. The issue of Chien-Ming Wang was indeed created by mass media. The process of producing a piece of news about Chien-Ming Wang is shown in the Figure 1.

And then, we will sequentially introduce how mass media create a sports star.

Emphasis being placed on reports related to Chien-Ming Wang by mass media

Considering the Chien-Ming Wang effect, now Chien-Ming Wang has become one of the most famous sports stars in Taiwan with everyday saturation coverage by mass media. The operational definition of saturation coverage is coverage which (1) can be easily seen/read, such as being placed on front pages of newspapers or being played on TV for over 60 consecutive seconds, or (2) can be continuously seen/read, such as being exposed in 3 consecutive days within 7 days or 6 consecutive days within 9 days, being printed in newspaper for 3 consecutive days, or being reported on TV news for 4 consecutive days within 5 days (Weng, 1992: 135-140). News coverage on Chien-Ming Wang has been seen almost every day in print media and e-media on front pages. As one of TV media job worker, Mr. Yang (China Times, 2007: 9-16), said "Is Chien-Ming Wang commercialized? Of course, he is a product himself. Last year his games had been relayed on PTS. This year, there are two TV stations relaying. The reason is business, which is also the reason why you are here today with this topic. People do care. People care about



Figure 2. Framed coverage on unique stories of Chien-Ming Wang. Information source: <http://blog.chinatimes.com/alex/gallery/1594.html>).

and pay attention to everything related to him.”

News frame, labeling, and priming effect on news coverage of Chien-Ming Wang

In the past, mass media was considered as means to reflect social reality events objectively. However, many researchers have found that when mass media reveals social reality, there are always framings, such as organization framings (of routines, organization culture, and professional ideologies), news workers' personal cognition framing (setting up a frame and following goals and assumptions under this structure), and text framing (symbolic message structure, including syntaxes, plots, themes, rhetoric, and wording) (Tsang, 1999).

According to the framing theory, news framing is a set of robust models of cognition, interpretation, selection, emphasis, and exclusion. And it exists among all news workers (Gitlin, 1980: 7). In the framing theory, mass media does not reflect social phenomenon completely. It only selects parts of social reality and magnifying them in news stories. The production of a piece of news includes a series of selections and results. Although some objective or real contents are selected, some are excluded as well. Only the selected content is highlighted.

In the recent years, the political situation in Taiwan has been tumultuous, leading to confusing values. The success of Chien-Ming Wang offers mass media a new focus which the society expects (Figure 2).

News frame, labeling, and priming effect on news

Since Chien-Ming Wang became one of the ace pitchers in major league, the Chien-Ming Wang phenomenon has been developed in Taiwan. Mass media has been using Wang to make connection with the nature recognized by the Taiwanese culture. And the so-called Chien-Ming Wang news has been produced. Andrews and Jackson (2001) indicated that, although Chien-Ming Wang is in the

major league in the US, his eastern nature is exactly what mass media can manipulate to compare with the western culture. Thus in this study, the extended meanings of the symbols created as a result of Wang's idolization through combination of Chien-Ming Wang and secondary symbols are discussed subsequently.

Reticence, humbleness, and eastern collectivism

The most significant difference between the Chinese culture and the western culture is that individuals are valued in the west. In the Chinese culture, the system is more like a system with group harmony. Family has been the production unit for traditional Chinese production methods, so that the uncertainty in the nature can be reduced. Furthermore, in a united large country, under the feudal structure, group interests are more important. It can be seen from Chinese naming. Family names are placed before first names in China, while in the west, first names are placed before family names. In this kind of system, it is understandable that characteristics such as "reticence" and "humbleness" are very precious to a cultural system, which focuses on group interests. Because of "reticence", one can obey the leader of his group and make the group more united. Because of "humbleness", one can attribute his success to the group. Chien-Ming Wang possesses these characteristics, which, after being reported by mass media, has become the common cultural heritage of Taiwanese people. There are compliments about Chien-Ming Wang, which are as follow:

"I like his humbleness, introversion, and reticence... His humble characteristic and introverted pitching style are truly admirable. He possesses the quality of eastern people, especially Taiwanese people" (Little Apple, fan).

"Being silent, calm, and down-to-earth, Chien-Ming Wang is like a boy next door, while in fact he is a player of the major league baseball, the highest level of professional baseball. He is just so humble. If you pay attention, you may find that every time after winning a game, he always



Figure 3. Chien-Ming Wang's endorsement for Nike. Information source: <http://www.nike.com.tw/justdoit/download/wangpaper/1024/1024x7681.jpg>.

praises his teammates' defense, says he gets lucky for he threw a low ball and the hitter just did not hit it, so he just kept on throwing... something like that. It seems that none of the wins is his contribution. That is what I like about him. He is honest and sincere like Taiwanese people are" (Da, fan).

It can be found from the fans' descriptions in the foregoing that it is Chien-Ming Wang's humble and reticent attitude, which is a characteristic of eastern personality, being praised. And it has become important assets for mass media to audience/readers by producing news on Chien-Ming Wang.

Hard-working personality and the cultural values of Taiwan

In the history, the Taiwanese society had been an agricultural society and a immigrant society. In an agricultural society, peasants and farmers are basically "diligent". The central morality of the society is diligence. There is no other way to face challenges of the nature. And the "hard-working" characteristic originated in the immigrant society. In an immigrant society, everything is unknown and uncertain. One needs to be fortitudinous to open up uncultivated land. Therefore, being "hard-working" means not only being diligent, but also being a pioneer with fighting spirit. This unique and not out-of-date personality is the core personality of Taiwanese people (Huang, 2000: 144-146). From this point of view, many of Chien-Ming Wang's characteristics are the praiseworthy characteristics of Taiwanese people.

THE IDOLIZATION OF CHIEN-MING WANG AND ENDORSEMENT MARKETING

Marketing is an important process for commercial production (Van der Waldt et al., 2008; Lee, 2010; Aydin, 2010; Rafique and Kashif-Ur-Rehman, 2011; Kolaric et

al., 2011; Nazir et al., 2010; Kamyra et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2010; Ozer and Ertokatl, 2010; Lee et al., 2010; Coban, 2010; Slabbert and Ukpere, 2010). While Chien-Ming Wang gradually accomplishes his outstanding achievements, his unique characteristics have become news materials for mass media to sensationalize, and cultural product of "Chien-Ming Wang" has been developed. At this moment, sports commercial organizations and business entities have utilized the secondary symbol meaning of this unique cultural product to extend what Chien-Ming Wang stands and add it to their products, so that these products may attract consumers with their association with Wang (Figures 3 and 4).

The manager of Ford, Wen-Fang Li (2007), said "I think Chien-Ming Wang is a very calm and confident person. And he is indeed very quiet. I think he fits this image very well." Therefore, many businesses combine Chien-Ming Wang and their products to become special significance commodities. Just right, this commercial basis indirectly allows more and more people to understand Chien-Ming Wang.

CONCLUSION

Chien-Ming Wang's characteristics have been magnified by mass media, leading to his idolization. Sports commercial organizations and business entities have utilized the extended meaning of Chien-Ming Wang and linked it to their products, in order to develop consumers' affectional identification. In this process, Chien-Ming Wang himself has become the special "Chien-Ming Wang brand", a special brand created by mass media.

Therefore, we can find that appearing of the sports star is not accidental absolutely. First, the athlete must have special skill which can catch the attention from humans, and then it should be transfer quickly to any space through mass media. If this athlete can be identified about a lot of humans, he/she will create a personal brand slowly. This moment, some businesses will want to



Figure 4. A book about Chien-Ming Wang. Information source: http://www.wretch.cc/blog/yijia&article_id=6863343.

market their commodities through image of the athlete and this behavior will help this athlete being more popular.

Future research should extend advanced techniques in soft computing and artificial intelligence (Lu et al., 2003; Chen et al., 2004; Tseng et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2010; Chen, 2010; Hsu, 2010; Kuo et al., 2010; Lin and Chen, 2010; Tsai and Chen, 2010; Yeh and Chen, 2010; Chen, 2011a, 2011b; Chen et al., 2011a, 2011b; Kuo and Chen, 2011a, 2011b; Kuo et al., 2011; Lin and Chen, 2011; Liu et al., 2011; Shen, 2011; Tsai and Chen, 2011; Tseng et al., 2011; Tang et al., 2011; Yeh et al., 2011; Shih et al., 2011c, 2011d; Lee et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2010c; Chen et al., 2005a, b, 2006a, b, c, 2007a, b, c, d, e, f, 2008a, b, c, d, e, 2009a, b, c, d, e, f, 2010a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, 2011a, b; Chen, 2006, 2009a, b, 2010a, b; Chen and Chen, 2010a, b) by including other factors that may affect the extent of knowledge management.

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