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Between the Nation and the Idol: Negotiating Identity in the Fandomization of Chinese Sports Culture

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Abstract

This study investigates the identity formation and behavioral practices of Chinese sports fan communities under the triadic cultural tensions of nationalism, athletic competition, and the entertainment paradigm. Through a combination of participant observation and in-depth interviews within the fan community of Chinese athlete Sun Yingsha, the study finds that sports fans engage in strategic negotiations between national narratives and fandom logic, expressing a dual identification pattern that merges idol worship with patriotic sentiment. Moreover, through data labor, community formation, and selective resistance under regulatory frameworks, these fans demonstrate a form of subjective agency within ongoing cultural confrontation. This study elucidates the complexity of the fandomization of sports and expands the theoretical lens for understanding sports culture in China's digital society.

Keywords: Data Fandom; Digital Sports Culture; Fan Identity; Nationalism; Sports Fandomization