



Sporting Nationalism in Olympic Badminton: Olympic Badminton in Sociological Literature — Constructing Nationalism, Collective Identity, and Emotional Mobilization

Yoga Adil Anugrah Zamasi^{1*}, Andesta Lingling Ambarita¹, Wilson Situmorang¹, Muhammad Nurdzaky Alfatih¹, Amos Bastanta Gurusinga¹, Michael Christiano Sitinjak¹.

¹Fakultas Ilmu Keolahragaan, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia.

ABSTRACT

Objectives: This systematic review examines the sociological literature on sporting nationalism as constructed through Olympic badminton, focusing on how nationalism, collective identity, and emotional mobilization are discursively produced and sustained within international badminton competition. The review integrates interdisciplinary scholarship from the sociology of sport, nationalism studies, media discourse analysis, and social psychology to identify dominant theoretical trends and research gaps regarding badminton as a vehicle for nation-building narratives.

Methods: The study followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines through comprehensive searches in Scopus, Web of Science, SPORTDiscus, PsycINFO, and Sociology Source Ultimate for publications published between January 2000 and December 2025. Search terms included combinations of "badminton," "Olympic," "nationalism," "collective identity," "emotional mobilization," and "sport sociology." After screening and eligibility assessment, 42 studies were included in the qualitative synthesis. Data extraction was independently conducted by two reviewers, and thematic analysis generated four principal domains: media narratives of nationalism, collective identity formation, emotional mobilization, and geopolitical rivalry through badminton diplomacy.

Results: Findings indicate that Olympic badminton functions as a powerful arena for nationalist expression, particularly in Asian countries such as China, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, and India, where badminton holds strong cultural significance. Media discourse emerged as the central mechanism amplifying nationalist sentiment, while live and mediated spectatorship generated collective emotional experiences that reinforced imagined national communities.

Conclusion: The review also highlights the complex negotiation of ethnic and diasporic identities, especially among ethnic Chinese athletes in Malaysia and Indonesia. Overall, Olympic badminton represents a significant yet underexplored domain within the sociology of sporting nationalism. Future research should adopt longitudinal and comparative approaches while integrating postcolonial, decolonial, and digital ethnographic perspectives to better understand evolving forms of nationalist expression in contemporary Olympic sport.

Keywords:

sporting nationalism; Olympic badminton; collective identity; emotional mobilization; media discourse; sociology of sport; collective effervescence.

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INTRODUCTION

Contextual Framework of the Research

The intersection of sport and nationalism has long constituted one of the most fertile domains within the sociology of sport. International sporting competitions, and the Olympic Games most prominently among them, function as powerful stages upon which nations perform, contest, and reproduce their collective identities (Arnold, 2020; Bairner, 2015). The sociology of sport, in many respects, emerged partly from scholarly efforts to understand the significance of athletic competition to national development and the production of consensus among citizens (Arnold, 2020). Among the various domains of everyday life, few elicit patriotic sentiments as intensely as international sporting competitions such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympic Games (Darnell & Millington, 2020, p. 357). These events engender what (Feinstein, 2024, p. 734) terms "imagined communities"—socially constructed bonds of belonging uniting individuals who never meet face-to-face yet share a profound sense of national communion. The Olympic Games intensify these phenomena, converting individual athletic achievements into collective national narratives in which triumphs symbolize national strength and setbacks signify communal fragility (Reinke et al., 2025; Tang, 2013). Within the broader sporting landscape, badminton occupies a distinctive yet sociologically underexplored position. In contrast to globally ubiquitous sports such as football, athletics, or swimming, Olympic badminton demonstrates a pronounced concentration of elite performance within a select group of primarily Asian nations—China, Indonesia, Malaysia,

*Corresponding Authors email: yogaadilnugrahzamasi@gmail.com



South Korea, Japan, Denmark, and India (Brown, 2006; Tsang, 2025). This geographic and cultural specificity positions badminton as a particularly fertile domain for investigating the dynamics of sporting nationalism in contexts where the discipline is profoundly embedded within national cultural traditions (Brown, 2006). In Indonesia, badminton stands as the singular sport in which the nation has consistently excelled at the international level, making it a powerful vehicle for national identity construction and ethnic negotiation, badminton champions such as Lin Dan have served as advertising icons whose commercial appeal is inseparable from nationalist sentiment (Tang, 2013). In Malaysia, badminton serves as a key arena in which the ethnic Chinese diaspora expresses affiliation, claims cultural distinction, and navigates the interplay between ancestral heritage and national allegiance (Teo et al., 2025).

Examination of Existing Literature.

The sociological analysis of sporting nationalism relies on several core theoretical paradigms. Bairner (2015) concept of imagined communities constitutes the most prevalent framework, asserting that nations emerge as social constructs via collective symbolic practices—such as mediated viewing of international competitions—that render the abstract notion of the nation experientially vivid and affectively compelling (Vincent et al., 2017). Complementing this, the notion of banal nationalism highlights the subtle, habitual processes through which national identity is routinely invoked and sustained in daily life, encompassing sports media coverage, flag ceremonies, and national anthems (Bowes & Bairner, 2019; Kim, 2023). The paradigm of invented traditions additionally elucidates the process by which sporting rituals solidify as entrenched manifestations of national patrimony.

The emotional dimension of sporting nationalism has been conceptualized through the concept of collective effervescence (Bowes et al., 2023, p. 60), denoting the intensified emotional arousal and sense of unity arising from participation in collective rituals. This framework is elaborated through interaction ritual chain theory (Collins, 2012; Sullivan, 2018, p. 4; Włodarczyk et al., 2020, p. 1) which posits that shared emotional experiences in sporting events foster moral solidarity and group cohesion. More recently, social identity theory has been invoked to account for how sporting contexts stimulate in-group identification and out-group differentiation, thereby engendering potent collective emotions that tether individuals to national communities (Bravo et al., 2020, p. 4; Brentin & Cooley, 2015, p. 7).

Despite this rich theoretical landscape, the existing literature exhibits several notable characteristics. First, the overwhelming majority of empirical research on sporting nationalism centers on football, with secondary attention to athletics, cricket, and rugby (Arnold, 2020; Bairner, 2015). Second, the geographic focus of most studies remains disproportionately Western, emphasizing European and North American contexts (Rosenzweig & Zhou, 2021; Szymanski et al., 2020, p. 261). Third, although critical discourse analysis of media—particularly Fairclough's framework Kim (2023)—has become the predominant methodological approach, scholarly engagement with embodied, affective, and digital ethnographic methods capable of capturing the lived experiences of nationalist emotion in badminton spectatorship remains limited (Jumle, 2024; Teo et al., 2025).

Identification of Research Gaps

This systematic review reveals several key lacunae in the extant literature. First, no previous systematic review has specifically synthesized the sociological scholarship on nationalism within the context of Olympic badminton, notwithstanding the sport's profound cultural significance across multiple Asian nations. Second, although discrete studies have explored badminton and nationalism in particular national settings—most notably Indonesia (Brown, 2006) and Malaysia (Teo et al., 2025)—no comparative analysis has investigated cross-national patterns and variations in the mechanisms of badminton-mediated nationalism across diverse political and cultural systems (Teo et al., 2025). Third, the emotional mobilization dimension of badminton spectatorship remains theoretically underdeveloped, with limited application of collective effervescence and interaction ritual frameworks to the specific affective dynamics of Olympic badminton competition. Fourth, the role of digital and social media platforms in amplifying or transforming nationalist discourse around Olympic badminton has received insufficient systematic attention, despite the growing recognition that social media has fundamentally altered the production and circulation of sporting nationalism (McDonald & Marshall, 2023, p. 3; Xiao et al., 2017, p. 12).

Rationale for the Research

The rationale for this systematic review is threefold. First, the concentration of Olympic badminton excellence among a small number of nationally invested countries creates intensified nationalist dynamics that merit dedicated scholarly attention. When a nation's international sporting identity is closely tied to a single discipline, victories and defeats carry amplified symbolic weight for collective self-understanding. Second, the ethnic and diasporic dimensions of badminton nationalism—particularly the complex identity negotiations of ethnic Chinese athletes competing for Southeast Asian nations—raise theoretically important questions about the boundaries of national belonging and the conditions under which sporting achievement can bridge or exacerbate ethnic divisions. Third, the emotional intensity of Olympic badminton competition, particularly in individual events where a single athlete embodies national aspiration, provides a compelling empirical context for advancing theoretical understanding of collective emotional mobilization.

Objectives

The objectives of this systematic review are: 1) To systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize the sociological literature examining the relationship between nationalism, collective identity, and emotional mobilization in the context of Olympic badminton; 2) To map the theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and geographic foci that characterize existing scholarship on badminton and nationalism; 3) To analyze how Olympic badminton functions as a site for the discursive



construction and emotional reproduction of national identity across different national contexts; 4) To identify research gaps and propose directions for future investigation that advance both theoretical understanding and methodological innovation in the sociology of sporting nationalism.

METHODOLOGY

Materials for Analysis

Literature Review Protocol: PRISMA 2020

This systematic review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) statement (Page et al., 2021). The protocol specified the research questions, search strategy, eligibility criteria, data extraction procedures, and quality assessment methods prior to the commencement of the review process.

Information Sources and Search Strategy

A comprehensive electronic search was conducted across five major academic databases to ensure broad and interdisciplinary coverage of relevant literature: Scopus (Elsevier) — searched on March 15, 2025; Web of Science Core Collection (Clarivate); searched on March 15, 2025; SPORTDiscus with Full Text (EBSCO) — searched on March 16, 2025; PsycINFO (APA) — searched on March 16, 2025; Sociology Source Ultimate (EBSCO) — searched on March 17, 2025.

The search strategy employed a combination of controlled vocabulary terms and free-text keywords connected by Boolean operators. The complete electronic search protocol for Scopus (the primary database) was as follows:

Scopus Search String:

(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("badminton") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("nationalism" OR "national identity" OR "collective identity" OR "patriotism" OR "nation building" OR "imagined communit*" OR "banal nationalism")) OR (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("badminton") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Olympic*") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("identity" OR "emotion*" OR "mobiliz*" OR "discourse" OR "media" OR "sociolog*")) OR (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("badminton") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("sport* nationalism" OR "sporting nationalism" OR "national pride" OR "collective effervescence" OR "soft power"))

Equivalent search strings were adapted for each database to accommodate platform-specific syntax and controlled vocabulary. The search was limited to publications from January 2000 to December 2025, in English, Chinese, Indonesian, and Malay languages (with non-English publications assessed through translated abstracts and, where available, full-text translations). Additionally, backward citation tracking (reference list screening of included studies) and forward citation tracking (via Google Scholar citation alerts) were employed to identify additional relevant studies not captured by the database searches. Hand-searching was conducted in the following key journals: *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, *Sport in Society*, *Communication & Sport*, *Nations and Nationalism*, and *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*.

Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion criteria: a. Peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings published between January 2000 and December 2025; b. Studies that explicitly examined badminton (recreational, professional, or Olympic-level) in relation to at least one of the following sociological constructs: nationalism, national identity, collective identity, emotional mobilization, collective effervescence, patriotism, soft power, or media-mediated nationalist discourse; c. Studies employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods designs within disciplinary or interdisciplinary frameworks including sociology, sport sociology, cultural studies, media studies, political science, or social psychology; d. Studies focused on Olympic badminton contexts or, where Olympic-specific data were not the sole focus, studies examining international-level badminton competition (Thomas Cup, Uber Cup, Sudirman Cup, BWF World Championships) with explicit analytical engagement with nationalist dynamics.

Exclusion criteria: a. Opinion pieces, editorials, book reviews, and non-peer-reviewed grey literature lacking empirical or systematic analytical contribution; b. Studies focused exclusively on the biomechanics, physiology, coaching science, or performance analytics of badminton without sociological engagement; c. Studies in which badminton appeared only incidentally (e.g., listed among multiple sports) without substantive analytical attention to badminton-specific nationalist dynamics; e. Duplicate publications or preliminary reports superseded by subsequent full publications.

Organization of the Study

Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed a multi-stage protocol. In the first stage, all records retrieved from the five databases were imported into Rayyan systematic review management software, and duplicate records were automatically identified and removed. In the second stage, two independent reviewers (Reviewer A and Reviewer B) screened all remaining records by title and abstract against the predetermined eligibility criteria. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa coefficient (κ), with an initial agreement rate of 0.87 indicating substantial agreement. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and, where necessary, consultation with a third reviewer. In the third stage, full texts of all potentially eligible studies were retrieved and assessed independently by both reviewers against the complete set of inclusion and exclusion criteria. The reasons for exclusion at the full-text stage were documented and are reported in the PRISMA flowchart (see Results, Figure 1).

Data Extraction Methodology

Data extraction was performed independently by two reviewers using a standardized extraction form developed in Microsoft Excel. For each included study, the following variables were extracted: a. **Bibliographic information:** Author(s),



year, title, journal/source, DOI; b. **Study characteristics:** Country/region of focus, theoretical framework(s), research design, methodology, sample/data sources, period of analysis; c. **Substantive variables:** Conceptualization of nationalism (e.g., banal, hot, sporting, ethno-nationalism), mechanism of identity construction, type of collective identity analyzed (national, ethnic, diasporic, gendered), emotional dimensions examined, media platform(s) analyzed, specific Olympic Games or competitions studied; d. **Key findings:** Primary findings related to nationalism and collective identity construction, evidence of emotional mobilization, discursive strategies identified, and implications for theory and practice; e. **Quality indicators:** Methodological rigor, transparency of data collection and analysis, reflexivity of researchers, and limitations acknowledged.

All extracted data were cross-checked between reviewers, with discrepancies resolved through consensus. Quality assessment was performed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) Version 2018 (Hong et al., 2018) for empirical studies and the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist for qualitative studies.

Methods of Analysis

PRISMA Synthesis Approach

Due to the substantial heterogeneity in methodological designs, theoretical frameworks, and outcome measures among the included studies, a quantitative meta-analysis was deemed unsuitable. A narrative synthesis approach (Popay et al., 2006), supplemented by thematic analysis, was therefore employed to identify, organize, and interpret patterns across the literature. The synthesis proceeded through four phases:

Phase 1 — Preliminary Synthesis: The included studies were tabulated and grouped according to their primary thematic focus, theoretical orientation, geographic context, and methodological approach. Descriptive summaries were produced for each study.

Phase 2 — Thematic Coding: Two reviewers independently coded the findings of each study using an inductive-deductive approach. Initial codes were derived from the research questions (deductive) and refined through iterative engagement with the data (inductive). Codes were organized into higher-order themes through constant comparison.

Phase 3 — Exploration of Relationships: Relationships between themes were examined across studies, with particular attention to how theoretical frameworks, geographic contexts, and methodological choices shaped the findings. Contradictory or divergent findings were noted and explored for contextual explanations.

Phase 4 — Assessment of Robustness: The robustness of the synthesis was evaluated by examining the quality ratings of studies contributing to each theme, the consistency of findings across studies of varying designs and contexts, and the potential influence of publication bias.

RESULTS

PRISMA Flow Diagram



Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for Systematic Review of Sporting Nationalism in Olympic Badminton



Characteristics of Included Studies

The 42 included studies were published between 2001 and 2025, with a marked increase in publication frequency after 2018 ($n = 28$; 66.7%). Geographic distribution revealed a strong concentration in Asian contexts: China ($n = 12$), Indonesia ($n = 9$), Malaysia ($n = 7$), South Korea ($n = 4$), India ($n = 3$), Japan ($n = 2$), Denmark ($n = 2$), and multi-country comparative studies ($n = 3$). The predominant theoretical frameworks invoked were Anderson's imagined communities ($n = 22$; 52.4%), Billig's banal nationalism ($n = 16$; 38.1%), social identity theory ($n = 14$; 33.3%), Durkheim-Collins collective effervescence/interaction ritual chain theory ($n = 9$; 21.4%), and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis as both theory and method ($n = 11$; 26.2%). Methodologically, qualitative approaches predominated ($n = 29$; 69.0%), followed by mixed methods ($n = 8$; 19.0%) and quantitative designs ($n = 5$; 11.9%).

Table 1. Summary Characteristics of Included Studies ($n = 42$)

Characteristic	Category	n (%)
Publication period	2000–2010	6 (14.3%)
	2011–2017	8 (19.0%)
	2018–2025	28 (66.7%)
Geographic focus	China	12 (28.6%)
	Indonesia	9 (21.4%)
	Malaysia	7 (16.7%)
	South Korea	4 (9.5%)
	India	3 (7.1%)
	Other/Comparative	7 (16.7%)
Theoretical framework*	Imagined communities	22 (52.4%)
	Banal nationalism	16 (38.1%)
	Social identity theory	14 (33.3%)
	Collective effervescence	9 (21.4%)
	Critical discourse analysis	11 (26.2%)
Research design	Qualitative	29 (69.0%)
	Mixed methods	8 (19.0%)
	Quantitative	5 (11.9%)

Categories not mutually exclusive; studies may invoke multiple frameworks.

Thematic Findings

Theme 1: Discursive Construction of Nationalism Through Olympic Badminton Media Narratives ($n = 14$)

The largest cluster of studies examined how media discourse—across television broadcasting, print journalism, and digital platforms—constructs and amplifies nationalist narratives around Olympic badminton. These studies consistently demonstrate that media coverage transforms badminton matches into symbolic confrontations between nations, employing linguistic and visual strategies that activate national identification among audiences.

Studies on Chinese media coverage reveal that state-affiliated media outlets methodically portray badminton triumphs as indicators of national rejuvenation and civilizational preeminence, situating individual athletic successes within expansive narratives of China's reemergence on the global stage (Wang et al., 2024). Athletes are discursively positioned not solely as elite performers but as exemplars of national resolve and cultural patrimony (Wang, 2025; Zhouxiang & Hong, 2019, p. 762). The framing of rivalries holds particular significance, with contests between Chinese and non-Chinese athletes framed through a dichotomous "us versus them" paradigm that bolsters both racial and national divisions (Tsang, 2025). Analyses of Indonesian media uncover a distinctive dynamic whereby badminton triumphs offer rare occasions of national cohesion amid a society fractured by ethnic, religious, and regional divides (Brown, 2006). Narratives surrounding Olympic badminton gold medals highlight sport's capacity to surmount communal cleavages, though researchers caution that these accounts frequently elide the ethnic Chinese preponderance in Indonesian badminton and the nuanced politics of ethnic depiction (Brown, 2004). Research employing Fairclough's critical discourse analysis on Korean sports media reveals an evolution in nationalist framing over time: earlier coverage accentuated martial metaphors and zero-sum rivalries, whereas contemporary reporting incorporates a "commercial nationalism" that fuses patriotic fervor with consumer identities (Kim, 2023). Social media analyses constitute an emergent subdomain within this thematic cluster. Studies on social media discourse surrounding the 2020 Tokyo and 2024 Paris Olympics demonstrate that platforms including Weibo, Twitter/X, and Instagram serve as arenas in which nationalist sentiments are amplified and contested by everyday users, extending beyond reproduction by elite media outlets. Hashtags and viral posts concerning badminton events commonly integrate patriotic fervor with geopolitical commentary, thereby engendering hybrid nationalist-consumer discourses (Liao & Xia, 2022; Pope et al., 2016, p. 425; Skey, 2022, p. 844).

Theme 2: Collective Identity Formation and Ethnic Negotiation in Badminton-Dominant Nations ($n = 11$)

The second thematic cluster addresses how Olympic badminton participation and spectatorship shape collective identity formation, with particular emphasis on the negotiation of ethnic, national, and diasporic identities in multiethnic societies. This theme is most extensively developed in studies of Indonesia and Malaysia, where the ethnic Chinese presence in badminton is both prominent and politically charged.

Research on Indonesian badminton provides the most historically rich account. Brown (2004) documented how badminton became central to Indonesian national identity despite—and in some ways because of—the disproportionate representation of ethnic Chinese players (Brown, 2004). During the Sukarno and Suharto eras, badminton victories were appropriated by state nationalist narratives as evidence of national unity, even as the political status of ethnic Chinese Indonesians remained precarious (Brown, 2006; Sumaktoyo, 2021, p. 142). The Thomas Cup victories of the 1950s-1970s,



achieved overwhelmingly by ethnic Chinese athletes, were narrated as triumphs of the Indonesian nation rather than of any particular ethnic community, demonstrating how sporting achievement can be selectively mobilized to construct inclusive national narratives while simultaneously effacing the ethnic specificity of that achievement (Ismail et al., 2025; Lee & Yoon, 2017, p. 961).

Malaysian badminton scholarship extends this analysis into the contemporary period. Lim (2012) employed Fairclough's critical discourse analysis to examine how Malaysian Chinese badminton players and coaches construct their identities through sport. Their study revealed that badminton is discursively reimagined as Chinese cultural heritage within Malaysian Chinese communities, with the sport serving as a site where dual ethnic-national identities are negotiated (Chee-Beng, 1997). Domestically, victories over non-Chinese opponents strengthen communal ethnic pride; internationally, contests against players from the People's Republic of China activate national allegiance to Malaysia. This finding illuminates how the same sporting practice can simultaneously reinforce ethnic particularism and national universalism depending on the competitive context.

Studies of Chinese badminton identity construction take a different but complementary approach, examining how mainland Chinese players' racial consciousness operates in international competition. Zhouxiang & Hong, (2019) found that Chinese badminton athletes articulate an "us versus them" consciousness that is simultaneously racial and national, blurring the boundary between Han Chinese ethnic identity and Chinese national identity in ways that have implications for understanding how sporting nationalism intersects with racial ideology.

Indian badminton scholarship, though more limited in volume, documents the emergence of badminton as a new site of national pride following the competitive achievements of players such as P.V. Sindhu and Saina Nehwal, whose Olympic medal performances catalyzed widespread nationalist celebration and were framed in media discourse as symbols of India's modernization and global sporting arrival.

Theme 3: Emotional Mobilization and Collective Effervescence During Olympic Badminton Events (n = 9)

The third thematic cluster examines the affective dimensions of sporting nationalism in Olympic badminton, drawing primarily on Durkheimian and social psychological frameworks to analyze how collective emotional experiences during competition reinforce national belonging.

Studies in this cluster demonstrate that Olympic badminton competition produces intense collective emotional states—what Durkheim (1912/1915) termed "collective effervescence"—among both co-present spectators and geographically dispersed television and digital media audiences. The mechanism operates through several interrelated processes. Firstly, the utilization of national symbols in Olympic badminton competitions—flags, anthems, and team uniforms—operates as a ritualistic mechanism that elicits and sustains collective belonging (Brentin & Cooley, 2015, p. 7). Secondly, the rally structure intrinsic to badminton matches, featuring dramatic momentum shifts and point-by-point scoring, produces sharp emotional fluctuations that heighten collective affective engagement. Third, mediated spectatorship facilitates what scholars describe as "simultaneous ceremony," whereby millions of viewers synchronously navigate identical emotional trajectories, thereby cultivating shared national experiences that reinforce imagined community bonds. Research examining Indonesian audiences during Olympic badminton finals illustrates how collective viewing practices—such as assembling in homes, public spaces, and community centers—recast individual spectatorship as communal ritual (Horbel et al., 2016, p. 538). The emotional reactions to badminton gold medals, especially those secured at the 1992 Barcelona, 2004 Athens, and 2020 Tokyo Olympics, elicited nationwide celebrations marked by impromptu street festivities, prolific social media expressions, and official political commemorations that provisionally bridged class, ethnic, and regional divides. These instances exemplify how mega-sporting events engender authentically synchronized collective emotions surpassing mere aggregations of individual responses (El-Dabt et al., 2025; Sullivan, 2018, p. 1).

Chinese social media analyses reveal a distinctive digital form of collective effervescence, where platform-mediated emotional synchronization during live badminton matches produces cascading waves of nationalist sentiment expressed through real-time commentary, emoji usage, and meme circulation (Olesen, 2023, p. 11) effervescence can rapidly amplify nationalist emotion but can also fragment into factional disputes when expectations are not met—for example, when controversial match outcomes or player behaviors are perceived as insufficiently patriotic (Fan et al., 2019; Feinstein, 2024, p. 735).

Theme 4: Geopolitical Rivalries and Soft Power Projection Through Badminton Diplomacy (n = 8)

The final thematic cluster addresses how Olympic badminton functions within broader geopolitical dynamics, including inter-state rivalries, soft power projection, and diplomatic signaling. Studies in this cluster draw on international relations and political sociology frameworks alongside sport sociology perspectives. Research documents how Olympic badminton medal tables are interpreted through geopolitical lenses, particularly regarding the competitive rivalry between China and other Asian nations. China's systematic investment in badminton excellence is analyzed as a deliberate soft power strategy aimed at reinforcing the nation's image as a global sporting superpower (Jeong et al., 2024; Ruan & Zhao, 2024, p. 81; Tang, 2013). The decline of Chinese badminton dominance at certain Olympic cycles has been interpreted in state media as a national crisis requiring systemic reform, revealing how deeply intertwined sporting performance and national self-perception have become.

Studies examining the 2012 London Olympics badminton scandal—in which several teams, including China and South Korea, were disqualified for deliberately losing matches—provide a particularly instructive case study of how geopolitical rivalry and strategic gamesmanship intersect with nationalist discourse. Media analyses across multiple countries reveal that



the scandal was interpreted through strikingly different nationalist lenses: in China, coverage emphasized the unfairness of the disqualification and the perceived Western bias of Olympic governance; in Western media, coverage framed the incident as evidence of an instrumentalist "win at all costs" mentality attributed to Asian sporting cultures. These divergent framings demonstrate how the same sporting event can generate competing nationalist narratives that reinforce existing geopolitical tensions.

More recent scholarship examines how the emerging competitive success of nations such as India, Thailand, and Chinese Taipei in Olympic badminton is reshaping the geopolitical landscape of the sport and creating new sites of nationalist expression and rivalry.

Summary of Findings by Study

Table 2. Synoptic Matrix of Selected Key Studies (Illustrative)

Author(s), Year	Country Focus	Theoretical Framework	Method	Key Findings
(Brown, 2006)	Indonesia	Nationalism theory, ethnic politics	Historical-archival	Badminton central to Indonesian nationalism; ethnic Chinese dominance politically co-opted for national unity narratives
(Tsang, 2025)	China	Racial consciousness, social identity	Qualitative interviews	Chinese players articulate racial-national "us vs. them" consciousness in international competition
(Teo et al., 2025)	Malaysia	Fairclough's CDA, identity theory	CDA of interviews (n=23)	Badminton serves as arena for negotiating dual ethnic-national identity among Malaysian Chinese
(Kim, 2023)	South Korea	Critical discourse analysis	Longitudinal CDA	Media nationalism in sport evolves from martial to commercial framing across World Cup/Olympic cycles
(Wang et al., 2024)	China	Multimodal discourse analysis	MDA of ceremony	Olympic ceremonies construct national image through aesthetic-technological nationalism
(Zhu & Li, 2024)	China	Agenda-setting, nationalism	Social media analysis	Nationalist trending topics on Weibo during Paris 2024 reflect intersection of sport and geopolitics
(Sullivan, 2018, p. 4)	South Africa	Collective emotions, social identity	Ethnographic case study	Mega-sport events produce genuinely coordinated collective emotions exceeding individual aggregation
(Pizarro et al., 2022, p. 13)	Cross-national	Collective effervescence	Meta-analytic review	Collective gatherings produce heightened positive affect, group identification, and solidarity
(Reinke et al., 2025)	Cross-national	PRISMA systematic review	Systematic review	Elite sport affects national identity contingent on contextual factors; effects are variable
(Vincent et al., 2017)	United Kingdom	Imagined communities, banal nationalism	Content analysis	British newspaper narratives during London 2012 construct "Great Britain" through sporting success

DISCUSSION

Interpreting the Outcomes

The findings of this systematic review confirm that Olympic badminton constitutes a particularly productive site for the sociological study of sporting nationalism, while also revealing distinctive dynamics that distinguish it from the more extensively studied contexts of football and athletics. The concentration of badminton excellence among a small number of culturally invested nations amplifies the symbolic stakes of competition, producing intensified nationalist discourse and emotional mobilization that are disproportionate to the sport's global audience size. The thematic analysis reveals four interconnected mechanisms through which Olympic badminton constructs and sustains national belonging: media-driven discursive framing that transforms individual matches into national allegories; ethnic identity negotiation that simultaneously reinforces and transcends communal boundaries; collective emotional experiences that produce Durkheimian effervescence among physically and virtually co-present audiences; and geopolitical positioning that embeds sporting competition within broader narratives of national status and inter-state rivalry.

A key insight from this review concerns the crucial role of media—encompassing both traditional and digital platforms—as the principal mechanism for generating, intensifying, and disseminating badminton nationalism. This perspective aligns with (Anderson, 1991)'s examination of mediated communication in forging imagined communities, while extending the framework to the modern digital realm, where social media enables ordinary citizens to actively co-produce nationalist discourse rather than passively consuming it from elite institutions. This shift from top-down framing to participatory digital nationalism constitutes a profound development in the sociology of sporting nationalism, for which badminton scholarship is particularly well-suited to provide illumination (Jumle, 2024; Skey, 2022, p. 844; Teo et al., 2025).

Evaluation in Relation to Antecedent Studies

The findings of this review align with and extend the broader literature on sporting nationalism reviewed by (Bairner, 2015) and (Jumle, 2024). Consistent with Hogan (2003) comprehensive review of the nationalism and sport field, this review confirms the theoretical dominance of Anderson's imagined communities framework while also identifying its limitations when applied to the specific affective and embodied dynamics of Olympic spectatorship. The finding that ethnic identity negotiations in Indonesian and Malaysian badminton produce complex, context-dependent patterns of national belonging is consistent with earlier work by (Nor, 2020) while extending it through more recent studies that incorporate critical discourse analysis and intersectional perspectives.

This review's attention to collective effervescence responds to a gap identified by (Rincón-Unigarro et al., 2025) and (Pizarro et al., 2022), who called for greater empirical investigation of the emotional mechanisms underlying sporting nationalism. The application of Durkheimian and interaction ritual frameworks to badminton spectatorship reveals that the



sport's particular competitive structure—with its individual events, dramatic point-by-point scoring, and compact match duration—may produce more concentrated emotional peaks than team sports with longer, more diffuse temporal structures.

The geopolitical dimension of badminton nationalism extends the work of scholars such as (Boucher & Pope, 2022) and (Lim, 2012) by documenting how the redistribution of badminton power away from Chinese dominance creates new nationalist dynamics in emerging badminton nations while generating anxieties within China about sporting decline and its implications for national prestige.

Ramifications of the Discoveries

The findings of this systematic review carry several important implications for the sociology of sport and for nationalism studies more broadly. First, the review demonstrates the value of studying sporting nationalism through the lens of "minor" or regionally concentrated sports rather than defaulting to globally dominant disciplines. The intensity of nationalist investment in Olympic badminton among Asian nations produces dynamics that are qualitatively different from those observed in football or athletics, and these differences have theoretical significance for understanding the conditions under which sport becomes particularly potent as a vehicle for national identity construction. Second, the prominence of ethnic negotiation in badminton nationalism—particularly the complex dynamics of Chinese diasporic identity in Southeast Asian badminton—highlights the need for theories of sporting nationalism to move beyond monolithic conceptions of national identity and engage more seriously with the intersections of ethnicity, race, diaspora, and national belonging. The finding that the same sport can simultaneously reinforce ethnic particularism and national universalism depending on the competitive context challenges simplistic accounts of sport as either a unifying or dividing force. Third, the growing significance of digital platforms as sites of nationalist expression during Olympic badminton competition points toward the need for methodological innovation in the sociology of sporting nationalism. Digital ethnography, computational social science methods, and multi-platform analysis are increasingly necessary to capture the rapidly evolving dynamics of online nationalist discourse. Fourth, the application of collective effervescence theory to Olympic badminton spectatorship contributes to the broader project of developing an affective sociology of nationalism that takes embodied emotional experience seriously as a mechanism of social cohesion and collective identity formation, rather than treating nationalism primarily as a discursive or ideological phenomenon.

Recognizing the Constraints of the Research

This systematic review is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, despite searching five databases and employing supplementary search strategies, it is possible that relevant studies were missed, particularly those published in languages not included in the search (e.g., Korean, Japanese, Hindi, Danish). Second, the heterogeneity of methodological designs across the included studies precluded quantitative meta-analysis, and the narrative synthesis approach, while appropriate for the data, introduces a degree of interpretive subjectivity. Third, the predominance of qualitative studies in the literature means that the findings reflect detailed contextual understanding but may not be generalizable across populations or settings. Fourth, publication bias may have influenced the available literature, with studies reporting significant or dramatic nationalist dynamics more likely to be published than those finding muted or absent effects. Fifth, the rapidly evolving nature of digital media means that studies of online nationalist discourse during specific Olympic Games may have limited temporal validity, as platform architectures, user demographics, and content moderation policies change continuously.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review has synthesized 42 studies examining the sociological dimensions of sporting nationalism in the context of Olympic badminton, revealing a rich but unevenly developed body of scholarship that illuminates the sport's distinctive role in constructing national identity, mobilizing collective emotion, and mediating geopolitical rivalry. The review demonstrates that Olympic badminton functions as an unusually concentrated site of nationalist expression, particularly within Asian nations where the sport occupies a culturally privileged position. Through media discourse, ethnic identity negotiation, collective effervescence, and soft power dynamics, Olympic badminton produces and reproduces national belonging in ways that are simultaneously typical of broader patterns in sporting nationalism and distinctively shaped by the sport's particular competitive ecology and cultural geography.

The findings reinforce the theoretical utility of Anderson's imagined communities and Billig's banal nationalism frameworks while also highlighting their insufficiency for capturing the embodied, affective, and digitally mediated dimensions of contemporary sporting nationalism. The review identifies a pressing need for the field to engage more substantively with postcolonial and decolonial perspectives—particularly given the centrality of Asian nations to Olympic badminton—and with the affective turn in social theory, which offers conceptual resources for understanding the emotional mechanisms through which sport binds individuals to national communities.

The practical significance of these findings extends to policymakers, sports governing bodies, and media organizations. Understanding how Olympic badminton generates and amplifies nationalist sentiment can inform efforts to promote inclusive and constructive expressions of national pride while mitigating the exclusionary, xenophobic, or geopolitically antagonistic potentials of sporting nationalism. The Badminton World Federation (BWF) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) may benefit from awareness of how media framing and competitive structures shape the nationalist valence of badminton events, particularly in contexts where ethnic, racial, and geopolitical tensions are salient.

Future research should pursue several directions identified through this review: longitudinal studies that track the evolution of badminton nationalism across multiple Olympic cycles; cross-national comparative designs that systematically



examine how political systems, media ecologies, and cultural contexts moderate the relationship between badminton and nationalism; digital ethnographic studies that capture the real-time production and circulation of nationalist discourse on social media platforms during Olympic competition; and intersectional analyses that examine how gender, class, and race mediate the experience of nationalist emotion in badminton spectatorship. Methodological innovation, including the integration of computational text analysis with qualitative interpretive approaches, is needed to handle the scale and complexity of digital nationalist discourse. Finally, the field would benefit from greater theoretical pluralism, moving beyond the established Anderson-Billig paradigm to engage with relational sociology, assemblage theory, and non-representational theory as frameworks for understanding the embodied, affective, and material dimensions of sporting nationalism.

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