

# US Elites Fail to Sink Chinese Swimmers at the Olympics

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Global Research, August 09, 2024

Region: [Asia](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

*US political and media elites tried but failed to sink the Chinese swimming team at the Paris Olympics. The Chinese swimmers performed well despite the increased stress caused by media-induced rumors of “Chinese doping”. And now, the tables are being turned as the US anti-doping regime is coming under increasing scrutiny and criticism.*

## The Media Manufactured Cloud of Suspicion

Just a few months ago the NY Times and German ARD media ignited the controversy with an [“investigation”](#) regarding an incident from December 2021. At that time, 23 Chinese swimmers tested positive for a trace amount of the heart medication Trimetazadine (TMZ) during a swim meet for top swimmers from across the country. The Chinese Anti Doping Agency investigated and learned that all the positively tested swimmers were staying at the same hotel and eating in the same dining room. The amount of TMZ detected was so low that in some cases it was detected one day, and not the next. Testing in the kitchen revealed that TMZ was on the counters and in the vent hood.

The Chinese Anti Doping Agency (CHINADA) concluded that the athletes had been contaminated through food served in the dining room. They reported the facts to the World Anti Doping Agency (WADA) and the international swimming federation (World Aquatics, formerly known as FINA). Both organizations concurred with the conclusion that the athletes were innocent and should not be charged with an anti-doping rule violation.

But the NY Times and ARD suggested something shady had occurred and the athletes may not have been innocent. They further suggested that CHINADA and WADA may be in collusion and covering up mass doping.

This story ignited a storm of accusations with the head of the US Anti Doping Agency (USADA), Travis Tygart, leading the pack. Some prominent international swimmers have joined the fray with suggestions that the Chinese swimming accomplishments at the 2022 Tokyo Olympics were tainted, “not clean,” or based on cheating. The insinuations and suspicions continued into swimming competitions at the Paris Olympics. Many TV commentators at the Olympics referred to the insinuation one way or another. Media kept the suspicion alive by highlighting when a prominent international swimmer said anything about it. American champion swimmer Katie Ledecky [said](#) it was difficult to accept coming second behind a Chinese swimmer who might have doped. Legendary US swimmer Michael Phelps [said](#) any athlete guilty of doping should be banned forever - “one and done”.

The US Congress got involved with Congressional representatives to suspend or cancel US contributions to WADA. With the 2019 Rodchenkov Act, the US Congress has granted itself

the power to arrest and penalize anyone in the world involved in “doping”.

## Paris 2024 Olympics

Image: Pan Zhanle (潘展乐) celebrating at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris in August 2024 (Licensed under CC BY 3.0)



Swimming at the 2024 Paris Olympics is now over. The swimming powerhouses US and Australia won the most medals with 28 and 18 respectively. But China did well, coming third with 12 swimming medals. China’s Pan Zhanle was one of the superstars of the event, setting a new world record in the 100 m freestyle. He also anchored the Chinese relay team to their [victory](#) in the 4 x 100 meter medley relay, an event the US has dominated for 64 years.

Chinese swimmers spoke about feeling additional stress and discomfort because of the accusations and rumors about doping. They were tested much more than any other team, with some 600 doping tests conducted leading into and during the games. There were zero violations.

The superstar Pan Zhanle was not one of the swimmers who tested positive in 2021.

So it was left to some [critics](#) to say his performance was not “humanly possible”.

## Tables Are Turned

Chinese and other media are now pushing back and exposing the hypocrisy and double standards of the US anti-doping regime. Even the mainstream Newsweek magazine headlines [“China turns the table on US doping accusations.”](#)

More significantly, on August 7 the World Anti Doping Agency (WADA) [publicly denounced](#) USADA for having “allowed athletes who had doped, to compete for years, in at least one case without ever publishing or sanctioning their anti-doping rule violations, in direct contravention of the World Anti-Doping Code and USADA’s own rules. The USADA scheme threatened the integrity of sporting competition, which the Code seeks to protect.”

Other international organizations are also reacting negatively to the US efforts to be the global judge and jury. The International Olympic Committee has said that the US may [lose hosting](#) of future Olympic Games if the US undermines the global anti doping

establishment.

## **NY Times Misleading Information**

The NY Times and Germany's ARD launched and spurred this controversy with misleading reporting. A recent NYT article titled "[A Doping Scandal](#)" claims there is "a troubling pattern of positive doping tests in the Chinese swimming program." Twelve members of the Chinese Olympic team tested positive in recent years for powerful performance-enhancing drugs but were cleared to keep competing." They insinuated malfeasance on the part of the Chinese swimmers, China Anti Doping Agency and World Anti Doping Agency. By implication, the world swimming federation (World Aquatics) was also guilty.

The NY Times claim that Trimetazidine is a "powerful performance-enhancing drug" is false. The medication is helpful for elderly individuals with weak hearts but does nothing for young athletes with healthy hearts. As [noted](#) at SwimSwam magazine, "Dr. Benjamin Levine, a renowned sports cardiologist at UT Southwestern Medical School, says he doesn't think it provides any benefit." If Western athletes doubt this or want to test it, Dr. Levine says they can imbibe RANOLAZINE which is very similar to TMZ and NOT PROHIBITED.

The insinuation that dozens of Chinese swimmers from diverse parts of the country with different coaches were collectively imbibing a prohibited medication risking their careers and reputations does not pass the sniff test. Simple logic would indicate an accidental contamination of the food they were all eating, confirmed by the presence of the chemical in the dining room kitchen. That is what CHINADA, WADA and World Aquatics all determined. The commitment of Chinese swimmers to anti-doping and clean sport is [confirmed](#) by the renowned Australian swim coach Denis Cotterell.

## **The Need for Thresholds**

This incident points to the need for there to be appropriate thresholds for determining a doping rule violation. Currently this is inconsistent. There are minimum levels for some chemicals and none for others. Modern test instruments can detect extremely small amounts - molecules - of a chemical. As a scientist at an official doping test laboratory said, "It is very dangerous to not have a minimum threshold because all sorts of chemicals are in the environment."

## **How Did the TMZ Get in the Kitchen?**

A very important question remains unanswered: How did TMZ get into the hotel kitchen and the food that was being prepared for consumption by the Chinese athletes?

There is a curious coincidence. During the same month, December 2021, the Russian figure skater [Kamila Valieva](#) - widely recognized as the best in the world - tested positive for a trace amount of TMZ when she was competing in the Russian Nationals in St. Petersburg. However this was not reported by the Swedish laboratory until February, just in time to disrupt the Beijing Winter Olympics. Unlike the Chinese swimmers, Valieva was alone and unable to identify where the contamination seven weeks earlier came from. This one positive test for a trace amount of TMZ resulted in huge turmoil in Beijing, assumption of guilt contrary to common sense, and ultimately the destruction of Valieva's international competitive career. Her suggestion there may have been sabotage was ignored. The [NY Times](#) thinks this case is "how it's supposed to work."

## Summary

In Paris unlike Beijing in 2022, the accusations were a distraction but not totally disruptive. The fans in the swimming arena were respectful and appreciative of the Chinese athletes. Some international swimmers also ignored the controversy and did the right thing. They congratulated the Chinese swimmers when they were victorious. Australian Kyle Chalmers congratulated Pan Zhanle. American Caleb Dressel acknowledged the Chinese swimmers were the best that day they won the 4 x 100m medley.

The attempt to torpedo the Chinese swimmers and undermine China's international image did not succeed.

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